

Memories of **GRIGORIEVKA**

edited by
Ted Friesen
and
Elisabeth Peters





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Ted Friesen
and
Elisabeth Peters

with
Glenn Bergen

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EDITORS



Ted Friesen was born in 1920 in Altona, Manitoba. All of his life he was involved in the firm, Friesen Corporation, serving as its secretary treasurer and vice-president from 1951 until his retirement in 1986. Ted is deeply interested in the performing arts and in history. He is a member of both the provincial and Canadian Mennonite Historical Societies; from 1982–1996 he served as president of the latter. Ted is also keenly interested in the church. He has served on the provincial and national boards of Mennonite Central Committee and on the board of Eden Mental Health Foundation.

Ted and Linie celebrated their golden wedding in 1995. They have three sons and six grandchildren.



Elisabeth (Dyck) Peters was born in Grigorievka, Ukraine, and emigrated to Canada with her family; they settled in Winkler, Manitoba. In 1937 she graduated from Normal School and pursued university studies in Goettingen, Germany, and the University of Manitoba. For many years Elisabeth taught in rural Manitoba and Winnipeg schools and for 22 years at the University of Manitoba. She has published, edited and translated numerous books and has contributed articles to *Canadian Fiction*, *Mennonite Life*, *Mennonite Mirror* and *Der Bote*.

She lives in Winnipeg with her husband, Dr. Victor Peters, a historian. They have a daughter, a son and three grandchildren.



Glenn Bergen was born in Altona, Manitoba. He studied at the University of Manitoba and in 1996 graduated with a Master of Arts in English. He has published fiction, articles and reviews in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* and *diVerge*. Currently, Glenn works as a freelance editor and librarian. He lives in Altona.

FOREWORD

As a Kanadier, I was introduced to Russian Mennonite history when my parents were hosts to immigrants in the mid-1920s. Although I was very young, nevertheless impressions remain of our guests. They were people of education and culture, while we were just emerging from a pioneer existence. These people had attained a higher social and intellectual status. And they had gone through terrifying experiences. A few families remained in Altona but many left for Winnipeg where opportunity beckoned.

Interest in that history was reawakened some years later when the local school board hired Peter B. Krahn to teach German in the summer months to Altona's school children. We were not only introduced to a language with which we were not unacquainted, this being the language of the church, but also to a German culture, fostered by music, especially folk songs, and literature. Low German was our mother tongue, but here a new world opened. At the time I wasn't even aware of our teacher's daughter Linie, whom I was to marry later.

Through the years my interest in the Russländer and their history was awakened sporadically. In my later teens a youth group of which I was a member fostered the singing of German folk songs. The church in its singing of the choral hymns then awakened in me a love of music, which later ripened to an appreciation of the great heritage left by Bach and the whole school of German music.

In 1945 Linie and I were married, and I became part of a family where this culture was part of a way of life. In some ways my family had always practised this. My father was deeply interested in history in general, and Mennonite history in particular—but our interest was on a more elementary level. Another influence was the friendship of the local pharmacist Ludwig (Lou) Erk, a man who shared his profound love of the arts, especially German music and literature, with an appreciative group of young people. Through these experiences I began to understand that love.

So these influences contributed to an interest in the life of the Mennonites in Russia. Through our marriage, and later in church work, I learned to know many more relatives and people who had come from the USSR. In particular, the village of Grigorievka began to intrigue me. It was the home of the Krahn family, nuclear and extended. But I also became aware of many others who had come and who became important leaders in church and public life in Canada. Among them are the teachers: J. H. and Agatha Enns, Johann Martens, Margarete Schaefer;

church leaders: J. M. and J. F. Pauls, Jake Harms, C. B. Krahn; educators: Leo Driedger, Henry Dyck, John Dyck, Rudi Engbrecht, Frank Neufeld, Peter Pauls; choral conductors: Henry Engbrecht, Ben Pauls; industrialists: John Buhler, Phil Ens; singers: Phil Ens Jr., Victor Engbrecht; and a radio celebrity: Eric Friesen.

So many outstanding personalities to have come from a small village—and that only from the group that emigrated. Added to that was hearing the stories of the golden era and its aftermath, the revolution and the ensuing terror. I felt this story had to be recorded—for the people of Grigorievka and their descendants, for the Mennonite people and larger society, and especially for present young people and future generations.

There were already some recorded documents: a history of the village by George F. Loewen and the recollections of Elisabeth Peters and Susan Miller. I decided to write to all families involved, asking for their stories and for pictures. The response was overwhelming; so many stories of agony and ecstasy. But the quality understandably was also somewhat uneven and needed editing. At this point I asked Elisabeth Peters of Winnipeg whether she would consider co-editing the book with me. That was a revelation! She had all the personal and literary experience which I lacked. She graciously consented, and I want to pay tribute to the many days that she spent editing, translating, condensing, advising and writing. Later Glenn Bergen also consented to join our team as co-editor and copy editor.

As the material came in, the picture of the village gradually came into focus. Grigorievka in many ways was a microcosm of the Russian-Mennonite world. But there were some differences from the larger colonies. The majority came from Old Colony background; there were a few Molotschnaer and Mennonite Brethren. Most of them were *kirchlich*-oriented. That made for a fairly homogeneous group with a like-minded world view. They rapidly raised the educational standards by employing excellent teachers. Even then, the composite wisdom of the village didn't save them from one disastrous enterprise: the mill. Later when the war, revolution and terror came, their faith, pragmatism and ingenuity helped to sustain them at least to the degree that it was possible. Their story was that of the whole of the Russian-Mennonite commonwealth. It also included the other ethnic groups living in Russia and the Russian and Mennonite people themselves. Even though we did not all experience these events, through these stories and our association with the people, we can to a certain extent vicariously share their suffering.

We looked at how the book was to be made up. The basic history of the village had been compiled by George F. Loewen and published in 1975. Written in German, the book was ably translated into English by

John Dyck of Winnipeg for his children. Here the brief history of the village from 1889–1926 was recorded with separate chapters on the school, the church and agriculture. To put the village story in context, we have prefaced this translation with a short history of Russia and the Mennonite commonwealth. Because of the many excellent teachers that raised the educational standards of Grigorievka, it was decided to include stories of the more prominent educators. Peter B. Krahn was the only teacher native to the village; his story is included in the Krahn chapter.

Elisabeth Peters' article of recollections, and Susan Miller's and Henry Klassen's visit reports have been included because they reflect on a village where each was born, a village completely occupied by Ukrainians since the mid-1920s. They all contrast what they saw with their picture and recollection of Grigorievka in its heyday. The article by Elisabeth, "As the year turns," is a brief social history and completes the picture of customs and habits that characterized the inhabitants. No doubt this depiction showed a similarity with Mennonites throughout Russia.

The map and chart of village inhabitants circa 1900 is included to help readers to orient themselves and to find their own roots. Pictures are of course integral to the book. By and large family group portraits were chosen. Many of them are dated but were selected because of the inclusiveness of the three generations that form the crux of the story. That leaves out the fourth and fifth generations. Some individuals who have achieved prominence were included. Also, genealogies were omitted; it was felt that readers could go to individual family histories to pursue this information.—*Ted Friesen, co-editor*

I feel compelled to add a few thoughts about this village on a long broad hill, half a world away, in Ukraine. The reason is that I was born there in the fine teacherage which had windows as tall as French doors—at least in my childhood perception—and a big, beautiful yard fringed with white acacias. I remember with nostalgic affection its houses and gardens and, above all, its people. My early memories are of carefree, happy times, but the turmoil of the revolution and anarchy tinged the later years with a bittersweet taste.

Grigorievka was a unique village, not typical in all aspects of the general Mennonite communities due to its "newness" (1889) and strict village organization, incorporating many of Johann Cornies' ideas. It was only one village of its kind in the diaspora of Russian Mennonite settlements in Ukraine and elsewhere, a small fragment of a whole, but it genuinely reflected the salient features of all Mennonite villages: typical architecture adopted by our people, the village government, farming practices, social mores and spiritual life. I hope our readers will

experience the resonance of our Mennonite heritage as they sense, in the protagonists, the joy of living, the hope of achieving ideals and goals, the challenge of new encounters and situations and finally, as the generation of contributors aged, the pensive recollections of turbulent past episodes, now blended with the memory of a Mennonite village in another time, another world.

It was often difficult to obtain materials of historic significance because only very few of the original residents are still among us. Unfortunately, we were unable to get information on some families. Also, we regret that we could not obtain a photograph of the memorial erected in our cemetery in honour of the victims of the train collision that occurred while German troops were arriving to provide assistance against the banditti.

This book was planned with great enthusiasm and we wish it bon voyage into the readers' circles.—*Elisabeth Peters, co-editor*

We give special thanks to all who have contributed to make this book a record and a memorial:

- *Glenn Bergen* for his expertise in copy editing-revising-condensing, and whatever needed to be done to achieve accuracy and unity in the manuscript.
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- The *Gerhard Lohrenz Publication Fund* for subsidy monies to offset publishing costs.
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- *All who have contributed family stories, pictures, advice.* You have done this willingly and unselfishly. You are all collaborators, and have made possible the publication of the book.

Ted Friesen & Elisabeth Peters
August 1997

GRIGORJEWKA

Grigorjewka, lieb Heimatland,
Der Ort, da meine Wiege stand,
Grigorjewka, lieb Heimatort,
Dein denkt mein Herze fort und fort!
 Wie liegst du freundlich unverdeckt
 Auf hoher Eb'ne ausgestreckt!
 Entzückend prangt in Blütenpracht
 Der Gärten Flur, im Lenz erwacht.
Von West nach Ost voll Sehnsucht bang
Streift unser Aug' die Straß' entlang.
Wer kennt der Häuser lange Reih'n?
Wie wird wohl das Willkommen sein?
 Es grüßt der Mühle weiter Platz
 Den Wand'rer, der mit flücht'gem Satz
 Dem Dorf zueilt. Der stolze Bau
 Trug größ're Schönheit einst zur Schau.
Ihr gegenüber, südlich wohl,
Stand einst ihr Vorfahr' auf dem Pfahl.
Die alte Windmühl' klappert' sehr
Bis einst wir hörten sie nicht mehr.
 Der Blütenflor durchwürzt die Luft,
 Der Tulpen Pracht, der Veilchen Duft,
 Der Zäune schnurgerade Reih'n,
 Sie alle laden freundlich ein.
Im Westen sinkt der Sonne Ball.
Und nur der Vögel Liederschall
Belebt des Abends Frieden still,
Bis man zur Ruhe gehen will.
 Doch in des Dörfleins Schul' ist Licht,
 Dort pflegt man noch der Ruhe nicht.
 Dort klingt ganz lieblich unserem Ohr
 Die Harmonie vom großen Chor.
So stehst du lieblich und getreu
In der Erinn'ung wieder neu.
Bist du noch immer, immer da,
Lieb' Heimatdorf, Grigorjewka?

—Peter B. Krahn

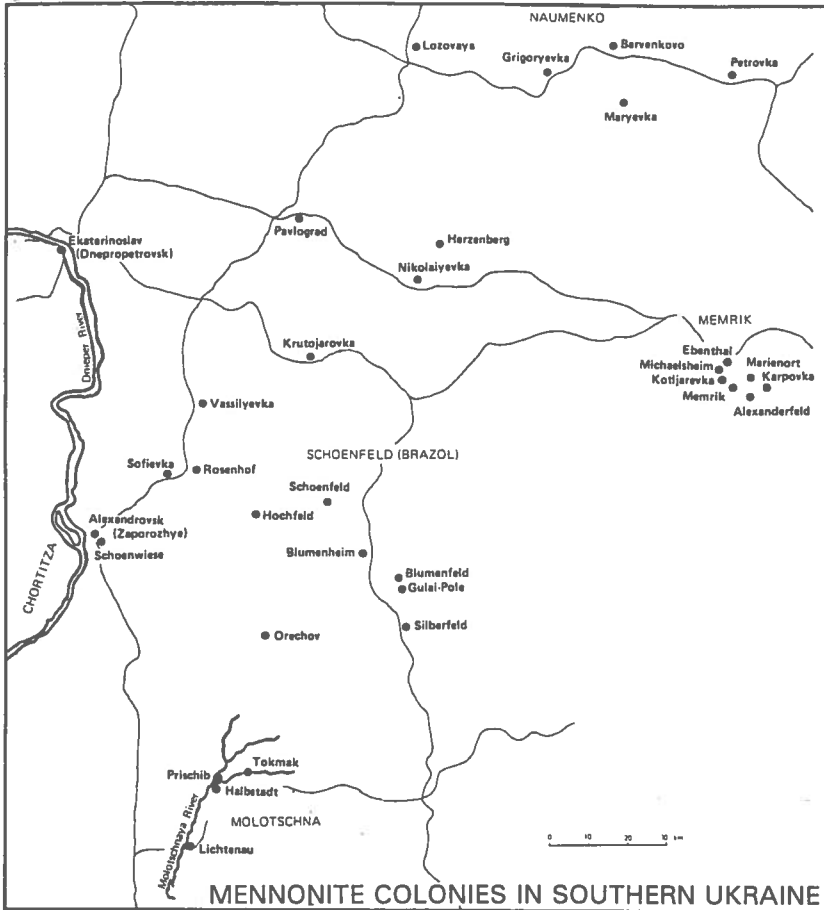
HISTORICAL PROLOGUE

In its political understanding, the term Russia applies to the territory that was known in recent times as the USSR. Russia was also the largest and most important member of the former republic. It now encompasses the land mass from the eastern shores of the Baltic to the Bering Sea in the east, and from the Arctic Ocean in the north to the Black Sea, and the northern borders of China, Iran and Turkey.

Under the rule of Catherine the Great, Russia became the chief continental power of Europe. Catherine continued her predecessor Peter's policies of absolutist rule at home and territorial expansion into neighbouring lands. Parts of these areas, including what is the country of Ukraine, were taken from Turkey. The southern part consisted of a fertile treeless black-earth steppe. It was this vast unpopulated area that Catherine wanted to settle and develop agriculturally. Prospective settlers were extended many rights and privileges that would influence them to accept the invitation to emigrate to the new territory.

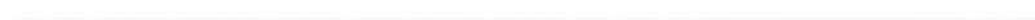
In the late 16th century, a group of Mennonites had made their home in West Prussia in the area of the port of Danzig. There they had suffered the vicissitudes of war, discrimination as a religious minority, and a growing need for more land. It was to these Mennonites, seen as desirable agrarian colonists, that Catherine's agents appealed. So successful was the invitation that in 1788, 228 families left for Ukraine, followed by additional groups that brought the total to 462 families. They established the first Mennonite settlement of Chortitza on the right bank of the Dniepr River. A second colony, Molotschna, was founded in 1804 to the southeast of the first colony. From these two, most of the daughter settlements originated. As James Urry writes:

These newer settlers had to adapt to the physical and economic environment of New Russia. For the Mennonites this adaptation in the early pioneer years involved a period of adjustment accompanied by some hardships: the steppe region with its apparently desolate landscape and erratic climate was strikingly different from the delta lowlands they had been acquainted with in Royal Prussia and Danzig. In the long term, however, the previously poorly cultivated land combined with support from a reasonably beneficent government and favourable official policies towards development, allowed Mennonites to utilize their entrepreneurial skills, not only to support a considerable increase in their population but also to considerably improve their standard of living ("Mennonite Economic Development in the Russian Mirror," in *Mennonites in Russia*: 103).



Map of Mennonite colonies in southern Ukraine. Map courtesy of: Anna Epp Ens, *The House of Heinrich: The Story of Heinrich Epp (1811–1863) of Rosenort, Molotschna and His Descendants* (Winnipeg, Man.: Epp Book Committee, 1970), 84.

This need for more land prompted the founding of daughter colonies. In all there were thirty-seven settlements established from the original colonies. Fuerstenland, in the province of Taurida, was established in 1864. From this settlement came the majority of colonists who went on to form the village of Grigoryevka, the subject of our book.





Village Memories





Chapter 1

MEMORIES OF THE VILLAGE OF GRIGORIEVKA 1889–1926*

George F. Loewen

The Village

Grigorievka was situated about 130 kilometres south-southeast of Kharkov on the south side of the Losavaia-Rostov rail line. To the west our rail station was Gavrillovka, to the east Barvenkovo. The land for this village, one of the youngest settlements of the Mennonites in Ukraine, was begun by two groups of young Mennonite settlers and augmented by several families from other colonies.

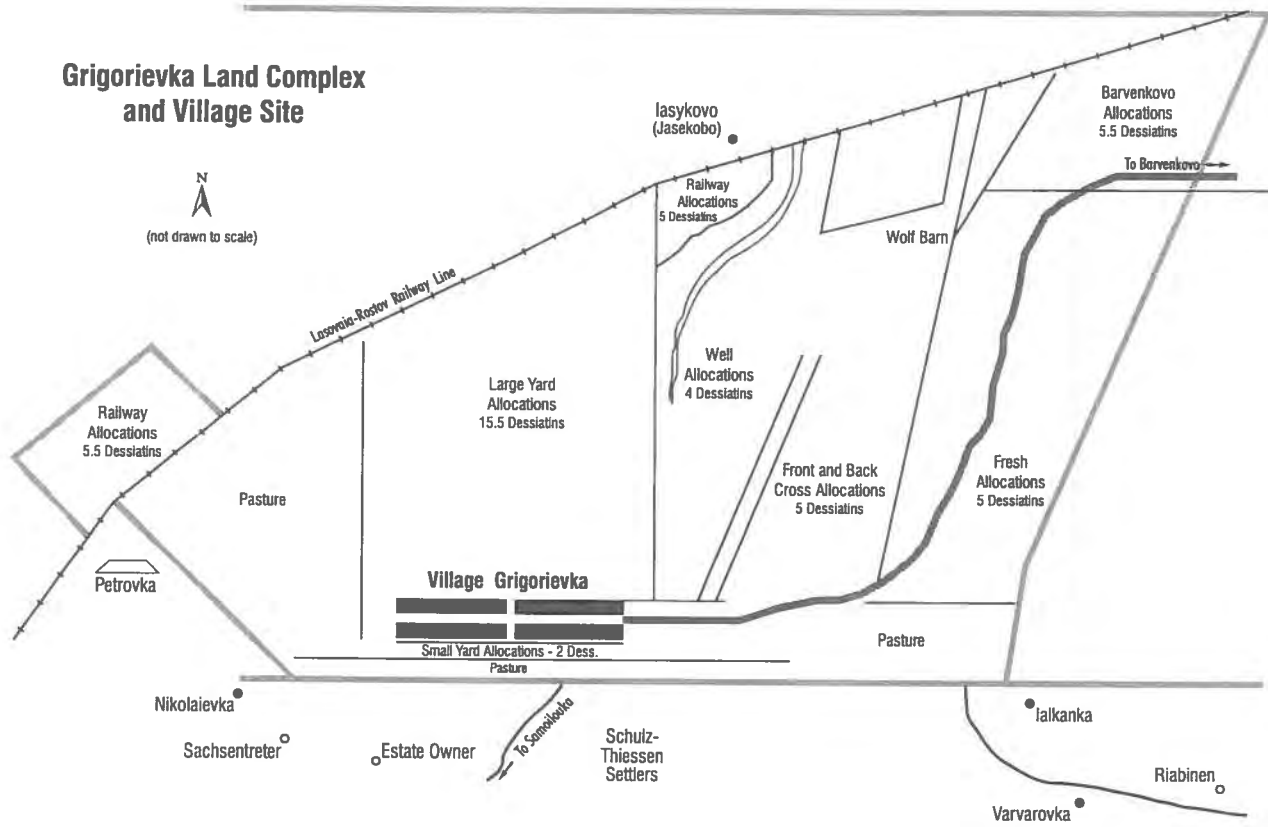
The first and by far the largest group, consisting of twenty-five families, came from five villages in the so-called Fuerstenland. Not long after, a second group of nine families arrived from the Nepluievka Colony. In addition, two families moved from Neu-Chortitza and one each from Rosenthal, Neu-Rosengart, Osterwick and Chortitza (see tables below). The men and women of these families were the founding settlers of the village of Grigorievka. However, soon people started moving about and might have been forgotten if Mrs. Abram Rempel had not recorded their movement with her loving hand.

The land of the village was bought from General Grigor Cherbachov for eighty-seven rubles per dessiatin (2.7 acres). Abraham Kroeger and Gerhard Redekop signed the contract in the fall of 1888, but the settlers only arrived during the spring of 1889. General Cherbachov was a Russian nobleman who owned crown land. Because the land now was deeded to ordinary citizens, the General had to transfer the account from the “gold bank” to the bank in Kherson. In order to pay a lower rate of interest, this account was again transferred in 1908 by Aron Braun and Jakob Baerg into the Poltava Farmers’ Bank under generous conditions. Since the communist government made all land state-owned after the Revolution of 1917, this debt was never fully paid.

The total purchase consisted of 2,906 dessiatins. The railway split the land into two sections, a northwest corner of 240 dessiatins and the larger

*Translation of *Erinnerungen aus dem Dorf Grigorjewka 1889–1926* von Jakob Baerg, Peter Krahn, Cornelius Sawatzky, Peter Sawatzky; gesammelt und herausgegeben von George F. Loewen (Np, 1975); translated by John Dyck.

Grigorievka Land Complex and Village Site



| Settlers from Fuerstenland in First Group to Grigorievka | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| Georgsthal | Rosenbach | Olgafeld | Michelsburg | Alexandertal |
| Jakob Pauls | Franz Sawatzky | Diet. Rempel | David Redekop | Wilhelm Dueck |
| Franz Huebert | Bernh. Krahn | Jakob Rempel | David Redekop | Peter Buhler |
| Korn. Enns | Bern Warkentin | | Gerh. Redekop | Gerh. Sawatzky |
| Wilh. Buhler | Franz Siemens | | Peter Redekop | Korn. Huebert |
| Klaas Peters | | | Peter Redekop | Bernh. Penner |
| Joh. Sawatzky | | | Peter Klassen | |
| Abr. Kroeger | | | | |

| Origin of Second Group of Settlers to Grigorievka | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Nepluievka Colony | |
| Franz Loewen | Neu-Chortitza: Peter Froese, Aron Froese |
| Gerhard Giesbrecht | Rosenthal: Jakob Froese |
| Isaak Derksen | Neu-Rosengart: Heinrich Froese |
| Isaak Tschetter | Osterwick: Jakob Harms |
| Johann Tschetter | Chortitza: Jakob Wallman |
| Isaak Loepke | |
| Peter Unger | |
| Gerhard Thiessen | |

section of 2,666 dessiatins. This land was further subdivided into forty-one *Wirtschaften* (farmsteads), each consisting of approximately seventy dessiatins, one of which was assigned for the farmyard. Each yard had 210 feet frontage and was 560 feet deep. There was a cross street in the middle of the village, also 210 feet wide. The whole village, therefore, was 4,410 feet—almost one mile—long.

The Layout of the Village

At first the plan was to build the village in the middle of the land complex because in that vicinity, in the Brunnenthal—the well valley—good water was available at a moderate depth. Based on a motion by Isaak Loepke and Wilhelm Buhler, this plan was overturned the next winter and supported by the whole community. Consequently the village became situated on a ridge toward the southwest corner of the land. In the middle of the village was a slight depression, so that the whole community was visible from either end of the street .

The village had two rows of farmyards. Running east-west, the street between them was 140 feet wide. In laying out the village and the farmyards, the planners drew two furrows 140 feet apart to mark the street, then further furrows parallel to these seventy feet from the street to mark the line beyond which houses and other farm buildings could be built. With the addition of the cross street, the village attained four quarters. In the southeast quarter there were ten farmyards up to the school, the schoolyard taking up the eleventh lot. On the north side, east to west, were eleven farmyards up from the intersection, then another ten toward the west end—forty-one farmyards in all.

According to community agreement, the main farm buildings, house-barn combinations, were situated on the east side of the yard in order to catch the morning sun on the threshing floor, something that was important at a time when harvesting was still done by rolling a threshing stone. On the west side of the yard was an enclosure for cattle, with a cow path toward the street, the pig barns, granaries and implement sheds. Generally the wells were located on this side, most of them being only twenty feet deep with good water.

The front yard was planted with fruit trees, allowing room only for a driveway. The first row of trees along the street were *Kruschkjebeem*, the wild pear trees beloved and famous in many Mennonite villages. Their stately growth and symmetry were a particular adornment. However, two farmyards had white acacias instead of pear trees. In the backyard stood more fruit trees, with half the space reserved for a vegetable garden.

Because at first dwellings were not available in this new settlement, most settlers made do with sod huts. Others found shelter in the neighbouring village of Ialkanka or even in the sheep barns located on the west end near the water ponds. The first houses were constructed with mud bricks, the barns and sheds of wood. Roofs were covered with straw. Then by the turn of the century, most houses were rebuilt with fired bricks and shingled roofs. From the start, three houses of the village were built of fired brick and roofed with tin, as was the school (also used as the church). If I remember right, only two roofs were covered with tiles.

The School

The school was built in 1890, but schooling had begun during the first winter in an adjoining house on the Aron Froese yard. The first teacher of the village was Dietrich Thiessen. He stayed only a year, then left to study architecture in Germany. Listed in the table below are the other teachers who served the schools of the village until 1926.

The end of the school year was highlighted by the traditional oral examination, a festive day of great importance for the children. If this day happened to coincide with the flowering of the tulips, the school walls, windows and tables would be adorned with wreaths, garlands and bouquets. This helped to heighten the festive mood. And even if the occasion was not a true examination, the presence of the parents gave it credibility and accentuated the school spirit. Obviously this closing activity in the village was not unlike the school picnic formerly common in rural schools in Canada.

Until the spring of 1905 the school consisted of one classroom with one teacher. The teacher's living quarters had been built toward the east end. Then a separate house for two teachers was built and the east section of the school became a second classroom with Johann Funk as the second teacher.

The economic life of the settlers had improved to such an extent that they began to send their children to continuation schools (*Fortbildungs-*

| Teachers in Grigorievka 1890–1926 | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Peter Harder | * Johann Enns | Heinrich Loewen |
| Gerhard Neufeld | * Jakob Funk | * Nikolai Kaethler |
| Gerhard Loewen | * Johann Braun | Peter Huebert |
| Johann Funk | * Dietrich Dyck | Kornelius Lepp |
| Daniel Siemens | Johannes Unruh | * Agathe Unruh |
| Jakob Warkentin | Heinrich Neufeld | * Margarethe Wiebe |
| Kornelius Peters | N. Warkentin | * Margarete Rempel |
| Gerhard Enns | * Peter Krahn | * Margarete Siemens |
| * Johann Martens | | |

* See chapter 3, "Village Teachers' Stories," for brief accounts of these teachers.

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Grigorievka school children in 1903 with teacher Gerhard Loewen.

schulen). That was problematic since the nearest *Zentralschule* was in a community called New York, seventy miles away—naturally they wanted their children under parental supervision for several years longer. So the villagers agreed to expand the school again. They built another school building with an attached teacherage and offered instruction in the first two classes of high school. In 1906 they also hired a third teacher. But these higher classes were for boys only. In order to give the girls some opportunities for advanced learning, another addition was made and a female teacher was hired.

That the Grigorievka school attained a high standard of instruction became evident during World War I. Our men held positions in Moscow where most of the Mennonite medical corps personnel were screened for physical and medical fitness. There it became obvious that, compared to young men from other villages, ours were superior in their command of the Russian language. They excelled not only in academics but also in music. The village had many young adults and much free time during the winter months, so singing and music could be practised. That was good for the youth as well as for congregational singing. *Ziffern*, a number notation system, was used in choir practises. It was not advantageous for playing musical instruments, so the villagers did not achieve as much instrumentally. Even so, they made music. Gifted persons formed small orchestras. Many beautiful pieces were practised and performed at special musical programs. The most common instruments at these evenings were violin, mandolin, balalaika and guitar.

The Church (Gemeinde)

The residents of our village belonged to the New York Mennonite Church in the Ignatievka colony. The long-time Ältester there was Abraham Unrau. He usually came to the village twice a year to officiate at baptism and to serve communion. His successor was the one-time teacher of German and Religion in the New York high school, Heinrich Funk, whose bold preaching resulted in long-term exile to the forests of Siberia. Even in his last years Funk had to remain in Karaganda, Kazakhstan.

The first minister, the *Ohm* of the village, was the old Abraham Kroeger. Many will remember having listened to his drawn-out sermons. He had the gall to call by name those who fell asleep in church, thereby keeping everyone awake. In the first years Peter Froese was minister as well; his family soon moved back to the Old Colony and Ohm Kroeger was left to minister alone.

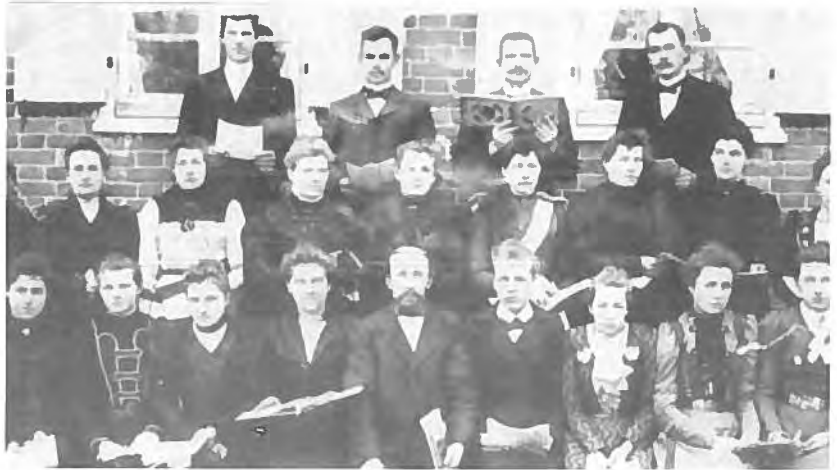
Then followed Peter Funk, who preached intensely serious and well prepared sermons. Peter Krahn notes in one of his recordings that he can remember the testimony of his sister-in-law who had taken catechism instruction with Rev. Funk. He described their sinful state so vividly that all of them sat and cried, following which he had pointed them to the One who can forgive and heal. It is regrettable that Rev. Funk was appointed manager of the steam-driven mill when it fell on hard times. He could not “save” the mill, but in the process lost some of his friends; this likely contributed to his early death. After Rev. Funk died, Gerhard Neufeld, a former teacher in the village, was elected minister. He served only a few years before his untimely death.

In the meantime the Jakob Baergs had moved to Grigorievka. Baerg had been ordained elsewhere and was accepted here as minister. In addition, Heinrich Unruh from Novo-Petrovka, the neighbouring village one mile away, was elected as minister. He served the village church until he moved to Alexanderwohl, Molotschna. He had wanted to go to Canada but could not attain an emigrant visa. Whether he is still alive [in 1975] and where is unknown—maybe somewhere in distant Siberia.

The last elected minister of our congregation was Rev. Kornelius Krahn. He began his service after World War I and continued in that role until his emigration in 1924. Then his brother Nikolai Krahn assumed ministerial leadership and served until almost the last Mennonite residents had left the village.

Usually the worship services were held on Sunday mornings. These were opened with singing led by the *Vorsänger* (song leader). During the singing of the second song the ministers entered. If two ministers were present, they divided the time: a shorter introductory sermon and then the

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Choir in Grigorievka with conductor Gerhard Neufeld. Photo: Walter Quiring, Als ihre Zeit erfüllt war

main sermon. If visiting ministers could not stay until Sunday, weekday evening services were held. To call people together in such cases, a short note was sent from yard to yard in no time at all, particularly if the message was started at the mid-village intersection and sent both ways at once. The neighbours from Novo-Petrovka (one mile west) and from Marievka (eight miles southeast) came to our church; non-village families also attended: Enns, Schellenberg, P. Friesen, Jak. Friesen, and the families of Schulz, Johannes Thiessen, David Redekop and Abram Sawatzky from Semionovka.

As was already mentioned, our village lay along a ridge, if it can be called that. The whole land complex was a gently rolling plateau with several valleys. East and south of the village were two deep valleys. They allowed for fast winter sledding. In spring the snowdrops and the scented violets graced the valley. A dam had been built on the east end of the village and a sizeable pond had been created, allowing for much swimming particularly on the sandy west shore. On the west end of the village was a meadow with two artificial lakes stocked with fish. There the children and youth went to frolic and to observe the passing trains. At times the trains were not only observed but also used for additional excitement. Boys would catch a ride when the train slowed for the ascent. Fortunately no serious mishaps occurred. In spite of such ill-conceived bravado, God kept his guardian hand over these youth.

However, one accident did occur. It happened during the years of famine, 1922 or 1923. A refugee, a young man named Regehr, met his

death there. He came from somewhere by train and attempted to hop off as the train slowed down as it went up the hill near our village. He fell under it and both legs were amputated by the wheels. Before appropriate medical help could be given, he bled to death. I cannot remember where he was buried.

Land Allocation and Agriculture

As was mentioned earlier, the whole parcel of land was divided among forty-one farms with about seventy dessiatins per farm. In order to give each owner an equitable allocation of quality land, the parcel was divided into smaller fields. There were: 1) the large yard allocations of 15.5 dessiatins; 2) the well allocations of 4 dessiatins; 3) the front and back cross allocations of 5.5 dessiatins; 4) the fresh allocations of approximately 5 dessiatins; 5) the Barvenkovo allocations of 5.5 dessiatins; 6) the railway allocations of 6 dessiatins; 7) the allocations on the other side of the tracks of 5.5 dessiatins; 8) the small yard allocations of 2 dessiatins; and 9) the marginal allocations of 2 dessiatins each. Each farm also had one dessiatin for the yard. The rest of the land was committed to pasture.

The soil was the famous black humus with a reddish-yellow clay underneath. It was very productive for all kinds of grains, vegetables and fruits. The primary grain was wheat—grown for the market it ensured a good income. Initially the Ulka variety was sown, a type of spring wheat. They had little luck with winter wheat because the winters of this region were unpredictable. Sometimes a fair blanket of snow would melt suddenly, causing water to accumulate on the fields; then a sharp frost would freeze the water, suffocating the winter wheat under the sheet of ice. Shortly before World War I, a new, more disease-resistant variety became available; consequently some success was achieved with growing winter wheat.

Because the wheat was sown on summerfallow land, the loss was too great if the crop died during the winter. Therefore for many years only spring wheat was sown. Soon it was determined that Welsh corn could be grown on land destined for summerfallow and, if properly weeded, good results could be obtained. In that manner summerfallow became a veritable gold mine for Grigorievka: the corn was good feed for horses, pigs and chickens, and the straw for the cattle. Because the yield was so rich, it served all local needs and even allowed for extensive market sales. The brewery in Antonovka gave additional opportunity for the sale of corn. Barley and oats were grown mainly for local use as fodder.

The so-called *Barstanen* (melon fields) occupied a unique niche in our agriculture. Melons and watermelons were a favourite dessert at

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mealtime from late summer right into the winter. On these fields pumpkins, as well as turnips designated for fattening cattle, were also grown.

The four-field rotation system was instituted right at the outset, but initially the implements and the agricultural approaches were quite primitive. The rolling stone (*Dreschstein*) was the earliest threshing machine. Even the flail was used, particularly for threshing rye in order to preserve the straw for thatching roofs. But the rich harvests allowed rather rapid economic growth, and soon each farmyard had its own horse-powered threshing machine plus good ploughs and grain mowers. Initially these mowers were the simple Russian *Lobograika* which required a man to shove the cut grain off the platform. That was hard and sweaty work. It was succeeded by the rake mower which was designed to move the grain off the platform mechanically. This mower did not really take hold because the more modern binder soon came on the market. The most common was the McCormick, followed by the Massey Harris and Osborne. Shortly before World War I, a number of farmers already had a stationary gasoline engine for the threshing, but most still used those powered by horses.

The Steam-Powered Mill

At about the turn of the century mill fever struck the Mennonite communities and many, including our village, succumbed to it. In 1904 a mill was erected—five storeys high, the first storey half sunk into the ground. It is unfortunate that so many errors were made: the first was that the mill was even built; the second, that it was not built at the railway station; the third, that the advice of experienced persons was ignored. They had advised that the newest technology should be built into the mill; this advice was ignored and machinery was used which did not meet the standards of the day. And then there was the misfortune with the managers who meant well but were not up to the challenges. When everything had already gone wrong, the error was compounded by the appointment of Rev. Peter Funk as manager. Because he could not correct errors already made, and even made some of his own, he lost the respect of some villagers. This loss of face compounded an already existing health problem, robbing him of the stamina to fight his illness, and he soon died.

Thereupon the war broke out, causing the millwork to be interrupted—the beginning of the end. After the war, first the machinery was sold, then the yard and the buildings. The new owners tore down the top two storeys and remodelled the remainder into a starch factory. What remained was the debt. The post-war economy eased that load; inflation



The five-storey, steam-powered mill built in 1904.

escalated and the debt was liquidated shortly. The dreams of mill ownership and of wealth came to an end.

Yet prior to the steam-powered mill, we had two treadmills in our village. One belonged to Abraham Kroeger, the other to Frank Sawatzky. Kroeger's treadmill was situated on the fourth yard from the east end of the village, Sawatzky's on the seventh yard on the opposite side of the street. Both mills were equipped with a stool for milling as well as with a bolting hutch and sieve (*Beutelkasten*) for removing the bran from the flour. How long these mills existed in Grigorievka I can not say with accuracy.

In 1908 the Kroeger farmyard went to Abram Unger, the third owner. Soon thereafter, likely in 1909, the mill was dismantled and most of the timbers were used for the construction of a new, larger house. The treadmill of Franz Sawatzky also went to a second owner, namely Aron Braun. He dismantled it shortly after its purchase. Soon after the demise of the treadmills a windmill was erected south of the village down the cross street. It had several owners; the last was Franz Sawatzky. No one noticed the fire when the mill was lost in flames on a particularly stormy night. In the morning only the foundation was left; even the ashes had blown away.

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Automobile dealership of David H. Unruh in Barvenkovo. Photo: Walter Quiring, Als ihre Zeit erfüllt war.

World War I

The years from the turn of the century to the outbreak of World War I were the village's golden years. This was evident everywhere: from the well-appointed houses, the barns and sheds; also from the good, practical agricultural implements and the beautiful horses and cattle which filled the barns. At the street most farmers had well built, painted fences which, together with the wild pear trees, presented a beautiful vista. The paths on either side of the street were raised and well kept.

Then the war came. Like wildfire the traumatic announcement raced through the village in August 1914: "Germany has declared war against Russia!" A policeman had ridden his foaming mount onto the yard of the village mayor and tearfully delivered this message. Generally our people were patriotically inclined toward Russia. Until then we had been treated as full-fledged citizens, were trusted by the government and respected by our Russian neighbours. Surely no one should doubt our loyalty toward our Fatherland. Soon many younger men volunteered for service in the medical corps. The local Russian authorities looked on this with favour.

But things changed and we soon became disappointed with the actions of our government. Horses were mobilized. According to Russian tradition, confusion reigned. The horses were graded into three categories: cavalry, artillery and railway; the prices paid for the horses were based on these classifications. Of first priority were the smaller horses of our Russian neighbours, satisfying the needs of the cavalry. Our large, beautifully groomed horses came last, were assigned for the third-class train service and paid for accordingly. Later we watched how the cavalry members traded their inferior horses for our larger ones.

A significant number of our young men had to enter the service. Even

married fathers up to forty years of age were taken, until finally families were totally robbed of their workforce. Two, three and up to five sons from one family were drafted, as was the case in our family. Some of these mobilized men served in forestry units or as forest watchmen, others in medical trains and hospitals or in medical brigades of the Red Cross at the war front to “clean up” the wounded on the battlefields. Quite a few were appointed as secretaries and bookkeepers in hospitals, chiefly in the Zemstvo association and in its trains, but also in the associations of the nobility and the cities. All of these were organizations designed to transport and care for the wounded and sick. Financial support for the wives and children left behind was generally left to their parents; eventually this became a great burden for them. The Russian wives and children received support from the government, but this was denied our Mennonite mothers. Only toward the end of the war did some of them receive help.

Although Grigorievka was the only Mennonite village among larger Russian villages, there was grudging recognition among most of the populace of the privileged position the Mennonites had vis-a-vis their convictions and the war. The quiet demeanour and lifestyle of its inhabitants, the relatively more generous payment and treatment of their servants, their industriousness, frugality, progressiveness, and their unostentatious worship services had left a trail of goodwill and respect which became a protective wall during this troublesome and restless time.

A workforce which alleviated the shortage of able-bodied men in the village were the refugees—more correctly stated, the Germans—who had been removed by the government from the German villages near Warsaw and Volhynia. Because the war fronts had moved to Russian soil, these Germans had to leave their villages, thus coming in some numbers to our village where they were employed as farm workers, as necessary.

The war against the middle powers became ever more disastrous for Russia. The military had to move back again and again and the populace became disgruntled, particularly under the instigation of agitators who laid all blame on the tsar. Finally some higher government officials organized a coup and deposed him. An interim government was elected, new generals were sent out to lead the military, and orators were sent to the front to inspire the troops to fight for victory. All this was in vain; the military order disintegrated further and many soldiers left the front and returned home, many with their weapons.

At this time Lenin came back to Russia and began to stir up the country. In October 1917 the Communists forcibly gained control of the government in Moscow. What little order had remained now dissipated and military men left the front in droves. In spring of 1918 Lenin made

a separate peace with Germany. One part of the agreement stated that Germany and Austria would have control of Ukraine for fifteen years to institute order and thereby earn the right to use the agricultural products of this rich region. As a result the German military joined with the Ukrainian military to enter Ukraine and clean up the marauding bands.

By the latter part of April, most of the grain had been seeded. We were digging in the back garden. It was a beautiful spring day. Suddenly we heard rolling thunder in the west. Jakob Unger, my wife's brother, knew this sound; he had become intimately acquainted with this kind of music in the medical corps at the front. Not long after, we received the message that the Red militia was assembling in Barvenkovo—a major battle was imminent which would likely engulf our village. Traffic on the adjacent rail line became heavier by the hour. The farmers working the land near the line noted that the train heading east passed every half hour; sometimes even two travelled together.

Soon more disturbing news came of the impending battle. Provisions were hurriedly loaded on wagons, and parents, children, women and girls fled the village, away from the railway tracks and the intensifying thunder of the guns. Only a few men and youth stayed behind in the village. But before evening a cadre of women and girls came back to milk the cows and process the milk—this was women's work in Russia. For the night, though, only the boldest stayed behind. For the youth of that time this was such an extraordinary event that it will likely never be erased from their memory.

One unforgettable moment for those young men will have been the sight of a military unit galloping into the village. They wore unfamiliar uniforms, but were soon identified as an advance guard of the German military. The officer of the unit was no less surprised when his questions were answered in perfect German. He announced that at a bend in the railway track, some one-and-a-half miles away, a German troop train had collided head on with a Ukrainian Panzer troop train. The accident had caused thirty-six deaths and 150 wounded. He asked us to bury the dead. In a few minutes everything had been arranged. A sufficient number of wagons were gathered together and prepared to carry the dead, while another group of men dug a mass grave and some single graves in the cemetery. [Since apparently all the fatalities were Germans, it was widely rumoured that the "collision" was with an unoccupied locomotive released by saboteurs. *Ed.*]

"I was one of those," writes Peter Krahn, "who laid the shrouded corpses in the large grave. Some of them were so mutilated that the remains were simply enclosed in a canvas sheet with the four corners tied together. After the graves were closed, the head officer concluded the

ceremony with a deeply serious prayer. Peace upon their ashes!” Later the military command beautified the gravesite with a modest but appropriate gravestone.

Soon the traffic became hectic on the usually quiet street as the remainder of the accident-struck regiment came into the village. But only a short respite was granted before the unit moved out in a southeasterly direction toward Pleshcheievo to engage the enemy. Meanwhile some of our “refugees” now dared to come back into the village and spend the night. However, most of them had fled toward the west, away from the Reds and the front. For the next night several came back again, including my wife and I, some of our siblings and the Brauns who had fled Warsaw. Everyone became busy churning butter and baking in order to prepare provisions for an extended time away from home. Early next morning at five we were awakened by machine gun fire from the direction of Barvenkovo. We stayed for another two hours, then were ordered by the German militia to leave. In the next night the battle was decided: a direct hit by a German canon on the command post of the Reds broke their resistance and they fled. We could again return home.

Some artillery shells had hit our village. A wild pear tree on the Abram Unger yard was damaged by shrapnel; another shell had hit the pigpen but not the pigs. At the Heinrich Froese home a large shell had uprooted a sizeable cherry tree and tossed it into the neighbour’s yard. At Peter Bartel’s, a cannon shot had come through the roof of the large shed. Some shrapnel had also fallen in the fields, but since the shells were only three-inchers the damage was not severe.

As mentioned before, Germany had made a separate peace with the Red government. According to the agreement, they and the Ukrainians with Petliura at the head were to “clean up” Ukraine. For that reason some of the joint German-Ukrainian military was stationed in every town and village. During the summer of 1918, Grigorievka also had military, namely the train unit of the 174th Regiment, stationed there. Soldiers with two horses and a wagon were quartered in almost every farmyard. These were decent people who made few demands. We had to provide 500 grams of bread per head per day; the rest of the provisions were supplied from their field kitchen which had been set up on Peter Redekop’s yard. This military unit gave us protection and peace in that restless time. Naturally they tried to persuade us to participate actively with them in their punitive forays into the countryside, testing us morally. When we responded negatively, offensive words followed; even cursing of us by the German officers in the presence of their militia and our young men had to be tolerated. When the Revolution commenced and Germany made peace with the Western Allies, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty

was annulled and the Germans had to leave Ukraine.

During summer of 1918 when the German military was still in control in Ukraine, a meeting was called of all Germans in our region: Catholics, Lutherans and also Mennonites were asked to appear at Barvenkovo in the school of commerce to discuss the organization of a home guard, the *Selbstschutz*. Several times earlier the German lieutenant had called together our young men and encouraged them to form such a protective unit against the marauding bands. On one of these occasions on the yard of Nikolai Albrecht, the village mayor, the lieutenant even threatened corporal punishment for those who refused to join. He desisted, though, when he saw the united resistance of most of the men. At another meeting in the schoolhouse he tried again, but without success. Finally one of the older men, Jakob Braun, dared to ask him, "Sir, were you sent here to bring order to Ukraine or to introduce compulsory military service?" That concluded the meeting and everyone went home.

In Barvenkovo the issue was again on the agenda. The lieutenant had brought along a staunch advocate of the home guard idea. Again Grigorievka presented itself solidly against such action. In particular, Jakob Baerg stated the case for the village. We did not have to regret our resistance. A short time later Rev. Baerg had been travelling home when he passed a Russian from a nearby village; he offered him a ride which was gladly accepted. In conversation this man said, "We also had our representatives at the Barvenkovo meeting and appreciated that you Mennonites did not want to shoot us Russians. That pleases us and we will not shoot at you either." This pledge was acted out later in December when the German military had to evacuate. None of the marauding bands, and there were many, murdered anyone in our village. Even Makhno, who later passed with his large entourage—yes, even stopping to feed his horses at the end of our village—hurt nobody. At the point of leaving, the German lieutenant confessed, "You Mennonites were wise to resist involvement in the home guard; you could not have stood up to the Russians on your own."

Grigorievka experienced great excitement on January 3, 1919. Soon after noon lunch a chain of soldiers with fixed bayonets moved into our village from the north. What did this mean? Would the village be exterminated? Many prayers floated heavenward. Again the Heavenly Father held his protecting hand over us and no serious mishap, aside from minor robberies, befell us. The Lord be praised! Later we learned that a rumour had been circulating that the German military had left behind arsenals of weapons and ammunition. Nothing was found and the suspicion against us dissipated.

It should be mentioned that already during the war the tsarist

government had been drafting laws which would have confiscated all property and lands owned by Germans. They would have banished the German people to Siberia, at first those in the seventy-mile boundary zone, afterwards all others. This law was not passed because the tsar was deposed and exiled. We breathed a little easier again. What might have happened to our families and older parents in Siberia with our men in the armed services? But how would the affairs of Russia develop with the war not yet over and the economy in ruins?

The Post-War Years

After the war both our lifestyle and mode of living changed. The singularly peaceful and rational life of the Mennonite farmers was totally disturbed and put on a different track. What had been taken for granted before was now questioned and became uncertain. The most common necessities were either in short supply or had vanished from the markets. People generally began to speculate and operate in the black market. There always were some entrepreneurs who knew where to find commodities, how to buy them cheaply and then sell them at inflated prices. Because money was losing value daily, no one wanted to buy for cash; barter became the norm. This bartering played a significant roll when famine touched the cities. Men and women came into the village daily with goods to trade for provisions, especially butter and flour.

Thread for sewing and wool for knitting were especially scarce. But necessity is the mother of invention: soon silkworms were everywhere in the village; the mulberry trees in the backyard gardens delivered the necessary fodder. In no time at all the older women had procured spinning wheels from somewhere and wool for winter stockings was quickly at hand. Fabric for summer clothes also became available, since the Russian women made tolerably good linen from their hemp. Jackets from this material were favoured by the men, even for Sunday wear. Leather was in short supply, therefore no new shoes could be bought. Wooden shoes became fashionable again. Sandals with wooden soles soon were in good supply—the soles were hinged with leather and leather straps crossed over the foot and around the heel to keep the sandals in place. At this time even beautiful white shoes for women were made in the village.

At the beginning of the Revolution the leaders of the Red government threw out many slogans to win the masses to their cause: “Freedom and Equality,” “Land of the Farmers,” and so on. The latter was particularly appealing because Russia had so many citizens who were hungry for land of their own. The irony of this new “order” soon became evident: the land was given to the people while the government officials took the

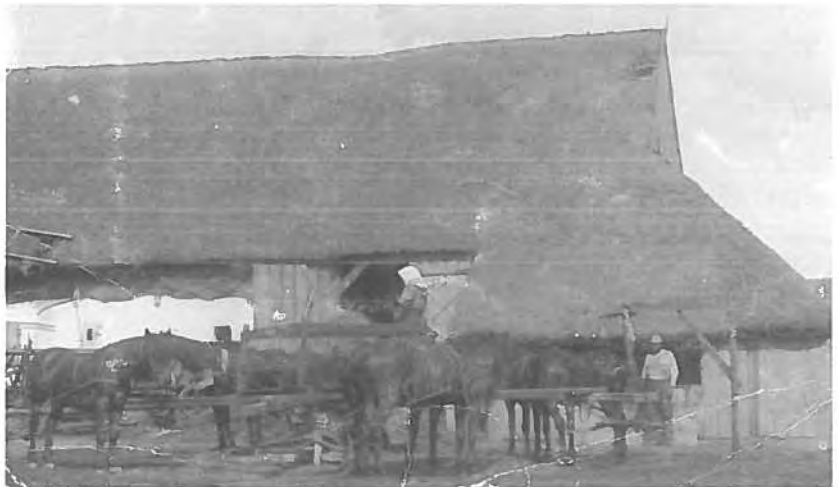
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harvest, often leaving the farmers hardly enough to feed their families and seldom enough for spring seeding. The leaders promised that this would all be given when the time came, and bread would also be available. But as soon as the government officials had the grain in their hands the promises were forgotten and the farmers were left to fend for themselves. If they then failed to get their spring seeding done, they were penalized. The harvest was unjustly estimated in advance and the delivery of grain to the state was demanded accordingly. No excuse was tolerated, even when the harvest was meagre. Sometimes the farmer was forced to earn money to buy grain so that he could deliver his quota to the state.

A substitute for sugar had to be found as well. That was not so difficult because through the years our people had refined syrup from watermelons and sugar beets. In addition, expanded apiaries brought a steady supply of honey into homes. The previously unknown saccharin also became available in the markets and was a usable substitute for sugar, albeit not a favourite.

A particular problem was the lighting during long winter evenings since petroleum products were virtually unattainable. People reverted to an old technology, namely the oil lamp. Some lard, sunflower oil or linseed oil was poured into a saucer. If lard was used, it had to be warmed first to make it fluid. Then one of several strips of good wool yarn was laid into the oil as a wick and allowed to hang over the edge of the saucer. When lit, the result was a modest but tolerable light.

Beggars were commonplace in Russia but, now that life's necessities



Threshing in 1925 at the Jakob Wiens farmyard.

were in short supply, begging increased. Many beggars walked through the village daily, from yard to yard, and held out their hands for some gift of charity. In most cases they were not disappointed. Still, they had to be watched until they left the yard, for there were those who were not above taking what had not been given such as clothes hanging on the washline.

I am reminded of the words of Proverbs 30:8–9, which says, “Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God.” Thank the Lord that, as much as is known to me, the people of the village were kept from sinning in this regard.

While conditions deteriorated and food became more scarce, the demands of the government increased. Almost daily, vehicles were demanded by the officials; farmers had to oblige without recompense, sometimes having to make long journeys which might take several days of their time. That was burdensome and caused many quarrels in the village office. Some tried to escape these obligations by deliberately emptying their barns of horses and keeping them elsewhere.

The Interlude—“New Economic Policy”

By 1921 the Red order became so anarchistic that some solution had to be found to save the government. Till then the principle simply had been, “Destroy what existed, build new.” They had succeeded with the first part: houses of estate owners had been burned, grain had been dumped into rivers and other valuables had been stolen or destroyed. A total crop failure in 1921 resulting from a drought brought on a crisis. No new grain was harvested and stored grain had been destroyed. Starvation set in and many, many people, even among the Mennonites, died of starvation. But God was gracious to our village. Enough had grown on our fields so that no one had to suffer acute hunger. We were even in a position to extend a helping hand to some others.

During this time the Red government made known its economic plan: the smaller factories could continue to operate as before and the small farmers could farm as they chose. They had to deliver some of their produce to the state and could sell the remainder on the open market. This turnabout in the economic policy of the government was a blessing for the country. Market forces improved the economic situation in short order, one could hardly believe how quickly. Since this New Economic Policy (NEP) seemed so beneficial for the country, many people thought the government would stick it out and shelve its former ideological plan: total state ownership of land, collective farms, outlaw the Christian religion, educate the youth according to its godless ideology, and so on.

The Emigration

Secretly, many of our fellow believers already had decided to emigrate, just as our forefathers had done in the past when their religious convictions were not tolerated. The turn for the better put some of these decisions in doubt: maybe it was better to remain in Russia than to go to an uncertain future in a land where language, customs and circumstances would be much different from our familiar ones. Yet in 1923, when four fully occupied trains (over 4,000 people) left on the first leg of the journey to Canada, the tide again turned in favour of emigration, and people began their preparations. But they wondered, how should they begin? It was agreed to send someone to Schoenwiese to inquire about how to proceed. This was just before spring seeding, and nobody wanted to take time to plan for emigration. Nothing much of value was gained at Schoenwiese, since the person who had last worked with emigration matters had left for an extended period of time. So we returned without pertinent information.

Soon after seeding time we did get the application forms which we would have to fill out to request permission to emigrate. Rev. C. B. Krahn had got them somewhere. Filling them out did not take long. That summer there also was a conference in Molotschna, to which we sent a certain Peter Dyck who had come to our village as a refugee during the war. He took along our applications to Orlov and delivered them to the office of the Association of Citizens of Dutch Extraction (*Verband der Bürger holländischer Herkunft*). There he became aware that each application had to be accompanied by a down payment. Since he had not been aware of this requirement, he had not brought this money. But he did not yield to despair. He had friends in Orlov who loaned him the money so that he could complete the transaction with the applications. Consequently they got to be at the head of the list of those approved. Yet because of a misunderstanding, our group had to wait for the second party leaving in summer. From our village 175 persons left. This larger party consisted of three smaller groups: seventeen train cars from Molotschna, seventeen from the Ignatievka settlement and seventeen from our village. These train cars were not passenger cars, only ordinary freight cars. At half the height of the walls were fastened the famous Russian *polki*, rough planks designed as beds.

We were called to be ready for boarding the train at the Barvenkovo station at noon on July 16, 1924. Our train cars were to come with the group coming from Ignatievka who were supposed to board at the Konstantinovka station. But we waited in vain on that day. Night came, and another day, but no trace of our train. During the night we slept on the platform outside. Many relatives and friends had come to see us off,



The Canadian Pacific ocean liner, Empress of Scotland, which took many of the Grigorievka residents to their new home in Canada.

also our Abram Unger. When he saw that this might take some time, he drove home where his wife baked a large batch of cherry pancakes. Father Unger delivered them to us at the station just before we boarded. He even helped load our baggage and then drove along to Losavaia where we were to meet with the Molotschna group. They had waited a whole day for us. We were only about twenty-five miles from our home village, but here good-byes were said in earnest; we were now truly leaving.

Under normal circumstances a departure from our home village would not have been easy. After all, this was the place where we had been born and raised, where many happy memories were associated to home, yard, family, friends and neighbours. In some way or other we related to all the villagers. And yet, this good-bye was not too difficult—the Reds had made leaving easy. Every rational person was aware of the goals of Communism and that the NEP was simply an interlude before the terror which was destined to follow, the big blow against all freedom.

We were also comforted by the thought that our fellow villagers would soon be following us. We had begun; for others the decision would be easier. Many joined us the next year, some others in 1925 and 1926. Because our village was considerably isolated from other Mennonite villages, a few remaining families could not expect to maintain their Mennonite village life. The villagers agreed to sell all their property to the Russians—at this time we could still sell our property. This liquidation happened in 1926. Those who could, emigrated to Canada; those who could not for medical or other reasons, moved to the Molotschna Colony.

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With that, Grigorievka ceased to exist as a Mennonite village. That was the beginning and end, 1889–1926.

Later Years

Interest in Grigorievka was not completely extinguished. Now and then news about our former home was submitted to us by former villagers. We heard that six of the farm buildings on the northern side of the village had burned down and had not been rebuilt, at least not in the previous style. Then in the 1930s we heard that all wild pear trees in the village had dried up because the new inhabitants had not received the Paris green for spraying against worms and could not be bothered to pick off the egg clusters. Only one mulberry tree remained in the back yard of the former Bernhard Krahn residence. All the street fences were gone; the wood had been used for heating.

The last news of our village was even worse. When the German military drew back, it destroyed the whole village. Supposedly Barvenkovo also was levelled.

Chapter 2

AS THE YEAR TURNS: SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Elisabeth Peters

Since the numerous contributors to this book of memories of Grigorievka often make references to the same event or customs among its residents, it might be useful to summarize briefly the modus of life in our village which was repetitive from year to year. A few practical customs with which we are not unfamiliar, such as community sharing in times of need, should be mentioned.

Communication

Means of communication, other than the grapevine, were of great importance in a time when there was neither telephone service nor mail delivery in a fairly large community. But news and information got around surprisingly quickly. Formal announcements, such as a village meeting (*Schultebott*), were written on a slip of paper (*Zadill*) from the mayor's (*Schult's*) office and dispatched to each of the four sections of the village. Children who usually bore the *Zadills* to the neighbour had been carefully trained to deliver them immediately and were checked up on after their return from the neighbour. Any *Zadill* was treated with respect. The degree of urgency was conveyed in one word: *Foats* (right now). If the notice was an announcement to a regular meeting, it would read: "Too Schulten onn wida aunsajen" (To the village meeting, and pass on the announcement). If the meeting was urgent, it would state: "*Foats* to Schulten onn wida aunsajen." The system was very effective.

Wedding and funeral invitations were delivered in the same way. Occasionally there were lapses in delivery because the family and friends discussed who was invited and why others were not. They sometimes kept the *Zadill* a bit longer for reference of names.

Community Care

As far as I know, there were no cases of extreme poverty in Grigorievka, perhaps because of the selective membership at its founding. But when instances of destitute conditions in a household arose, usually due to the death of a spouse or financial misfortune such as the mill venture, the village council (*Dorfsrat*) stepped in. As in all Mennonite settlements, children from parentless homes due to death or from hopeless home conditions were placed in foster homes, usually with relatives, rather than in institutions which could not replace happy home

surroundings in a family. A guardian (*Vormund*) was appointed for bereft children, a counsellor (*Gootmaan*) for widows. Careful, although never overt, consideration was employed to ensure that the children were well placed. Their financial assets, if any, were secured through inheritance laws by formal registration in the *Waisenamt* (orphans' council). There was only one *Waisenamt* in the Old Colony Chortitza; Molotschna had two.

Night Watchman

Another feature of Mennonite village life was the *Nachtwachhta* (night watchman) who guarded the community from 10:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. next day. The Mennonite village council was very careful to hire a responsible man. I still remember the chant which the watchman sang or spoke while walking the dark streets and orchards in order to put the villagers at ease when they heard the quaint rhymes. "Hört, ihr Leute, lasst euch sagen, die Glock' hat eben zwölf geschlagen." (Hear you people, let me tell, the clock has struck the twelve o'clock bell.) This was not quite true because none of our Mennonite churches had bells, but the watchman had a rattling shaker which resounded through the night when he shook it vigorously.

The watchmen were Germans, not Mennonites; we called them *Kolnisten*. They came from distant German Lutheran colonies in Ukraine which were not as prosperous as Mennonite settlements so the men were glad to get the job at a fair wage. I don't know whether the Mennonites chose not to be watchmen, or whether they were reluctant to put their own men on the streets because of the risk of physical violence which was against our tenets of faith. The watchman came to be a familiar figure in the village during the peaceful years before the Revolution. The greatest threat then was an encounter with watermelon thieves from nearby Ukrainian villages.

Fire Brigade

The village system demanded joint efforts for various community concerns of which the village voluntary fire brigade was a most important one. The fire engine was housed in a special little shed (*buttje*). In Grigorievka it was located near the picket fence in the school garden. During the years of anarchy, the dissatisfied elements among non-Mennonite workers would vent their anger after any disagreement with their Mennonite employer by setting fire to the large straw stacks in the back of the barns and other outbuildings. Frequently the fire brigades from Barvenkovo and Gavrillovka were called for help by the village mayor who had a telephone.

Mad Dogs

In the hot spring and summer days there was always the danger of rabid dogs, but Grigorievka had few instances of hydrophobia. One of the most disturbing of these cases concerned our own family in 1918 (see chapter 3). The whole village engaged in the attempt to destroy the rabid animals and assist the families who had had a family member bitten by a mad dog.

Medical Care

There was no doctor and no drugstore in the village, but when Mr. Abram Kroeger, Jr., came to visit Grigorievka, everybody who needed medical attention went to see him at the home of Aron Wiebe, his wife's family. He cannot have done much visiting with his in-laws because the patients had long waited for this very competent, kind chiropractor who never asked for a fee, but I suppose he was happy to receive food or supplies when money had little worth. The Old Colony villages had their renowned chiropractors (*Trajchtmoakasch*) but as a rule not every village had one of its own. For most ailments, in Grigorievka old Mumtje Wiensche (Mrs. Wiens) or Taunte Oarendt Bruenschi (Mrs Aron Braun) were consulted.

Pig Slaughtering

As soon as frost set in, the happy slaughtering days kept the village busy. The pig killing started very early, perhaps at six in the morning. Neighbours and friends were asked to come and help and we children under ten were invited to share the noon meal and supper which consisted of roast chicken and dressing (*Heenabrohden en Bobbat*) with all the wonderful extras. I always shuddered when I saw the expert *Steatja*, the person who stabbed the animal in the aorta at just the right place causing almost instant death if things went right. Then the carcass was strung up on the barn rafters to bleed, put into the scalding trough (*Breajtroch*) where the bristles were meticulously scraped off, and finally dissected on the wooden trestle tables. The women then came into action, stripping the intestines of lard, which was rendered in a large cauldron (*Mauergrapen*) set up outside for the day, and boiling the fat. The residue of wonderful crackles (*Jreeven*) was strained out to solidify for breakfast use. It was a day of delight for children—*after* the horror of the killing was over—to watch them stuff the sausage (*Fleesch-worscht*) and the liver sausage. Spareribs (*Reppspea*) could be smelled a long way off and everyone sniffed in anticipation of this supper treat. When supper had been eaten, the host would produce a “fifth” (*Veadilamma-flausch*) of wine, usually homemade cherry, plum or red currant. The glasses they

used were very small, I thought, but the men (*Omtjes*) had more than one and the ambiance was always one of happy socializing. They called this drinking *Spatjmäten* (measuring the bacon).

Oral Exams (Prüfung)

At the end of the school term in spring, the oral exams (*Prüfung*) were held in the presence of parents and relatives. The room was beautifully decorated with garlands and flower bouquets brought by the children. As an incentive, the best bouquet would be hung on the wall right behind the pulpit (*Kanzel*). As a child I was shy, but on the day before the *Prüfung* I somehow mustered enough courage to approach Mr. Baerg, the preacher, an older man with a long, flowing beard, as he walked in his beautiful garden which I always felt was enchanted. I asked him if he would “lend” me some of his exquisite narcissi for a bouquet for the *Prüfung*. He smiled broadly and picked me an armful of the lovely white blossoms. Our artistic mother created a work of art with the many flowers and hung it on the garden bench in the cool air after sprinkling it with water. Next day early in the morning our brother Henry carried it to school. When I entered the classroom wearing my new white dress—which was really Ella’s old one—together with all the other girls, I had to stop to catch my breath. There, right above the pulpit on the front wall, hung my bouquet!

The *Prüfung* presented no problem for us except that we regretted not being allowed to respond to the questions, the answers to which we knew so well, as we waved our hands to indicate this. Parents, teachers and pupils were proud and happy at this wonderful spring occasion, which most of us who were planning to emigrate knew would be our last.

Social Life

In spite of the difficult revolutionary times, the youth of Grigorievka, who are old men and women today, still delight in recalling the good times they had when they were young. Very likely the new government regulations, with their emphasis on physical fitness, gymnastics, meetings, football games and clubhouses, had been met by the young men playing football or soccer on Sunday afternoons, and the prescribed clubhouse—in communist times, usually church buildings changed into theatres—became unnecessary due to the Sunday night social gatherings, loosely organized in the parlour (*Groote Stow*) of the large homes. The orchestra provided music for the ballroom dances, such as waltzes, as well as folk dances and, of course, the complex beautiful czardas.

Games were played to accommodate those who did not care to dance, the most prominent games being *Schlüsselbund* and *Grünes Gras*.

Schlüsselbund is started by a man carrying a heavy set of keys. He bows to a girl, she takes his arm and they begin to promenade in a circle, singing a familiar song. All the others join in and follow suit. When the keys are dropped, everyone scrambles for a seat; the one who is too late for a seat has to start the next round. Occasionally ladies' choice (*Damenwahl*) was loudly proclaimed, but it was never very popular. *Grünes Gras* was a similar circle game involving songs that must have been brought from Prussia, quaint and rustic, with references to the monastic life (*Klosterleben*), perhaps dating back to the Reformation. The refrain's opening lines are: "Jetzt muss ich mich leider ins Kloster begeben auf eine lange Lebenszeit, mein Schatz, mein Engel, mit dir zu leben wär' lauter Glück und Seligkeit, doch wendet sich wieder das Kloster nun um, ich seh mich nach was andrem herum" (I have to go to the cloister now, my treasure, my angel. To live with you would be pure happiness and bliss. But now the cloister is turned around and I will look for someone else).

Engagement Party (Verlobung)

Many weddings were held during the year and played an important role in the social life of youth from Grigorievka. When a couple was planning marriage, the banns were read in church and the engagement party (*Verlobung*) was held in the bride's home. Relatives and friends were invited. Busy weeks were ahead for the engaged couple since they were expected to accept the many social supper invitations which they received until their wedding.

Prenuptial Evening (Polterabend)

The evening before the wedding was designated as *Polterabend*. *Polter* pertains to noise and the event may be an outgrowth of the much earlier pagan belief that before the wedding the *Poltergeist* (a mischievous imp) must be frightened away by loud noises such as the clattering of breaking dishes or metal dustpans. This pre-nuptial evening was held in the barn of the bride's parents where the wedding reception was usually held after the church ritual. The young people spent the day before the wedding covering the walls of the building with fresh green boughs, transporting chairs and tables borrowed from various homes for the occasion, and practising plays and skits for the evening's entertainment, relying heavily on singing and orchestral music. Gifts were brought for the couple and deposited on the tables decorated with colourful bouquets, although in the difficult early 1920s there were few gifts. The couples apparently were not too concerned and sat happily on their "bridal" chairs which had delicate garlands wound around them for

decoration. In this era the ribbon bows were borrowed from recent brides most of the time because there were very few silk or other textiles available on the market. *Polterabend* was a happy affair.

Weddings

The wedding ceremony was held in church. Many young couples who were invited followed the bride and groom and flower girls who scattered flower petals on the walk all the way to the church in a long procession. People now knew who was going with whom in “earnest” and expected that other weddings would soon follow. The bride always wore white and her veil was secured by a myrtle wreath as a sign of her chastity. (According to old photos, the custom of wearing white and veils only came into use in the second half of the nineteenth century.) The groom wore a boutonniere of white flowers held together by a white satin ribbon. After the ceremony in the extravagantly flower-decorated church, the procession wound its way back to the bride’s home for supper and an evening’s entertainment.

The meal was served at long tables covered with white cloths, which had been borrowed from neighbours and friends, and decorated with many vases of flowers. Usually the meals consisted of *Plumimoos* (fruit soup) and *Schintjefleisch* (smoked ham) with *Zwieback* and *Platz*. There was never a wedding cake. In earlier, more prosperous times, I was told, there also had been *Rindsupp* or borscht and hot meals served. During the meal there would be loud calls of the Russian word *Gorka* (bitter) to the couple—the intent of the word was that the couple must kiss to sweeten things up. When the meal was over, the young people hurried home to do the chores and milking, then donned their Sunday garb again and returned to the wedding for an evening of fun, dancing and games. Toward the end of the evening another very special little ceremony was conducted in the *Kranz und Schleier ausspielen*, which means disposing of the veil and the wreath, something like throwing the bouquet today, but much more formal. All unmarried girls joined hands to form a large circle while the bride’s eyes were blindfolded and she was asked to stand in the middle holding a tray on which the veil and wreath had been placed. Then a sister or close friend pinned a white bow in her hair, a symbol of the biblical head-covering which designated her as a married woman. She was twirled around three times and walked to the girl who was to get the veil and myrtle wreath. Meanwhile the circle of girls had walked around, hands joined, while singing Weber’s well-known bridal chorus: “Wir winden dir den Jungfernkranz aus veilchenblauer Seide, wir führen dich zu Spiel und Tanz” (We wind for thee a virgin’s wreath, of violet blue silk; we lead you on to games and dance). The lovely refrain

was repeated several times: “Schöner, grüner, schöner, grüner Jungfernkranz” (Lovely green virgin wreath). After a year or when the first child was born, the white hairbow was replaced by a black one. Then the young men formed the circle and sang the remainder of the song. The groom’s eyes were blindfolded while he presented his boutonniere to a young man who was known to be a suitor or admirer of the girl who won the wreath.

When this ceremony was over, the bride and groom sat down on their garlanded chairs, facing each other, and the swarm of young men lifted them up into the air, all calling “*Gorka*.” (actually the Ukrainian form, *Horka* was used.) After the young couple had been duly bounced up in the air, the girl and young man who won the wreath and boutonniere respectively were lifted up—a practice we called *hutschen*—and they too were not put down until they kissed, usually timidly. Parents and important persons were given a heave up into the air, and when the old couples heard the “*Horka*” they quietly followed suit in the kissing procedure but occasionally demurred with, “Na, daut’s aul nich needig, wie senn ji aul ohlt.” (Now, that’s not necessary; after all, we’re so old.) Frequently at this point the end-of-the-wedding gunshots were heard outside, the young men shooting into the air to give the newlyweds a noisy send-off, not on their honeymoon trip but to the boys’ room (*Sommastow*) of the groom’s parents where they would likely live until land or a *Wirtschaft* was found for them.

Funerals

There were no official undertakers in the village, but old, experienced women performed the necessary washing and clothing of the deceased. The open casket was handmade, often by male family members, sometimes by carpenters. Again, the funeral announcements were made by sending the invitation letter by means of hand-delivery from house to house. The whole village helped to prepare the meal (*Vaspa*) which followed the church service. Cream, butter, flour and other necessities were brought to the home of the deceased and, if the family wished to bake the *Zwieback* in the home, women volunteered to come and help with mixing the dough, kneading, *oppsatten* (placing the little balls of dough on the long baking sheets) and baking them. Sometimes the women took the dough home and baked the buns there.

Epiphany

In time many customs became traditional. The first celebration in the new year was Epiphany (*Heilige-drei-Königstag*), which coincided with the date of Russian Christmas on January 6. The dinner, always a noon

meal, consisted of dried bean soup (*dreaji Schaubelsupp*) made with salt pork (*Peatjilfleisch*). When we came to Canada in 1925 we were amazed that we had the same fare in our uncle's home in a new country. He had come in 1874.

Easter Observances

The winters in Grigorievka were perhaps a little shorter than Canadian prairie winters and the weather at Easter was often very pleasant. The day before Good Friday was called *Gründonnerstag* or *Jreeni Donnadach* (Green Thursday). All the homes were freshly and very thoroughly spring house-cleaned. The children had brought in pussy willows, which were difficult to get—we had fruit trees, but not many “useless” willows on the farmsteads. About a week before *Jreeni Donnadach* each family had planted some barley in a fancy plate filled with good soil. If kept warm and moist and given much sunlight, this plate of barley (*Joascht*) became green and looked pretty, especially when coloured eggs were put into it. The houses all smelled the same—every housewife baked the traditional Paska (Easter bread), a custom taken over from the Ukrainians. They contained many eggs which the children took turns beating with whisks—later, when no whisks were available, with a fork—and were baked in tins the size of our syrup pails. The Paska were a real success if the top of the pail was covered with a cap—like a mushroom—and were decorated with a homemade glaze. Usually there were tiny Paskas baked in tin mugs for each child. I have seen this barley and Paska tradition kept in many American and Canadian Mennonite families. Just as Christmas isn't the same without a Christmas tree, Easter is not the same without Paska and coloured eggs offset in green barley.

The young men of Grigorievka were kept busy the day before Good Friday: another “must” was the huge village Easter swing erected every Easter season. The swing was built on a different *Wirtschaft* each year. I remember our last Easter in Grigorievka when the swing was built on the yard of the deceased minister, Peter Funk, where Jacob Pauls, a well-known and respected Ältester in Canada, was courting the lovely young daughter, Mariechen Funk. The swing was a very big one, fastened to a huge structure of wooden supports to which were tied four ropes—this one had chains—which held up a wooden board or seat on which the young girls sat and enjoyed the swinging provided by two young men who stood, one on each end of the board, and pushed. Something went wrong this time and Jacob Pauls was hurled from his post while his end of the swing was high up in the air. Panic reigned as the other people on the swing held on for dear life to the board and the chains which only a

few could reach. Jacob was knocked out or fainted but was soon restored to his usual self, especially when Mariechen bent over him. The others carried on with the fun and Jacob and Mariechen joined them after some time, but they did not swing!

Pentecost (Pfungsten)

Next on the calendar was Pentecost. By then the lilacs and peonies were in full bloom, the *Kruschtjibeem* (wild pear trees) were heavy with blossoms, and Grigorievka was at its loveliest. Most families tried to complete the special cleaning (*Frechten*), the yard work and the preparation of food, which included pot or pearl barley (*Jrettimaltj*), early in order to be able to celebrate the joyous days of Pentecost when the baptism of those young people who wished to join the church took place. It was always a solemn (*feierliche*) occasion for which the school room was decked in a profusion of flowers. The *Ältester* and *Vorsänger* in their black frock coats (*Saturratj*) lent the ritual of baptism even more awe and reverence. The girls who were baptized wore white and usually had a spring flower pinned to their dresses. Since children under twelve generally did not attend baptism—perhaps because communion was served right after the ceremony and children could not participate—I never had the opportunity to attend this celebration (*Feier*) in Russia. We had no resident *Ältester* and were served by the one from New York, Heinrich Funk, our mother's brother, who baptized my oldest sister Katja in 1923, and a Mr. Unrau, also from New York, who baptized my sister Njuta in 1925. The *Pfingstfeier* was always a joyous occasion and even we children sitting on the garden swings were louder in our childish singing as we chanted: "Schokkel, schokkel scheia, Ostern ät wie Eia, Pinjsten ät wie wittet brot, stoaw wie nich, dann woa wie groat, stoaw wie doch, dann kom wie ennt Loch! Kickiracki, dee Hohn es doot, reat nich mea met einim Foot, frat nich mea sien Bottabrot." (At Easter we eat eggs, Pentecost we eat white bread. If we don't die, we'll grow a head higher; if we die, we'll go into a hole. Kickiracki, the rooster's dead, won't stir a foot, won't eat his bread and butter.)

May Day (Maifest)

Early in spring the school children and young people enjoyed the spring festival, *Maifest*, held always on May 1. By this time the swallows had returned and the stork on Thiessen's barn roof had rebuilt its nest. The swallows' return was a sign that the weather was warm enough to go barefoot in the soft, warm soil. The whole village was a sea of bloom, the cuckoo called its pleasant greeting and the shy nightingale was inhabiting the nest in the bushes which it occupied the previous summer.

Most of the village population joined in the May Day fun. The long hayracks (*Laddawoages*) were decorated with canopies of green boughs. The school children hung their legs between the rungs of the ladder that formed the sides of the wagon, many struggling energetically for the coveted place on the *Dook*—the end projection of the wagon floor-board—which teetered beautifully as the horses broke into a brisk trot. The girls were dressed in their best white dresses with coloured sashes. There was much jostling and laughter as the drivers cracked the whips and the cavalcade of wagons started at the end of the village, down the long main street and on to the woods a few kilometres away. There was also a lot of singing, and one marvelled at the beautiful voices of the revellers and their wide repertoire of German and Russian folk songs which they knew by heart. Lunches had been packed by fond mothers, and the picnic cloths on the green meadow with the goodies on it had been decorated with flowers. After the meal games were played and contests held. I don't know whether the first of May had always been celebrated in this way, but certainly the current government supported, if not instigated, May Day, although in Grigorievka it was not much of a political affair.

Christmas

The happiest time of the year, at least for the children, was Christmas, much as it is everywhere in Christendom today. The gifts of course were not nearly as elaborate as they are today and they were never wrapped. A school child was very happy to receive a pencil with red lead at one end and blue at the other. A box of crayons was indeed an overwhelming gift, although dolls and little wooden horses seemed to be most popular. All high holidays, such as Christmas, Easter and Pentecost, were celebrated for three days. The first day of Christmas was spent with family, the second with in-laws, which I gather was alternated every other year; the third day was for general visiting with relatives or friends. The traditional meals were practical and prepared the day before. The candles for the Christmas tree were often made at home of tallow, although sometimes wax was used.

After the Christmas concert, held in the school or church, hungry family members often went into the back kitchen (*Hinjatüs*) to eat a length of “red” (meat) sausage with vinegar or a slice of headcheese or pig hocks (*Silfleesch*) with a piece of rye bread. After a short night, due to excited children waking their tired parents to show them their gifts, breakfast was eaten early. While it was still dark outside, the Christmas tree was lit, the lamp turned down and we children had to fold our hands and solemnly stand before our parents to recite our *Weihnachtswunsch*

(Christmas poem of thanks and affection for the parents). And then came the part we liked so well. We sang our lovely carols which we all knew by memory, although not one of us remembered learning them formally.

Grigorievka was unique, as far as I know, for the custom of the choir singing carols outside the windows of the village homes on Christmas Eve. My father started the practice, I was told. The choir and conductor went from house to house to “sing in” (*einsingen*) Christmas. We all listened expectantly for the singing while we were setting up our plates for Santa to fill. The custom may have been known in other villages, but many people from distant places whom I have asked about it denied having kept it. The plates were joyfully selected by the children and placed under the tree or on the Christmas table, to be found by the *Weihnachtsmann* when they were asleep.

New Year's Eve (Sylvester)

New Year's Eve was observed by families and friends meeting for a leisure hour of visiting, carrying on serious conversations in older circles, while young people enjoyed their usual social entertainment. Again, as after weddings, young men shot off their guns to welcome in the new year and bid farewell to the old.

Frequently, young people from the neighbouring Ukrainian villages came early in the morning on New Year's Day to sing their good wishes for the family whose home they were visiting. They were given some coins, or the familiar *Portzeltji* (batter fritters with raisins fried in deep fat). So many of them were baked and the smell from the hot, deep-fat frying was so pervasive that clothes and coats all smelled of them the next morning in church. For decades, the turn of the year was celebrated somewhat contemplatively, yet happily, until Grigorievka was no more.

Chapter 3

VILLAGE TEACHERS' STORIES

Johann Enns (1889–1974)*

Agathe Unruh (1892–1978)

My first four years as a teacher were in Altonau, 1907–1911. I then had to take a one-year leave-of-absence due to illness. My second teaching position was in the village of Grigorievka, starting in September 1912. Some years earlier, a *Fortbildungsklasse*, a two-year junior high school program, had been added to the existing *Dorfschule*, for boys only. Two other teachers were also hired that same year: Gerhard Ens, the principal, two years my senior and already married, and Johann J. Martens, who was a few years younger.

At that time Grigorievka was only some twenty years old. The inhabitants were mainly from the Old Colony of Chortitza with others from the Molotschna area, bringing the total to forty farmsteads. The land was most fertile and the farmers prospered—all also having large orchards and gardens. In addition, the village was fortunate to have a steam-driven flour mill, not too common elsewhere, which provided extra employment.

The three teachers of the previous years had all resigned for personal reasons; therefore we had free reign to do as we deemed fit. We were all young and had the privilege of doing exciting, worthwhile work for three short years before World War I changed everything.

In the summer of 1913 the village mayor (*Dorfschulze*), Franz Schellenberg, informed us that the congregation had decided to add a girls' junior high class for the fall and were searching for a suitable teacher for this new position. "Do you know an Agathe Unruh," we were asked, "the daughter of Ältester Heinrich Unruh of Muntau; if so, can you recommend her?" We, especially I, knew her well and recommended her very highly. Agathe had just completed a three-year Gymnasium program in Berdiansk after graduating from the girls' school (*Mädchenschule*) in Muntau. We were secretly engaged. So, in the fall of 1913, Agathe Unruh began her first teaching position in Grigorievka.

*Excerpt from Johann H. Enns, *Dem Lichte zu*, unpublished memoirs. An English translation available at Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba.



Johann H. Enns (1889–1974)



Agathe (Unruh) Enns (1892–1978)

A few years before World War I something new and beautiful came into being. The Pädagogische Gesellschaft von Moskau (Teachers Society in Moscow), supported by the Russian government, had arranged for year-end school tours for students to various parts of that great country; later, these trips were also extended to foreign countries. At the end of the 1914 school year we were able to take our students into the Crimea. Gerhard Ens, Agathe and I accompanied twenty-five of our students from Grigorievka on this tour. To our “Steppenkinder” (steppe-children) this was a thrill of a lifetime! For the first time in their young lives they travelled on a steam-driven train, experienced the sights of a major city, Simferopol, saw mountains and the Black Sea, toured the fortress at Sevastopol, went swimming in Yalta and saw the tsar’s entire family vacationing on the royal yacht. The children wrote excited postcards to parents and grandparents who had helped to finance their trip. We were convinced that, over and above these children having a wonderful time, this experience broadened their horizons immeasurably, and students and teachers became friends for life.

Due to the uncertainties of the war and our people’s future, the girls’ junior high class was closed in 1914. In February 1915, Gerhard Ens and I were mobilized into the medical corps of the Red Cross and had to leave our teaching positions in Grigorievka.

Editors' notes: Johann Enns and Agathe Unruh taught in Grigorievka from 1912 to 1915. After World War I broke out, Mr. Enns was conscripted by the Red Cross for alternative service. Both left Grigorievka. They were married in Molotschna, started a family and emigrated to Canada in 1925. For a short time, they settled on a farm near Ste. Elizabeth, Manitoba. In 1932 they moved to Winnipeg where Mr. Enns assumed the duties of a minister (*Prediger*) and later *Ältester* in the Schoenwieser Mennonite Church, succeeding *Ältester* Johann Klassen. Enns guided and served this large congregation until his death in 1974. He was highly esteemed in Mennonite circles and beyond, receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Winnipeg and the Order of Canada. Agathe Enns died in 1978.

Dr. and Mrs. Enns raised a large family well known in Winnipeg for their contribution to community and church: Ernest, an alderman for some years and a noted choir director and participant in festival and church activities; Siegfried, a Member of Parliament in Ottawa; Harry, Minister of Agriculture in Manitoba; John, Queen's Bench judge; Selma and Marlies, who both made fine contributions to Winnipeg's music and theatrical circles; and Henri, a school principal of many years who has conducted numerous choirs and is still active in this field.



The J.H. and Agathe Enns family, from left (back): Harry, Peter Enns, Ernest, Henri & Marie (Malcom) Enns, Siegfried, John, Horst Friesen; (front): Helene (Klassen) Enns, Selma (Enns) Enns, Irene (Wieler) Enns, Mother Agathe, Father Johann, Vera (Loewen) Enns, Martha (Friesen) Enns, Marlies (Enns) Friesen.



Grigorievka school children in 1912 with teachers (from left): Gerhard Ens, Johann Martens and Johann H. Enns.

Dietrich Dyck (1878–1940)

Elisabeth Peters (daughter)

Dietrich Dyck, son of Dietrich and Katharina (Andres) Dyck, was born on March 2, 1878 in Hochfeld (Morosova), Iazykovo settlement. His father had been predeceased by his wife by several years. After his death, the children, *runde Waisen* (full orphans), were placed with families that were opened to them, since Mennonites frowned on placing orphans into institutions. My father lived with three bachelor uncles, his mother's brothers, in Chortitza-Rosenthal. He was educated in the Chortitza Zentralschule and received his teaching diploma from the Chortitza Lehrerseminar (Teachers' Institute).

While he was teaching in a one-room school in Neuenburg, some distance from Chortitza, he fell in love with my mother who was seven years his junior. She was the daughter of Heinrich and Katharina (Friesen) Funk, the sister of numerous brothers who were teachers and ministers. The marriage was a very happy one, although it lasted for only seventeen years until our father's violent death. My sister Katja was born in June 1905. After two years they moved to Blumengart where my sister Njuta was born in February 1907. Subsequently, our parents moved to the lovely village of Schoenhorst, where my father taught and also became part owner of a brick factory with a millionaire named Unger from New York, Ignatievka. My brother Hein was born there in May 1908, and our sister Sonja in February 1910. To our mother's great joy, New York, the elite Mennonite village of that time, offered our father a position as teacher in the *Mädchenschule* where my mother's brother, Ältester Heinrich Funk, was already teaching. There our sister Ella was born in February 1912. At this time father was offered the principalship of the Grigorievka schools under excellent terms. They moved there in 1915 and father was principal until 1921. I was born in November 1915, my youngest brother Dietrich on July 20, 1920. We lived there until we emigrated to Canada in 1925.

Life in Grigorievka was most pleasant. We had a fine teacherage, enough money to live comfortably, and were able to enjoy some luxuries such as our parents' trips to teachers' conferences in Odessa and other fine resorts on the Black Sea. Mother told me the early years in Grigorievka were the happiest years of their marriage until the dark clouds of World War I broke over them, followed by anarchy, civil war and destruction everywhere in Russia.

After the execution of Tsar Nicholas II and his entire family, anarchy reigned and civil war brought strife and anguish, particularly to our Mennonite settlements which were considered enemies because of their



Dietrich Dyck family, from left (back): Henry, Katja (Katharina), Father Dietrich; (centre): Mother Katharina with Elisabeth; (front): Njuta (Anna), Ella, Sonja; (inset at left): Dietrich (Richard), the youngest.

prosperity. The main factions were the Bolshevik Reds, swelled to an army by the many roving bands, including some Makhnovzi (followers of Makhno), versus the Ukrainian army, the Petliurovzi (followers of Petliura), and perhaps some straggling remnants of the White Army. Lenin had made a separate peace with Germany, according to which the Germans were to send troops to bring about peace and order in war-torn Ukraine. Soon German militia arrived to join the Ukrainian forces in order to rid the country of the robber gangs that left death, ruin and destruction in their wake.

In early April, 1918 rumour had it that a massive Red Army had assembled in Barvenkovo, about 3½ miles south of Grigorievka, ready for battle. The rumours were confirmed by the sound of distant gunfire and cannon. The opposing force was to the north of us. Obviously our village was going to be the front of the bloody conflict. In great haste, every household prepared for evacuation. Food, bedding and other necessities were packed on wagons and all, except a few young men who remained to keep an eye on the village, left. I was only two-and-a-half at the time, yet in my subconscious there is a glimmer of recognition of

terrible tragedy all around us. In my mind's eye, I see a little grey enamel pail hanging from a tripod—our evening meal—and the roar of cannon in the distance, although we must have been at a safe enough location. The terrain around our village was hilly. While we were “camped out” during the days of evacuation, a message of a terrible accident was brought to our neighbour, Franz I. Schellenberg, the village mayor. The official report was that a German troop train going up a steep hill collided head-on with a Ukrainian armoured train coming down the hill on the same track. However, since the casualties were all Germans, the more likely explanation is the widely circulated rumour that the opposing forces deliberately released an unmanned locomotive which gathered speed as it descended toward the oncoming German train. This rumour is too pervasive to be disregarded.

Mr. Schellenberg assembled the teachers and asked them to organize actions to help. Many young men volunteered. My father, with three other teachers—Johann Braun, Johann Martens and Margarethe Rempel—hurried to the accident scene, and were met with a grisly sight and a terrible task. They collected limbs, which they tried to match with decapitated bodies and tied them into bundles, carefully took letters and identification where possible after marking the bodies, and sent them on wagons to the schoolyard where they were further organized and identified. Two huge mass graves were dug on the cemetery behind Nikolai Albrecht's yard, and the bodies were buried during a simple but very moving ceremony.

After the tracks had been cleared, more troop trains arrived. Our village bristled with billeted soldiers and officers. Naturally this caused a great deal of extra work for individual households. However, the villagers were amply rewarded by the sense of security which the billets offered. The women of Grigorievka put their best foot forward and excelled in culinary performances. They became fond of the military “guests” and told of many interesting events. The Aron Wiebes had one of the officers, Leutnant Becker and his valet in their parlour (*Groote Stow*). Every morning Becker who was very fond of the Wiebe's waffles was served this special treat. One day he left two little hearts which were to be kept for a later snack. However, the valet couldn't resist the tempting delicacy and ate them, hoping the Leutnant would forget about them. But when Becker returned from a long manoeuvre, he at once asked for his waffles: “Meine zwei Herzchen, bitte!” (My two hearts, please). The groom answered with great consternation: “Ach, Herr Leutnant, bitte vielmals um Entschuldigung, aber die Herzchen sind zum Herzen gegangen!” (Please excuse, but the little hearts have gone to the big heart). Many such stories were told from house to house.

At this time banquets were frequently given in the school with the best Mennonite dishes, including borscht and fowl suppers. When the contributed food was brought from various homes, everything was kept hot in our kitchen in the *Mauergraben*, a huge iron pot used for heating water (the pot was cemented into the end of the brick stove and oven—hence *Mauer* or masonry). There was a great deal of singing and good conversation after the meal at the long, flower-adorned tables in the classroom building. The officers arranged reading evenings in our living-room where Oberst Karbe, Leutnant Becker and our father took turns reading German stories, especially works by Fritz Reuter, to numerous guests. Many of these evenings were also held in other homes, especially at Fräulein Rempel's living quarters. The large school yard served as an excellent training exercise yard. The surrounding Ukrainian villagers liked the German troops, and sometimes came to ask the general in command to arbitrate in local matters, even in marital crises. This period was perhaps the last “good” time in the area; peace and order were the norm, and socially things were pleasant.

Later a large monument was erected to honour the victims of the train collision. I remember well the brass tablets on the face of the huge stone, simple yet impressive. The Ukrainian collaborators donated a fine fence of massive cement posts connected by heavy, black, wrought-iron bars. There was an impressive, dignified dedication service after the ceremony at the monument. The speaker, Oberst Karbe or the chaplain, admonished the villagers not to neglect the graves. “Some day,” he said, “the wives, mothers, sweethearts, family will come to visit the resting place of their beloved.” No one knew who took care of the graves after the Germans left, but weeds were absent, the earth was raked, and a profusion of flowers adorned this part of the cemetery.

Not long after the ceremony, the Red forces gained power and the German troops were recalled. Before they left, they tried to help the villagers, good friends by now, to organize the *Selbstschutz* (home defence) to protect lives from roving gangs who killed, raped and looted at will. But our Mennonite people, with their deep faith in pacifism, were not easily swayed. Oberst Karbe finally became angry when the *Selbstschutz* was not organized in Grigorievka. He turned to the men who were assembled on the school grounds and thoroughly berated them. “Grigorievka hat brave Frauen aber feige Männer,” he shouted. “Ihr Feiglinge, ihr Korinthenscheisser!” (Grigorievka has brave women but cowardly men. You cowards, you currant shitters.) The men were not unduly upset by this tirade. They took little notice of the “coward” accusation and, as for the currant clause, old Uncle Bernhard Penner, my mother's uncle, had a twinkle in his eye and laughed: “Daut kunn je een

ennbrinjendet Jischaft sennen.” (That might be a lucrative business.)

All of Grigorievka seemed to be under a pall, a cloud of regret and premonition as the Germans boarded the trains to return to their homeland. With the departure of their German protectors and the dire political situation when the Bolsheviks came into power, the village lived in an atmosphere of fear for the future. The teachers were especially concerned because all religious instruction in schools had been banned. The government was a sham; the ministries, held by incompetent people, changed almost every month. Textbooks used thus far were forbidden and schools found by the inspector to be using them were severely admonished. Teachers, who refused to teach the atheism now touted, feared losing their diplomas. My father was depressed at the thought of having to sacrifice his integrity and considered trying his hand at farming if the new land deal, which would take some land from the owners of large parcels and give it to the landless, should become reality.

I remember one very hot day in early summer or late spring during the usual noon-hour nap time (*Meddachsclöp*), the Ukrainian maid, Rosa, burst into our parents' bedroom, screaming at the top of her voice. Both parents ran outside where Sonja and Ella and some playmates were playing house in the school tool shed. A moment later we heard running footsteps near our front door and saw a number of young men, armed with pitchforks and long-handled iron pokers (*Ovintjrettjen*) pursuing a huge, shaggy Russian dog, a stray with ten inches of froth on its mouth—a certain sign of rabies. They had almost caught up to it when it reeled and headed straight for the school. It leaped through one of the windows, shattering the windowpanes and, in a few moments, having dashed across the large classroom, dived through the window in the opposite wall, splintering its glass, and cleared the tall picket fence which surrounded the school yard.

Sonja was lying on the clay floor of the shed, where she, Ella, Lena Peters, Sarah Albrecht and Sus Poettker were playing house. Sonja and Sarah were the farthest inside the shed, while Ella and the other two girls were near the open door. The dog had marched straight to Sonja, knocked her down, bit her in the thigh and, to our parents' horror, on the upper lip before the men could catch the animal. The proximity to the brain of a mad dog bite was of importance since the venom would be effective immediately and cause a raging fever, usually fatal.

The many dogs in Russian villages were kept for protection since their villages were not guarded by a night watchman as ours were. The large dogs always got their thief, but unfortunately also many an innocent traveller. The lackadaisical attitude of Ukrainian farmers often resulted in the dogs not being fed or watered regularly, even in the heat of July

and August. Also, they were not always chained during the day.

After Sonja had been bitten, all the neighbours were soon offering advice and help. Someone sent for Mrs. Wiens, a wizened old lady who, in spite of her age, was on the school yard before our father had carried Sonja into the house. Mother was terrified. Father at once asked the neighbours and his colleagues what would be the best way to proceed. Sonja was about eight, so this must have been 1918. The Red and Ukrainian armies were engaged in bitter civil strife, and Grigorievka still provided the front. The shelling and gunfire were sporadic, but our lovely orchards and gardens were full of craters torn out by cannonballs.

All communication by train was out of the question, but our parents declared stolidly they were leaving in the morning for Kharkov, our capital city, to take Sonja for treatment. There was dead silence because all the villagers knew that Grigorievka was encircled during the days of the siege, making it almost impossible to get out. Then two young men volunteered to take our parents to the next train station that was open, Gavrillovka—our regular large town, Barvenkovo, was under siege and lay partially in rubble. They were to leave at five in the morning in our *Droshki*, a light vehicle drawn by two horses, which the young men would bring back to the schoolyard *if* they got back.

Old Mrs. Wiens at once commenced treatment for Sonja. She had a great deal of common sense and much experience in herbal medicine, although this was her first encounter with hydrophobia. At one end of a long bathtub were six or eight tight balls of cotton batting soaked in alcohol and lit. Sonja was placed at the other end. A thick feather quilt covered the entire tub, except where Mrs. Wiens's hand held it an inch above the side of the tub to allow a little air to enter. The heat and the terror of it must have been almost unbearable for a little eight-year-old child, but she soon was too worn out to scream. Our mother couldn't bear the sight, and ran out into the yard in utter despair. When she came back into the house, Mrs. Wiens had lifted Sonja out of the tub where the highly flammable cotton batting balls had burned out. The bottom of the tub was wet with Sonja's perspiration. Mother held the whimpering little form in her arms all night, except for a repeat treatment, an almost inhumane procedure, but we think it did save Sonja's life.

We had a young, kind, highly inefficient Ukrainian housemaid, and a youngish man, Kuril, who had come to our father one day and asked for a place on our kitchen floor and a bit of bread each day in exchange for chores around the house and yard. Father felt sorry for him and agreed. He was a quiet, pleasant presence in our home and, before our parents left with Sonja, our father took Kuril aside and told him simply: "Kuril, you know what has happened. I leave my children, my most precious

possession, in your care. Make sure you look after them, so that we can all have a joyful reunion when we return.” Kuril clicked his heels in a salute, and said: “Sir, I shall guard them with my life. May the holy God keep you and darling Sonyushka.” And so the next morning we were on our own. I found great solace in Kuril’s presence who put me on his shoulders and pranced around, pretending to be a horse. He would swing me for hours on the school swing so that I wouldn’t miss my parents.

My mother told me so often about the agonizing month which followed that I feel I experienced it vicariously. Getting around the battle line under fire was an inconceivably horrible feat, successful only because of the good horsemanship of the driver and side rider, until they finally got to Gavrilovka station where, miraculously, a train was almost ready to pull out to Kharkov. Trains were never on time, often arriving days late, yet our parents were able to get to Kharkov “only a few hours late.” Our mother always attributed this miracle to the many silent prayers for safety by all the villagers. The people of Grigorievka never went overboard in their religion, meeting only for Sunday morning church services, but they believed in the power of prayer.

When they first entered the waiting room in the clinic there weren’t even enough seats for the patients. All except our parents had with them the head of the dog which had bitten the patient. Because Sonja had been attacked several days earlier, the chief doctor saw her immediately, to the annoyance of those who had waited for hours. The doctor was serious, but hopeful of complete recovery since there was no fever. Our parents had to relate every detail of what had been done for Sonja before they came. “Could this be the cure without a serum?” the doctor asked excitedly. “Possibly the venom was sweated out of her system in that rigorous treatment the old lady gave the child. We’ve never heard about it, so we will give her the customary injections of anti-venum sera, several in this case, because we have no blood specimen of the animal. It will be painful for the poor child, but we want to be absolutely certain she will suffer no ill effects. If she is *not* infected, it is a miracle!”

The injections, twenty-six in number, were cruelly painful, and mother’s voice always broke when she told me how the slight child, quite emaciated by now, would cling to her at the sight of that long needle and beg her not to let the doctors do this to her. The treatments took only a few days, but the doctors observed her for a week and consulted with their colleagues about the extraordinary cure. At last it was over. There was no follow-up caution of any kind, but it was recommended that she not drink coffee or use vinegar on her food for about a year.

After two weeks of “laying over” in every little town station, the difficult and dangerous return trip home actually became reality. The

front had moved south and Grigorievka was open for travel. In the meantime the mad dog had bitten two pigs in a neighbour's pen (both of them died) and a young man, Hans Hiebert. Hans's diaphragm had ruptured, blood had spurted up to the ceiling from the pressure of the raging fever. Mercifully, he could die. We have never heard of another death due to this terrible disease in our villages.

Kuril stood at attention when our parents arrived. He waited quietly until the joyous hugging and kissing abated somewhat and then solemnly said: "Sir, I give you back your children in good condition." Father gave him some reward, I think, and our mother praised him profusely. A few days later Kuril was gone. Our parents thought he might turn up, but were shocked when they made their first trip to Barvenkovo to get merchandise and saw huge posters of Kuril: "Wanted for murder." We never heard of him again, but our parents always insisted it must have been an act of passion or self-defense. We little ones always had to add to our nightly prayers: "Dear God, protect Kuril."

The post-revolutionary years were a nightmare. After the bloody battles ceased, gang warfare continued. Grigorievka had decided not to participate in the Selbstschutz, perhaps because we had only one or two attacks by robber gangs. Non-violent Mennonites had a hard time accepting this measure, and our ministers and counsellors had trouble with their consciences when the skies were on fire as the estates of prosperous Mennonites (and those of Russians as well) burned, and garden paths were red with blood as the peaceful home owners tried to escape and were cruelly murdered. But the Selbstschutz could not overcome the odds of numbers and the allies of misery that came to join the violence. Famine stalked the land and the dreaded typhus and dysentery took thousands of lives that had been spared by Makhno. Beggars staggered from the street to our doors when we had not enough for ourselves.

Still our father taught until the end of the spring term. Almost daily new curricula were legislated but since the forces in power changed frequently, sometimes from month to month, at times even from week to week, it was politically dangerous to teach the current curriculum or use the textbooks prescribed earlier by the administration in office just a few weeks earlier. Mennonite schools were in jeopardy since all religious instruction was considered treasonable. Inspectors came and went according to political shifts, so the Grigorievka teaching staff finally used the pre-revolutionary texts, which were carefully concealed under a pile of sand in the deep school basement when an unfamiliar vehicle approached the schoolyard. As a precaution, all pictures of the tsar and the royal family were pulled out of the older texts and destroyed.

Father's resignation in the fall of 1921 coincided with "das Hungerjahr" (the hunger year); the dire economic situation had left his family without any means of sustenance. According to the new laws, we were landless and, when the redistribution of land was carried out by curtailing existing farmers' acreage, the land was given to those who had none. Father used up what little savings he had and bought a team of horses and two cows to start farming. He had already dug a cellar for a *zemlin* (a basement covered with an improvised straw roof to save building walls). But the country was rapidly nearing a collapsed economy, and soaring living expenses could barely be met by those who had not raised crops or gardens in the past year.

Fall was upon us, and our situation was desperate. We had left the teacherage which was changed into classrooms. Since our house was not completed by September, we moved across the street into the boys' room (*Sommastow*) of Mother's cousins, the children of Bernhard Penner—two unmarried sisters and twin brothers. We were seven children, the oldest sixteen, the youngest just over a year. A total crop failure due to drought made it almost impossible to buy flour and other necessities. Father must have been desperate and accepted an offer to drive a Mr. Friesen and another man to Memrik, where Friesen had an estate, to get flour and other food products that were still there on his property. Father was to receive a 100-pound bag of white flour for the service. Mother and the rest of the family implored him not to go, but Father knew we had only two pounds of flour and there was none to be bought. On the return trip, the night of September 30 or October 1, they were ambushed near a Russian village about twenty kilometres away. They had to disrobe and line up on a nearby hill. My father was in the middle. He was shot twice, through the back and head. The other two men were able to get away; one leaped into a pond, the other into a brush of scrub.

The winter after our father's death, the year of the great famine, was one of hardship and sorrow. We had been very fortunate in getting an empty summerhouse but had no fuel. Dietrich, a little over a year, had to stay in bed all day, and still had many chilblains which burst and festered on his baby hands. Our two cows were our only means of income; when one of them "dried up" before calving, there was no butter to trade for staple foods such as sugar and flour. That winter we had only heavy black bread, made with sourdough without a grain of wheat flour to lighten it. It was slimy and nauseating, but so rare and precious that our mother had Henry hammer a six-inch nail into the ceiling beams to hang the breadbasket. Before our meal, she mounted a chair, then the table, to get it down. Very carefully she cut off a slice about two fingers wide and four inches long, for each of us. We each had a little plate, although the

bread was nearly always the only item on the menu—no butter, because we sold it to purchase the black rye flour. But we always had a little sprig of geraniums or greens gracing the bare table. After we had eaten slowly, thoughtfully, to make the meal last longer, Sonja and Ella had to wash the few dishes. They were badly undernourished and didn't have the strength for the task. They put the plates in a basin on the knee-high kitchen bench, and knelt on the floor to wash them. In two instances, Ella, who had grown too quickly after a long siege of pneumonia, collapsed. Often Sonja got painful hunger colic due to an empty stomach, so mother gave her a square inch of bread because there would be no food until the next day at one o'clock and there was never any breakfast. Young as I was, I remember observing Mother's slice of bread getting shorter and narrower. All of us sat, silently, hungrily looking at the little slice for Sonja, especially one-year-old Dietrich who stretched out his hands, hoping to get a few extra crumbs.

The winter days were short. We hardly ever had enough kerosene to light the lamps, and often no straw to light a fire. Frequently the dark evenings were very dimly lit by a *Schmurzschoavil*, a small saucer with melted lard or oil and a bit of woolly cloth for a wick. I always felt the room was dimmer when it was lit, perhaps because of the eerie blue shadows around the ghostlike flame. Mornings were dreary too. Stoically everybody, except little Dietrich, had to get washed and combed.

The next year fortune smiled on us. The weather was favourable for crops and vegetables, and especially fruits, so that we could depend on garden produce for food. Lenin was trying to put in place his New Economic Policy (NEP) and, in spite of the incredible inflation (20 million rubles for a pair of shoes or for a pound of butter), life became more bearable.

Our Uncle Jasch (Funk), my mother's brother, had also left his position in New York to join the Grigorievka teaching staff. He was our guardian (*Vormund*) whose duty it was to look after the interests of the children of widows and assume some responsibility for their upbringing. Widows also had advisors (*Gootmanna*) whom they could choose from the village council. Nikolai Albrecht, Cornelius Krahn and Hans Braun were each asked to take this role. They were a great support for our mother in her struggle for material survival, but unable to alleviate our poverty. They and Uncle Jasch encouraged us to emigrate to Canada, since materially we had nothing to lose. Another of Mother's brothers, Uncle Gerhard Funk from Chortitza, filed an application for our passports to Canada. He was on the executive of the Verband der Bürger holländischer Herkunft, a Mennonite organization that worked to facilitate emigration. His position likely cost him his life. He was picked

up by the “Black Vulture” in the 1930s and was never heard from again. His son Konstantin suffered the same fate.

That summer we got our passports and visas to emigrate to Canada. In September we were all packed into freight cars with many other Mennonite emigrés, and started the long journey through the beautiful autumn landscape to Moscow. Every member of the family, except Dietrich, who was too young, had to carry one item of hand baggage. Sonja carried our seven-stringed guitar, but I’ve never seen it in Canada—either my memory duped me or we sold the instrument in Winkler for some much needed cash. The guitar played an important part in our family, so very likely I am correct in assuming Sonja carried it all the way. Ella toted a hand sewing machine, I a little footstool which our brother Henry made out of wood for Mother for the first Christmas after our father had died. It is still cherished by Henry’s widow.

On October 6, 1925, we arrived in Rosenfeld, Manitoba, so grateful to be in this new land with its security, its challenges and promise of a happier life. We were lovingly received by Anton Funk, mother’s uncle, his gentle wife and fine family. By the end of the day only Mother, Mitja (Dietrich) and I were left because all the others, even thirteen-year-old Ella, had jobs. Since they had free room and board, plus clothes, all their earnings were immediately sent to the Board of Colonization in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, in an attempt to reduce the *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) which we owed to the Canadian Pacific Railway—the millstone around the neck of every Russländer who came to Canada on credit. Mother missed her children but revelled in the freedom, the kindness of our relatives, the excellent food and security for us all. In May, we were able to purchase an old but, by our standards, beautiful house, in Winkler, although it was so drafty that the flower vase on the table froze to pieces one night in January. The house had vines on two sides, which we all loved, tall windows and high ceilings—and it was ours. We had been able to purchase it at a very low price (\$525) through the Altona Waisenamt with Uncle Anton Funk’s backing.

My sisters and brother Henry worked very hard, year in, year out, to pay our debts. Mother cleaned houses until the 1930s when no one could pay for help any longer. She was already ailing, although she always kept her usual happy attitude. To her great joy, Henry arranged payments on the house so that we could all go to school for part of the school year—our father had been so adamant about education possibilities for his children. Mother was very happy when Henry got his teaching certificate, Ella finished her grade 12 and Mitja and I did well at school. How pleased she would have been if she had lived long enough to see three of us get a higher education. Our optimistic, loving, dynamic

mother became a little weaker every day and died in 1940 at the age of 55. The constant star in our lives no longer is with us.

Henry was only thirteen when father was murdered. He had always been an excellent student, and the staff of the Teachers' Institute in Chortitza offered him permission to enrol, gratis, in the seminary that year. At age seventeen he successfully completed the courses required for certification. When, in 1925 we emigrated to Canada, and a year later settled in Winkler, Manitoba, Henry assumed the role of "man of the family." For years he worked year-round as a farmhand to help our sisters repay the Reiseschuld and support the family. With a student loan, he was able to take Normal School in Winnipeg and, after receiving his teacher's certificate, taught in Rosengart, Chortitz, Horndean, Springstein and Dauphin. He was instrumental in bringing about the Southern Manitoba Music Festival with K. H. Neufeld, and spent time and energy organizing school choirs and putting on plays with his older students.

He married Kathryn Kline, a singer and music teacher from Pennsylvania, and moved to the United States where he had received degrees from the University of Minnesota and University of Pennsylvania. He and Kathryn both taught in Bemidji, Minnesota, and later in Mansfield, Pennsylvania. Always his Mennonite heritage was of great importance to him. For a time he and his brother-in-law Victor Peters published a journal, *Die Mennonitische Lehrerzeitung*. He translated Arnold Dyck's novel, *Verloren in der Steppe* (Lost in the Steppe) which was published in 1974 after Henry's sudden death in 1973.

Johann Braun
Agatha Martens (daughter)

The whole village of Grigorievka was one street with a very short cross-street near the school. As I remember, there was a steam-powered mill and only one business: a small grocery store run by Gerhard Peters, an uncle to the Duecks. The Dueck family, one of the wealthy land owners, came to live with Mr. Peters when the Communists were killing teachers, preachers and anyone with money. The Dueck's son married my sister Mary while we lived in Grigorievka.

To me Grigorievka seemed like a small village compared to New York from which we had come—I think the distance between the two was about two day's travel by horse and wagon. I remember this because when we moved I had taken my little kitten with me; when we stopped for the night she got away from me, ran into the bushes and could not be found again.

My father, Johann Braun, was a school teacher. He was a dear gentle man who felt that very young children were like sponges to soak up learning—and he wanted to fill those sponges with knowledge. Father also had the job of composing funeral announcements. He wrote up the particulars on black-edged paper. This invitation was passed from house to house until everyone had received it.

Our family lived in teacher's housing on the school grounds in what we now call a duplex. The other teacher lived in the other side. Beside the school was a smaller building, half of which housed the principal's quarters, the other half two classrooms for older children. This is where I went to school—I was almost 12 years old when we moved to Grigorievka. My teacher was Mr. Neufeld.

All the teachers had an orchard plot behind the school. Ours was mostly a cherry garden plus one apricot tree and gooseberries. One cherry tree had large, light-coloured fruit which was very good. My mother dried many cherries for us to eat in winter; some she canned and sealed with wax. She also dried apples and pears.

Our neighbours were Schellenbergs on one side, Poettkers on the other side and Penners across the street. Penners had twin boys who were probably in their late twenties. I was only twelve or thirteen but was considered light on my feet and was asked to dance by them and other boys. The village dances usually were held after weddings or after plays which were put on at the school. In one of the plays my sister Mary was an angel and I had to stand behind her on stage to hold up her wings because they were so heavy. I remember that the Albrechts had a daughter Suschen who had a serious illness and died at age 21. This was the first time I had seen someone buried in a bridal veil. I understand that this was the custom if a girl died before she was wed.

Everyone had cows and chickens and acres of land that ran in a long narrow strip behind each house. The teachers were given a smaller plot of land about half a mile away where we could grow our vegetables. My father built a two-wheeled cart which we loaded up high at harvest time. Then I pushed while my father pulled it back to our home.

In our kitchen we had a table loaded with worms. They were silkworms and served a purpose. Their food source was mulberry leaves. It was my job to clear away the empty mulberry branches and go across the street to the Penners and cut new ones. The worms gobbled up the leaves very fast. Eventually they built cocoons in the branches, and at the right time mother picked them off and dunked them in boiling water. Then we touched the cocoon with a whisk to pick up a few threads, which unravelled very easily, and wound them into balls. We then knit or crocheted sweaters, scarves, hats, even stockings with our own silk.

My best friend was Agatha Braun who lived in Novo-Petrovka, a village of about six of the wealthier families. I remember that Agatha's mother gave me a dress to wear to go swimming in the pond because my mother wouldn't let me use one of mine. The pond was muddy so I didn't enjoy the swim very much. I don't recall that the winters were particularly cold, but I had an old pair of skates so they must have been fairly severe. My mother was a bit of a worrier; she would only let me wear one skate at a time so I wouldn't fall.

Peter B. Krahn (1896–1964)

Susan Miller (daughter)

Peter was the youngest son of Bernhard Krahn, one of the original settlers who founded the village of Grigorievka in 1889. Peter was born in 1896, so he grew and developed with the village. Dad must have been a bright, high-spirited boy; our mother has told us how *leichtlernig* he was (how easily he learned). Because he was the youngest and so keen on school, he was permitted to continue with higher education and become a teacher. He attended the Zentralschule in Chortitza.

According to early photographs, as a young man dad still had hair and looked very handsome. In his bachelor days he was quite whimsical, although Justina, our mother, who was still mourning the recent loss of her own mother, found herself unable to join in. This difference almost broke up their relationship. Eventually they must have worked it out, because they were married in 1919. Since times were hard, dad couldn't get a new suit for their wedding. Ingenuity was called for. He carefully ripped open the seams of his old one and turned the fabric. Voilà, a new, presentable suit.

Dad devoted his whole life to teaching—eleven years in Russia and twenty-five in southern Manitoba. Since he taught us, his children, throughout elementary school in Canada, we know from experience what an inspiring teacher he was. His enthusiasm and positive outlook set the tone in the classroom. For him, getting an education was a real privilege and the key to success in life. “No one can rob you of that,” he would say. Friendly competition was encouraged, but the weaker child was never humiliated or ignored. And the singing! Dad believed all children could be taught to hold a tune. He placed strong singers beside the shaky ones, then encouraged everyone to sing joyfully. When the inspector came, he invariably asked us to sing for him.

In the Mennonite villages, both in Canada and in Ukraine, the local school teacher frequently assumed the role of community leader. Our



Grigorievka school children in 1926 with teachers (from left): Heinrich Loewen, Johannes Unruh and Peter B. Krahn.

father was no exception. He played ball with the young people, organized choirs and programs, and joined the students for outdoor games. What we did not like so well were his occasional confrontations with trustees and parents over policy. He did not hesitate to speak his mind, and thought it his duty to admonish others from time to time. Run-ins with his own teenage children were inevitable. Now that we are parents of grown children ourselves, we can understand his concerns better and no longer feel resentment for his methods.

In remembering our father we must not fail to mention his dedication to the church and to Christian discipleship. He was consistent in his daily walk and tried to foster in us a love of God and the Bible. He emphasized family devotions and taught Bible stories to his classes in school. His staunch support of the German language was part of this dedication. He once told me if we carelessly neglected to hang on to our *Muttersprache* (mother tongue) we would also lose our faith. I do not agree that faith and language can be equated this way, but how I thank him for encouraging us to preserve the gift of a second language whose cultural heritage adds such richness to our lives.

One paragraph from dad's obituary in the *Red River Valley Echo* sums up quite well who he was. "Mr. Krahn will be remembered for his cheerfulness, his indomitable spirit and his uncomplaining acceptance of his illness. His life was spent in giving himself, his time and his talents in service to God and man. This sense of stewardship he also faithfully sought to instill in his family and others."

But lest we see him as too serious, I like to remember the father who enjoyed fun and laughter, who teased us, played Strauss waltzes on the violin or Russian tunes on the mandolin, skated with us in winter and played ball with us in summer. Now his bones are resting peacefully in the Altona Municipal Cemetery, where mother planted an evergreen tree at his grave the year he died. That was thirty-three years ago. From time to time, alone or together, we stop by to pay our respects and to reminisce. He left behind a nostalgic poem (see poem in front of book) and an unfinished manuscript about Grigorievka. He must surely be rejoicing that this book about his beloved village is coming into being.

Margarete (Wiebe) Schaefer (1899–1948)

Elisabeth Peters

Young and pretty Margarete Wiebe, "Fräulein Wiebe" to us children, taught in Grigorievka after Margarethe Rempel (New York) left her position as *Handarbeitslehrerin* (teacher of fine sewing, embroidery, arts and crafts) in the Mädchenschule, perhaps in 1919. Very likely all the



*Margarete (Wiebe) Schaefer
(1899–1948)*

female teachers in Grigorievka also taught some regular school subjects in the intermediate grades.

Fräulein Wiebe is still vaguely familiar to me since she was a frequent visitor in our home, and our parents had a fine, friendly relationship with her. My sister Njuta, who had her as a teacher in the Mädchenschule, adored her. According to my mother's reminiscences, she was an enthusiastic, impetuous teacher who overwhelmed the Grigorievka women as well as the school girls by her smart, stylish dresses (she came from Berdiansk), her modern hairdo, piled up high on her head, and her fetching *Zaposhkie*—high-heeled, tall, lace-up boots of fine leather, the height of fashion at that time. The children spoke of her “silvery voice” and her willingness to join in their games during recess.

I remember watching her and the children on the school yard—I can't have been four—playing, “Wer fürchtet sich vor dem Schwarzenmann?” (our pom-pom-pullaway), which was most popular with Grigorievka youngsters. Fräulein Wiebe was very agile, at least to my adoring eyes, and seemed to fly from one end of the playground to the other in sheer delight. One day, when she stumbled over some obstacle and fell, breaking a heel of her fine boot and putting her lovely hair in disarray, everything came to a standstill. She must have been very popular with the entire school population, as concerned colleagues and pupils crowded around her to help. I do not know why she left Grigorievka, but she went to a school in the Kuban Mennonite village of Alexanderdar, where she

met a colleague, Paul J. Schaefer, teaching in the same school. She gave up a promising teaching career to be married to him on July 5, 1921 in the city of Berdiansk, her parental home.

In 1925 they emigrated to Canada with their first-born daughter, Lily. Mr. Schaefer embarked on Canadian teachers' training courses, although he was an experienced instructor by this time. After completion he took a teaching position in the village of Gnadenthal near Winkler, Manitoba. Margarete Schaefer dedicated her life to her husband, her children and the community. She was well educated, artistic, musical and assisted her husband in many school activities as well as teaching piano and music notation. Her first and foremost student was the well-known violinist Armin Sawatzky (Jay Armin of Toronto).

Mrs. Schaefer died on March 19, 1948, leaving behind her husband, her daughters Lily and Irma, and teenage sons, Ted and Wilfred. She was laid to rest in the cemetery in Gretna, Manitoba.

Johann Martens (1891–1985)**

Johann (John) Martens was born September 2, 1891 in the village of Muensterberg in the Molotschna Colony. He was the son of Jakob and Katharina (Martens) Kroeker; he received his elementary schooling in Tiege, as well as several years of Zentralschule. In 1910, after two years of studies at the Teachers' Institute in Halbstadt, he obtained his teaching certificate at the age of 18. In 1911 he was baptized by Ältester Heinrich Unruh, father of the Mennonite writer Nikolaus Unruh, on the confession of his faith. On June 12, 1914, he married the lovely Agatha Dueck.

Martens taught for a year in Schoenau, then for a year in a sugar refining centre in the district of Voronov. In 1912 he moved to the village of Grigorievka to assume teaching duties in the modern schools of the village. He worked together with teachers Johann Enns and Agathe Unruh. Mr. Martens always enjoyed reminiscing about his teaching years, especially those in the Grigorievka era. Whenever he met a former student, he sang the praises of the beautiful school yard in spring when the white acacias were in bloom and the swallows built their nests under the eaves of the teacherages and school buildings while the nightingales nested in the gooseberry bushes.

After the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Martens served several years on a Red Cross unit train. These years under the Red Cross as

**Based on "Reminiscing on John Martens," in *Mennonite Church Memories 1938–1988* (Springstein, Man.: Springstein Mennonite Church, 1988), 105–106.



Graduating class of 1913 with teachers, from left: Johann H. Enns, Johann Martens and Gerhard Ens. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

Sanitärer also left him with many interesting impressions and memories. In 1917 he returned to Grigorievka and resumed teaching, both in the elementary school and the high school. When Communism threatened the schools of Grigorievka, he and his family moved to Zagradovka, where they lived for three years in the *Nebenhaus* (auxiliary house) on his father's farmstead.

The family emigrated to Canada after the birth of two children, John and Frieda. Upon their arrival in Manitoba on August 11, 1924, Martens worked for the David Wall family on a farm near Gretna. His son John writes that they will always be grateful for this opportunity. These good friends also found Johann Martens a job harvesting on a farm, but his vocation as a school teacher had not prepared him for stooking sheaves. Soon he was looking for another occupation after this unaccustomed heavy work was finished that first fall in Canada.

With some other new immigrants, he and his family moved to the Springstein area, west of Winnipeg, to found a new farm settlement to which he dedicated his interest and strength. A Mr. Bean from Minneapolis sold him and nine other families 3,000 acres of land with a large, eight-room house as well as a big lean-to, a 120-foot stable, a huge machine shed, a blacksmith shop and numerous smaller buildings. In 1928 Martens bought another 640 acres of land in the vicinity. It was

completely covered with water, but the municipality agreed to drain the property. A tractor was required to break up the land and it was Johann Martens who brought this first tractor to the settlement named Springstein. Then the John Deere company granted him a dealership. In 1929 he founded a sales centre for farm machinery, which he later expanded to an automobile business.

But Mr. Martens' interests included much more than farming and business ventures. He was active in establishing a school and church congregation as well as operating a post office in the community. His teaching experience and organizational abilities stood him in good stead and his know-how in procedures ensured his and the community's success. It must have been gratifying to this man of vision, courage and foresight to see the little village of Springstein, which was conceived when the Depression threatened, prosper, thrive and grow.

In 1945 the family moved to Winnipeg where he opened a wholesale outlet for sporting goods together with his son John. In Winnipeg they joined First Mennonite (Schoenwieser) Church and remained its loyal members to the end of their lives. He and his wife travelled widely, visiting different parts of the world and enjoying the beauty of art and cultural exhibits in many countries. After sixty years of happy married life, Agatha died in March 1975. Johann Martens died in Winnipeg in 1985 at the age of 93.



The Johann Martens family in 1963, from left (back): John Klassen, Erdman Falk, Gordon Falk, Carolynne, Kenneth, John Jr.; (front): Richard Klassen, Elsie Klassen, Freda Falk, Marta Klassen, Mother Katharina, Father Johann, Bruce Klassen, Violet.

Nikolai Kaethler (1896–1981)*Elisabeth Peters*

Nikolai Kaethler was born in Gnadenthal (Baratov) in 1896. His parents were Jakob and Maria (Unrau) Kaethler. He was the third youngest child of eleven siblings. They moved to Grigorievka in 1898, where Nikolai completed grade seven elementary and two years of high school, then in 1914 went to study in New York (Ignatievka) to finish two years of Zentralschule. In 1911 the family moved to Borissovo, lived a year in Kondratievka, and then in Nikolaiefeld.

They returned to Grigorievka in 1913. Two years later Nikolai went to Siberia to assist an older sister with farming after her husband was conscripted into alternative service. This time spent in Siberia proved significant for Nikolai. He took part in the activities of the village and youth and was baptized on Pentecost that year by Ältester Gerbrandt. He was called to service in the *Sanitätsdienst*, which took him to the front on the Turkish border and gave him first-hand experience in the political and economic phases which Russia was undergoing during the war and later in the Revolution. Life became more complicated for him and in 1920 he returned to his family in Grigorievka. His father had died earlier. When his brother Wilhelm also died of typhoid, Nikolai was left in charge. His dream had been to attend the Chortitza Teachers' Institute, but he realized the financial strain on the family would be too great.

Still desiring to complete his education, Nikolai found his way around the barriers that stood before him. It was difficult to enter non-Mennonite pedagogical institutions in the area because of the political questioning to which Mennonite students would be subjected. In order to keep abreast professionally, he took part in tutorials which were given by Principal Dietrich Dyck, as well as evening classes and private instruction. Mr. Dyck was impressed with this student's progress and his persistence in somehow obtaining a teacher's diploma. They spent many stimulating hours of discussion on educational subjects and became good friends.

After Dietrich Dyck was murdered while returning home from the Old Colony on the night of September 30 or October 1, 1921, he was buried by a kind old fisherman who put his body into a shallow grave and erected a small, crude wooden cross at the head. The location was well known to some villagers who travelled that route occasionally, but everyone knew how dangerous it would be to retrieve the body and bring it home to Grigorievka. Kolya (short for Nikolai) was planning to be married, and another student, Heinrich Sawatzky, whose mother was widowed and dependent on her son, heroically offered to undertake this journey, travelling at night on lonely roads to avoid notice by the banditti



Nikolai Kaethler (1896–1981), at right, with friends in the Sanitätsdienst.

who ravaged the area. The whole village held its breath until the young men in their twenties returned safely, bringing home the mutilated body of their beloved teacher and friend.

Between 1923 and 1924, and perhaps the first half of 1925, Kaethler held an elementary teaching position in a private school on the Muehlenhof at the end of Grigorievka. Later he joined the teaching staff of the Grigorievka village school, where I had him as a teacher in first grade. We all respected this young, dedicated instructor, especially because he wore leather shoes, not the usual wooden sandals with leather thongs. Everybody in the class wondered how Mr. Kaethler was able to buy those smart shoes and regarded him with awe because he wore them to school, not just on Sundays.

Meanwhile, Kaethler had married a beautiful girl, Helena Wiebe, daughter of the Aron Wiebes, a prominent family in the village. They emigrated to Canada in August 1925 and made their home near Ste. Anne, Manitoba, where they tried to farm in the pre-Depression years. It was very difficult for this dedicated teacher to abandon his career because there was no hope of providing for his family, repaying travel debts and taking teacher training courses when he did not even know the language at that time.

I met him at a Grigorievka reunion near Starbuck, Manitoba, in 1938. He was sitting with a large group of musicians, his friends and colleagues of better years long gone with whom he was playing the familiar music of the Grigorievka orchestra. On that day he played the mandolin—he

was a good guitarist, violinist and balalaika player as well. Tears welled up when I saw Mr. Kaethler, Hein Wiebe, Peter Krahn, Hans, Gerhard and Hein Neufeld, and others. They were playing their hearts out in the few precious hours with the companions of their youth. I will never forget the passionate rendition of the czarda which expressed their love of life *and* the depths of despair at their disappointments.

Nikolai Kaethler's health began to fail at the end of the 1970s and in 1981 he died peacefully, leaving behind his wife, two daughters and three sons. Helena, his wife, died after a series of strokes in 1991, having suffered the pain of losing their daughter Olga in 1990.—*Dedicated to a fine man, my teacher, with respect and affection.*

Jacob Funk (Foung) (1891–1967)

Elisabeth Peters

Jacob Funk was born on September 25, 1891 in the village of Neuenburg in Chortitza. He was the son of Heinrich and Katharina (Friesen) Funk, who had a lively family of eleven children (three sets of twins). He was my mother's brother and, after my father's death, was our *Vormund* (guardian). I've called him "Onkel Jasch" all my life.

All the Funk children were gifted and eager to get into "higher" learning, but my grandfather, a successful farmer, was not wealthy enough to let all of them attend high school and university. Yet several



Jakob Funk (1891–1967)

of them received a stipend from anonymous wealthy Mennonite philanthropists and so it was possible for Onkel Jasch, when it was his turn, to attend the Zentralschule. Later he studied at the Teachers' Institute in Chortitza at his father's expense and he too became a teacher.

In 1917 he married Helena Thiessen from New York. His older brother, Ältester Heinrich Funk, officiated at the wedding. Onkel Jasch taught in the New York schools for some years, then in 1919 moved to Grigorievka with his wife and their little daughter, Johanna, to take a teaching post there from 1923–1925. Like most of the other teachers, he decided to leave his career after the Revolution and, in 1926, he and his family which now included two sons, Jacob (1922) and George (1924), emigrated to Canada. He bought a farm near Leamington, Ontario, and thanks to persistence and hard work, made a success of farming. He remained on this farm until his death due to a stroke in 1967. His wife, Lena, remained in their fine home until her death in 1981. The farm was retained by the family under the management of a grandson, Billy Founk (George's son), who had lived with his grandmother during her last lonely years.

The three children and their families all lived in the surrounding area. The oldest, Johanna, married William Schellenberg. They lived a few houses away from their parents near Leamington. Johanna died in 1983 and was survived by her husband and four children: Bob (Lenita); Paul (Sandy), who have five children; Helen Louise Sauer who died at 49 in 1996, leaving her husband, Lee Sauer, and three children; and Shelley, who has two children. Jacob Funk's youngest son, George, was married to Helen Neufeld. They lived next door to George's parents and had seven children. George died in 1996 at the age of 72.

The only surviving family member is Jacob Founk, the second oldest. He is married to Elizabeth Dyck and they have two children, both married. Jacob and Elizabeth live in a lovely home, surrounded by beautiful gardens, in Harrow, Ontario. Jacob gave up farming to work with the Ontario Agriculture Organization.

Margarethe (Rempel) Klassen (b. 1887)

Elisabeth Peters

Margarethe Rempel was born in 1887 to Gerhard and Susanna (Dyck) Rempel in the village of New York. Her father owned a large steam-powered mill and was a most successful industrialist—he even bought the first automobile in New York, a Daimler-Benz, manufactured in Germany in the “good years” before the Revolution. Margarethe was handicapped in walking due to a deformed hip which required as a

balance a special shoe with a built-up inside sole in the back part of her footwear. Her mother died shortly after the last of her four children was born. After this loss the family managed with nannies and governesses until Mr. Rempel was married a second time to an Austrian girl whose family name was Graber. She also died and Mr. Rempel married her sister, Sonja Graber, who outlived him and emigrated to Winnipeg in the late 1920s, where she lived almost in poverty with her sister Lilja until she died.

Because she was handicapped, Margarethe was given special attention and privilege and was sent to complete her education in the Fröbelhaus in Berlin. Several wealthy young Mennonite girls attended this distinguished finishing and vocational school for young female teachers. Her younger sister Sonja had married Ältester Heinrich Funk, who taught religion in the New York schools (Mädchenschule and Zentralschule) and Margarethe spent much time in their home, especially after the children were born. When Margarethe returned from Germany with her diploma, from 1917 to 1919 she took the position of arts and crafts teacher (*Handarbeitslehrerin*) in the Mädchenschule in Grigorievka. She also taught regular subjects in other grades.

Margarethe spent a great deal of time in our home—she and our mother were close friends—and thus became our “Tante Greta.” She washed and braided our hair and tied our bows. She made us camomile tea when we had sore throats and scolded us for refusing to drink it. With mother, who was much gentler, we often got away with spitting out the vile concoction, but never with Tante Greta, whom we loved dearly. She was known to be a very strict teacher and so produced excellent students. She was highly respected in Grigorievka.

When the train collision of 1918 took place, she staunchly accompanied the male staff members and young men to the grisly scene and carefully collected and read the letters and secured keepsakes that were strewn around. After the mutilated bodies were brought to the school yard, she tried to match them to the corpses that could be identified and gently placed them together.

Tante Greta left Grigorievka in the fall of 1918 and accepted a teaching position in Borissovo, a Mennonite village not far away from New York. There she fell in love with Peter Klassen, a man ten years her junior. When their only child, Willie, was born, her happiness knew no bounds. Willie must have been three or four when they emigrated to Canada in 1926 and settled in Winkler, Manitoba. Peter Klassen was a likable person and a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church, which Margarethe had also joined when they were married. He was deeply religious and went about preaching in outlying districts. Margarethe, an



Margarethe (Rempel) Klassen
(b. 1887)

excellent seamstress, stayed at home with Willie and gladly supplied the necessities of life.

A series of difficulties then besieged the family. Peter Klassen fell prey to a severe illness and was treated in a sanatorium setting for several years. He was a good carpenter and, when he was well again, became a building contractor. Soon he built a fine home for his family and bought a new car. Unfortunately, they had a car accident in which Tante Greta's hip was broken. But the doctors were able to operate and she recovered completely. Overjoyed, she shortened the back of all her wardrobe to even out the hem, since formerly her skirts had to be much longer in the back.

Ironically, fate then dealt her a blow from which she could not recover. Perhaps due to the aftermath of the illness which her husband had overcome, their marriage broke down. Margarethe had a stroke from which she partially recovered, but died of cancer a few months later. She is buried in the Winkler cemetery.

Helene (Siemens) Wiebe

Elisabeth Peters

I recall Fräulein Siemens [erroneously identified as Margarethe in the table in chapter 1] as the last female teacher in Grigorievka. She was a pretty young woman and had no discipline problems with the Mädchenschule girls, where she taught my sister Njuta, nor with pre-teen boys' classes, according to my brother who had her as a class teacher. The pupils worshipped her from afar.

She emigrated to Canada, where she and her husband, a Mr. Wiebe, farmed near Minnedosa, Manitoba, for some years. She had always been a special favourite of my parents, and a lasting friendship between them developed. During the 1930s she and her husband always made a point of visiting us in Winkler. Like most farmers in that decade, they had great difficulties in keeping their farm going and moved to North Kildonan. Her husband was a fine musician and directed the choirs in various churches. They had joined the Mennonite Brethren church, but the MB churches had already engaged their choir directors, so Mr. Wiebe conducted choirs mostly in the General Conference Mennonite (*kirchliche*) congregations. Unfortunately I could not trace the churches he served, so was not able to obtain more recent information on this fine couple. I saw them last when they visited our home in Winkler after my mother's funeral.

[*Note:* Information received from a niece in St. Catharines, Ontario]

Chapter 4 VISITS AND MEMORIES

August 1996

Henry Klassen

“How about going to Russia?” That is how my two younger sisters approached me in 1994. Never having given it any thought, my first answer was, “No, what do I want in Russia?” However from time to time they reintroduced the idea. My interest grew. It was my birthplace and the land where our parents spent their prime years. So when Assiniboine Travel announced the Heritage Tour for 1996, four of us from the Klassen family and one brother-in-law made plans to go.

We had heard a lot about Old Colony and about Molotschna, these were included in the tour. Our prime interest would be Grigorievka of which our parents had such fond—and later such bitter—memories. We were told there would be several “free” days while in Zaporozh’e to make side trips for people with special interests. Our special day for this venture would be August 17, 1996.

Grigorievka is a long way from Zaporozh’e. There being five of us, plus the driver and guide, we needed a van. The price was \$25 US per hour for the Ford van, driver and our English-speaking guide. Her name was Olga, a very pleasant and capable guide indeed. Grigorievka still is new territory for tourists; neither Olga nor our driver had ever been there before.

We left at 8 a.m. with the hotel providing a bag lunch for our all-day tour. It would be about ten hours, we were told, and we had to pay \$300 in advance at Intourist Hotel before we could go. We wanted some assurance that it would not be more than ten hours, but our guide said drivers were very superstitious and would not even discuss the mileage or time required lest something went wrong. So with some reluctance we paid the \$300. They promised a refund if it was less than ten hours.

The country provided much for us to see: the trees that were planted along the roadside years ago, the open spaces between them through which we could see large fields of harvested cropland, the beautiful black soil with no stones, the long stacks of straw that stood near the villages and adjacent to fields of sunflowers, sugarbeets or melons not yet harvested. We also noticed the absence of farmyards along the roadside as we have them in Canada. We watched many men and women working in their country gardens. They were moving produce to the villages in

every conceivable way, some on roofs and open trunks of old cars. Older men and women pushed and pulled small carts of every description with what looked like bags of potatoes or grain. Even bicycles were used in the labourious enterprise of bringing the harvest to the village.

Olga conversed constantly, but because she did not have a loudspeaker, most of what she said was only understandable by the two who sat next to her in the middle seat. The paved roads were very uneven and the noise of tires and motor were too much for all to hear her commentary. Another potential problem was that our guide found two Grigorievkas close together on her very detailed map. We chose the one that had the larger point and was closest to Barvenkovo which I remember dad mentioning.

A few minutes before noon we came to the road sign that read "Grigorievka." Without our guide and driver we would not have recognized this since they use the Russian alphabet. We stopped there and had our lunch in the shade of some trees. After our lunch we proceeded the last kilometre to the village. Olga was not concerned about getting information as to whether this was truly the village we had in mind. "My source of information is old women (*Babushka*)," she said. "They know everything. It's no use asking men. They drink too much and don't know anything." And so, finding our first old lady, she asked



The sign, Grigorievka, one mile outside the village with sisters (nee Klassen), from left: Tina Kauffman, Lena Peters, Justine Speirs.

and was informed, "Yes, we were in the right village." It had been a German village, but we were on the wrong street. We were on the highway that passes the edge of Grigorievka on the south side. We needed to go one street further north. Upon entering that street it did fill the description of a Mennonite village. A wide, straight street and, according to Gerhard Loewen's book (see Chapter 1), it had the "kleine Senkung mitten im Dorfe," a slight depression in the centre of the village. Upon further inquiry a very old woman was found, but her memory failed; she could not help. Then other women gathered, since tourists are a novelty. We were told that at one time there had been a mill at the end of the village. The yard was now vacant except for some old small buildings and machines. The school that had been on the southeast corner of the intersection had been torn down several years earlier. They also informed us of the memorial in the cemetery, and that no Mennonite homes remained.

We started exploring on our own. We counted six dwellings to the east from the mill site. Again following Gerhard Loewen's writing, this should be where Peter Unger's home should have been, my mother's parents' place. We took pictures together with the lady of the house in front of her gate. She had only lived there a few years and knew nothing of the history of her house.

There was a picket fence built from various materials along both sides of the street, with fruit and other trees between fence and houses, just as our parents recalled. There were not many trees along the street itself. In walking and driving to the intersection we found there were more dwellings than the fifteen or so that Mr. Loewen has recorded between the mill site and the intersection. My guess would be that for every one lot there are now two or even three dwellings. To our dismay, we didn't photograph the right house.

We went to the location of the school. On the east side of the lot was a pile of rubble with pieces of red brick. Weeds and shrubs had overgrown most of the yard. While we were exploring, women and children were bringing their cows along the main street, a number being herded over the school yard. From the street they were then taken to the fields beyond. Our parents mentioned that this had been done in the morning, however it was already about one in the afternoon.

From the school yard it was not far to the cemetery, just a bit south on the crossroad and then to the right. There, Mrs. Peters had asked us to look for a large memorial, any sign of two multiple graves and a mountain ash planted in memory of her father, Mr. Dyck, who had been murdered in the evil years. The memorial was not hard to find. The base, made of brick and covered with cement, was about four feet wide, eight



The Grigorievka cemetery with (from left): Henry Klassen, Justine Speirs, Lena Peters and Tina Kauffman. The stone above may be the memorial honouring the 36 military men who were killed in a 1918 train wreck.

feet long and two and a half feet high. There was a marking on the east side, which we could not read. A neighbour came along and said the marking was either 1917 or 1918. The main upper part of the memorial, also made of the same material, was about four or five feet wide by about seven feet high and two feet deep, the top being pointed in the shape of an inverted V. The neighbour also told us that this upper part now lying on the ground had been pulled off its base in 1965. Our guess was that more may be inscribed on the side that is now on the ground. We could not find any other markings of graves, except for several newer grave sites in the northwest corner of the cemetery lot. My parents also buried their two firstborn there in 1915. Was this large memorial placed there in memory of the thirty-six German military men who died in the train wreck of 1918 near the village? It was a solemn time to think of those who died and were buried at this place between the years of 1889 and 1926.

From the cemetery we went along the side street (*Nebenstrasse*) to the end of the village. There was no connecting road to the main street so we needed to come back to the main intersection and then past the demolished school. From there we went east again to the end of the village. On the field next to the village were several long, tall straw stacks. We did not see any baled hay or straw in Russia or Ukraine. Farming is still done collectively. Most of the villagers work for the collective, we were told. Although fruit trees still grow between house and road, houses are old and poor-looking by our standards. Back yards have small shacks. Many

households have ducks, geese or chickens and often own a cow. There are no lawns, few flowers and many weed-infested gardens.

From the east end of the village to the mill site on the west the odometer showed 1.7 kilometres. Now it was time to return the 254 kilometres to Zaporozh'e. We got back by 6:30 p.m. and within the ten hours we had allotted ourselves.

God was gracious to our parents in that they could have some good years in Grigorievka. When they had experienced the terror, doors to a better land opened. In leaving they thought not only of themselves but also of our future. We are reaping the benefits of their choices.

August 1977

Susan (Krahn) Miller

I am the third daughter of Peter Bernhard and Justina (Peters) Krahn. I was born in the village of Grigorievka, a small Mennonite colony near the city of Kharkov in Ukraine. I emigrated to Canada in 1928 at the age of two and grew up in the German-speaking communities of southern Manitoba where we were called *Russländer*.

Much has been said or written in recent years of the importance of going back to one's roots. I must say I had never experienced any great urge to go back to mine beyond listening with interest to what our parents told us of their childhood in Ukraine, their marriage in hard times, the birth of four daughters, then emigration, followed by the birth of three sons in Canada. We had escaped godless Communism and rejoiced that we were in a free country.

As a young adult I frequently found it embarrassing to have to give my place of birth as Russia, especially when crossing the nearby border into the United States, where the first question always was, "Where were you born?" However, when I met Virgil Miller, my future husband, he regarded my *Russländer* origin as a major attraction, one to be researched and explored, just as he was trying to discover and retrace the immigration routes of his own ancestors from Switzerland via Alsace and the Palatinate to the United States. In the course of twenty years of overseas teaching in the Middle East, we were able to look up both our places of origin informally as we travelled to Europe during our summer vacations.

In 1977 we spent a summer camping in Scandinavia and the Soviet Union. Our youngest daughter, Lois, was with us. She was a seventh-grader whose youthful perceptions added a touch of piquancy to our more measured reactions. We were teaching in Saudi Arabia at the time. Virgil was able to secure the necessary permission to enter the USSR through a travel agency in Kuwait. The most flexible and more economi-

cal way to visit the Soviet Union, we found, was via a camping trip; several brochures prescribed routes and camping places to choose from.

In total, our trip took seven weeks, but only fifteen days of that period were spent in the Soviet Union, and only one day in Grigorievka. Still, it seemed a major achievement to be crossing the border from Helsinki, Finland, into the USSR. I cannot recall feeling either fear or great elation; it all seemed so normal—one more big new country to explore.

We half expected someone to discreetly latch onto us and follow our movements, but no one ever did. As long as we reported to our respective campground at night, all was well. We were always welcomed and greeted by name, so we knew they were expecting us, but during the day we were free to travel alone, though not to deviate from the pre-arranged plan.

Before our *Abstecher* (side trip) to Grigorievka, we were staying at the campground of a fair-sized Ukrainian town. The Intourist representative there was a disarming, unsophisticated youth named Sasha. Virgil acquainted him with our wish to visit my birthplace, ninety miles off the official route. He said he would try to arrange it. Next day we were taken to a larger Intourist office where a smart young woman roundly said, “Nyet. Impossible.” It would take weeks to get permission, and even then the request might be denied. Disappointed, we returned to the campground, only to have Sasha drop in to our little cabin later to say: “I’ll go with you in your car tomorrow.” How he managed it, we never found out.

Next morning we woke to a gloomy drizzle, but set out undaunted on a new asphalt road that passes by, if not through, Grigorievka. Along the way we stopped at a rough country restaurant where we went through a crowded cafeteria line with workers in damp clothes for some hearty borscht, good brown bread and tea. Then we continued until a sign electrified us. It said “Grigorievka.” Of course we stopped to take a picture by it.

Mercifully it had stopped raining, and we even had a bit of sunshine to brighten the sodden landscape. When we reached the village it was unthinkable to drive off the asphalt into the mire of the unpaved street. We were told even tractors got stuck in that mud. Sasha suggested pulling over to the side and walking. We should have gone barefoot, but feeling uncertain, we waded through the mud in our shoes. Our inglorious return to my birthplace struck me as wildly funny.

Good-natured Sasha accompanied us the length and breadth of the village. It reminded me a bit of Reinland, Manitoba, where my Uncle Cornelius and Aunt Mary and cousins lived when I was growing up, or of Sommerfeld, where my dad taught school for some years. There was a wide centre street and a crossroad with farmsteads along the sides. The

yards had neglected fruit trees and shrubbery and old picket fences toward the street. The buildings stood a bit further in. Some were recognizable as “Mennonite” with the barns attached to the houses; others had been replaced.

The school was obviously the same, and was still used for instruction. There were two solid buildings and a well on the large schoolyard. We talked to some librarians who described the current educational program briefly and let us look around, although the school was not in session. I wished so much that my mother had been with us to identify our living quarters, perhaps even the room where I was born with only my father to assist in the delivery.

Next we walked over to the co-op store. It looked too new to be the building where my Grandfather Peters had run his general store, or where my father had worked as bookkeeper for a few years—he gave up teaching temporarily when communist doctrine was imposed on all the schools. Eventually, with Sasha’s help, we interrogated a few of the older residents. They vaguely knew of former German landowners, but could point to no memorials or even a cemetery as reminders of bygone times. However, the people were all friendly and very curious. By the time we returned to our car quite a large circle had gathered for our departure. Someone had anticipated our problem with muddy shoes and had thoughtfully provided a large pan of water for us to wash them off. We took a few pictures together and even exchanged addresses, which resulted in one communication from both sides later. As we waved goodbye, we felt at peace and wished Grigorievka well. The Mennonite times were over and it was the Russians’ turn now. Interestingly, the day we visited there was August 22, Lois’s thirteenth birthday. It seems appropriate in retrospect that one of Peter Krahn’s granddaughters had been able to return to *her* roots the day she became a teenager.

Memories of Grigorievka

Elisabeth Peters

Grigorievka—the village where I was born. I can see it before me today as I follow my memories down that long vista of years to the time when we left it forever so long ago. I was only nine then but the images are vivid as I recall the village with sunlit clarity. Many of these images are not even remembered, or at least they are only linked to conscious memory by incidents related to me by my mother and older sisters and brother Hein. Often I may have conjured up the wrong image in my fancy; dates and directions and things I relate as facts are certainly subject to error, but I shall describe my home village as I remember it.

Grigorievka was built on the crest of a long, broad hill. Some distance away was the bustling Russian town of Barvenkovo, and a little nearer in a valley was situated the little hamlet of Ialkanka. Our village had only two streets: the wide, longer one bordered by homes on either side, and the shorter cross-street (*Dwaegaus*) in the centre of the village. The school buildings and teacherages were built on a corner lot of the intersection. They were fine buildings of red brick with much space for a very large playground. The main teacherage, which we occupied because my father was the principal, had lovely large rooms with windows the size of French doors, fitted with vertical wooden slat blinds which could be closed and opened from the inside. During the Revolution when life in Grigorievka became unsafe, some neighbours occasionally came over to spend the night because our rooms could be lighted up without the danger of alarming enemy forces.

The whole complex was fringed by tall, white acacia (locust) trees which filled the entire school area with their delicate fragrance when the white blossom clusters covered the stately branches. In front of the school building where I attended first grade grew a linden tree, but I do not remember whether it bore blossoms—I imagine it did. Near this tree was the deep well with its excellent water. There was a roof overhead and metre-high boards around to keep out the leaves and debris. A pail hung at either end of a rope suspended over a pulley to draw the water. The casing could keep out undesirable materials, but not the curious school population of the elementary grades. Bruni Lenchen, Aulbrajchs Magret, Wiensi Marus, Lepptjis Nutt (Lena Braun, Margaret Albrecht, Marie Wiens and Njuta Lepp) and I used to gaze into the silent depths, and—I'm ashamed of this, but Wiensi Marus started it!—spat into the darkness, wondering who could produce enough saliva to reach the water's surface. Between the school building, near the white picket fence which separated the street from the school yard, was the shed (*Buddtji*)—I suppose Arnold Dyck would call it the *Cholodne*—that housed the fire hose (*Fiaspretz*), which always was an eyesore to me, set as it was between the gooseberry and red currant bushes. It evidently did not detract from the romance of this garden when it was a mass of fragrant blossoms under a silvery moon, and the Grigorievka youth succumbed to its charm.

Diagonally across from the school was the village's only store owned by Gerhard Peters and his family. His wife had died before my time, but I remember the four lovely daughters—Justina, Agathe, Sarah and Lena—and two sons, Grisch and Jasch (George and Jakob). Grisch, as far as I can recollect, always played on the violin, or perhaps the balalaika, the fiery gypsy airs so commonly heard in Grigorievka. But the greatest

attraction for me was held by Justina Peters, especially after she became engaged to Peter Krahn, a young teacher. We six-year-olds were spellbound by the romantic couple—the beautiful dark-eyed Just and the dashing Peter. As soon as dusk set in we would take up our positions at the picket fence—the school grounds were so central that we played there together almost until nighttime—and enchantedly watched the young couple as they promenaded on the village sidewalk while the delicate petals of the wild pear (*Kruschtji*) trees (the fruits of Johann Cornies' labours) gently rained down on them. The next day we would imitate their gait—with arms intertwined (*ennjehoakt*) we tried to walk as we thought they had, by keeping our knees absolutely stiff! In the fall of that year when Mr. Krahn became our teacher we were frightfully embarrassed at the thought that perhaps he and his lovely bride had seen us behind the picket fence (*Staketentün*).

Directly across the *Dwaeagaus* in a house with a very high foundation and many steps leading to the front door lived the Poettker. They already had two sons, Willi and Peter, and one daughter, Sus, when a family addition arrived, a baby boy named Heintje. Margaret Albrecht, who lived next door to Patchers, told me Onkel Poettker was so fond of Heintje that when Sus was to tend him and he fell down the flight of outside steps before she could catch him, her ears would get boxed before Heintje had struck bottom.

Across the street lived the Penners, my mother's cousins—two unmarried girls and twin, unmarried men, until one of them, Abram, married Marie Schellenberg. After my father was murdered and we had to vacate the teacherage, these kind people—a widow with seven young children—let us live in their boys' room (*Sommastow*). They must have been very happy when we were able to move into a small summer kitchen (*Nebenhaus*) in a farmstead near the end of the village. Many years later, in Canada, I eavesdropped when a former visitor of Grigorievka and my mother were talking about this fine family of four siblings. From what I could gather, Lena, the oldest of the Penners, had fallen deeply in love with Cornelius Krahn, a brother to Peter. Apparently she had been so broken up when Cornelius Krahn married pretty Maria Neufeld that she had a fit of depression on their wedding day, and her sister Sauna had to read to her from the hymn book (*Gesangbuch*).

The Krahns and Neufelds were prominent residents in Grigorievka. I think the patriarch, old Mr. Bernhard Krahn, was a somewhat chubby gentleman. One son, also Bernhard, lived farther down toward the end of the village. I remember his widow, a good friend of my mother, as a beautiful woman. They had several children, of whom I remember Bernhard, Lena and twin girls, Tina and Sarah.

The Cornelius Krahns lived toward the opposite end of the village where we also moved a little later, so I remember their children a little better. There was Bernhard (we called him Boris), Marie, Neta and Cornelius who was in grade one with me. He bothered his uncle and teacher Peter Krahn even more than I during penmanship (*Schön-schreiben*) class because we both didn't get the downstroke of the Gothic letters dark enough. Not far from Cornelius Krahns lived Nikolaus Krahns who had a daughter, Anna. Every Sunday while she stood at the street, leaning on the picket fence, gazing down the street, I admired the beautiful little garnet brooch she had fastened on the lace frill of her white blouse. The Jakob Krahns lived almost at the end of the village. They had a son Jacob and a pretty daughter Lila (short for Elisabeth), now Mrs. Betty Langeman; I don't know if they were of the same Krahn stock. At any rate, all the Krahns played an active role in the life of Grigorievka.

To me the village always seemed to have its climax on Saturdays. Indeed, Grigorievka on Saturday night was a lovely spot, its spacious homes almost uniformly built of red brick with roofs of red tile or dark shingles—each one full of life and laughter. They all had green and white shutters and were surrounded by large gardens of fruit trees. On Saturday the whole village bristled with cleaning up, which meant that every room was thoroughly scrubbed, the stone steps scoured, the gardens raked, the



Many close friendships were forged in Grigorievka, from left (back): Friends Lena Peters, Liese Loewen; (centre): Liese Thiessen, Lena Krahn, Liese Buhler; (front): Sonja Dyck and Katja Friesen in a 1925 photo.

walks and yard space near the doors swept—I always got stuck with the latter onerous duty. Between three or four in the afternoon when all was clean and glistening, our mother, like most mothers in the village, mixed white sand and water and scattered (*tjlatjad*) the most artistic scrolls of wet sand in the door areas and the garden paths right up to the street. The paths were outlined by tulips, lily-of-the-valley and columbine (*Okalei*), and when the fruit trees were in bloom one would have thought Alfred Noyes must have been writing his famous lines about Grigorievka instead of Kew gardens: “The cherry trees are seas of bloom, and soft perfume, and sweet perfume.” Always at this time of day our mother would pick huge bouquets from the garden or the *Kruschtji* in front of the house for the dining table, where the scent of the blossoms engraved themselves indelibly on my mind and senses.

This time on Saturday was also set aside for “Hauls onn Oaren wauschen” (washing neck and ears). We children hated it because we were all mercilessly scrubbed until our skin tingled. Many of the villagers made their ablutions, sans bathing suits, in the pond (*Dräntj*). There was one at each end of the village—I don’t know whether they were natural or man-made. At any rate, on Saturday afternoons the whole village went to bathe there—men and women, children and horses cooled off and cleaned up in the clear waters of the ponds. Women and children bathed at one little cove, men and horses in another—everyone in the rightful place of the species. Our village must have been more decorous than many others, and everything went as it should. I recall, however, the hilarious reminiscences of a former village resident of Niederchortitza who, together with another teenaged youngster, decided to swim underwater to the ladies’ section to steal a look at a young girl admired for her beauty. Having lived on the Dniepr all their lives, the boys were expert swimmers, but unfortunately miscalculated the position of the “ditje Hillbraundsche,” the vicious village gossip, who slapped their heads down with the flat of her hands, accompanying the gesture with one most expressive word: “Schnoddatjitjel!” The boys barely made it back to the male beach and never tried that trick again.

Since Grigorievka was a new village and its residents either young or in the prime of life, the social life in the area was indeed ahead of many older settlements. There was a fine choir in church on Sunday mornings, usually directed by a teacher. I remember Justina Loewen singing the solo in the song “Die Last ist so schwer” (The burden is heavy), which moved me to tears as a nine-year-old. I remember that my father directed a number of fine variety evenings (*Vaytchers*) with excellent performances by the village youth of such demanding dramas as Lessing’s “Minna von Barnhelm,” the Russian “Medveadj,” and the well-known

“Der Neffe als Onkel,” as well as the Low German, “Bildung,” “Ennbildung” and “Daut Schultebott” by J. H. Janzen. After my father’s untimely death other teachers carried on these activities. I believe the teachers, Peter Krahn, Kolja Kaethler and C. Loepp, continued the tradition. But the most outstanding achievement of the young people of Grigorievka was its fine string orchestra, the members of which were all self-taught and played musically, beautifully, without notes. There were excellent violinists, guitarists and, of course, the balalaika players whose haunting music I can still hear in my mind today. They all played by ear, but due to their musicality the orchestral performances in Grigorievka were always excellent indeed. They had a wide repertoire (not being hampered by the lack of sheet music) which included “Donauwellen,” “Over the Waves,” “Zigeunerweisen” and the fiery czardas. I imagine that whoever had been in the city, Ekaterinoslav or even Moscow, picked up the tunes in the opera or symphony and brought them home, where the others learned them by rote. Chopin, Liszt, as well as many of the beautiful minor Russian pieces resounded through the village on warm spring evenings and became part of the charm of the tranquil, moonlit village enveloped by the beauty and fragrance of blossom time in Grigorievka.

But not only the orchestra made music. Family groups, old and young, gathered on some neighbour’s steps and sang, to the accompaniment of a guitar, the happy German folk songs that all knew by heart, as well as the songs of the Dniepr and the mournful airs of the Russian steppe which they probably learned from the working girls or boys employed by the farmers. The Neufeld family contributed much to these musical activities. We lived in our *Nebenhaus* on their yard, and almost every evening Gerhard or Peter or Hein or Hans—Franz was still too young—would come over with their guitar and their sisters Neta, Nutt and Tin and, together with our mother and our Katja and Njuta, would begin to sing. Young lovers walked softly along the sidewalk or sat on a bench under our tall walnut tree while the nightingale sang in the bushes in the quivering moonlight. Strange—I feel to this day that the moonlight was softer and more silvery then, although I know full well that my memory is playing tricks on me.

Of course all adults attended church on Sunday morning. Children under twelve were frequently not allowed to attend since up to the time when I was of school age excellent religious instruction was provided in school. Services took place in the large school building. I remember the raised gallery where the *Vorsänger* (song leader) sat at the front of the room on either side of the pulpit, which to my childish eyes had the exact shape of a cream pitcher (*Schmauntkauntji*). We had an elderly preacher,

Mr. Baerg, living in the village. He had a long beard and equally long sermons (I heard about the interminably extended preaching when Mrs. Jakob Braun visited my mother), but he had a heart of gold and a beautiful garden which I always thought was enchanted. There was a Prediger Unruh also, who was short and kept bouncing up and down in the *Schmauntkauntji* during the enthusiastic performances of his well-prepared sermons. The ministers wore frock coats (*Satturatj*). Although I don't recall the men's garb, I do remember the women's dark Sunday dresses with leg-o-mutton sleeves and high collars, the older ones wearing the becoming black head covering (*Haube*), a true work of art in ribbons and laces. The younger ones in my mother's age group had a black bow fastened under or above the hair knot (*Schupps*) and frequently draped black lace shawls provocatively around their shoulders. Grigorievka had beautiful women.

After church a simple dinner was eaten. It had been prepared the day before and usually consisted of *Plumimoos* and *Schinkefleisch* (fruit soup and ham). The meal was eaten hastily, so that the older family members could indulge in a lengthy afternoon nap before they went visiting for *Vaspa*. After an afternoon of socializing or games in the lush green meadows outside the village, the young people met at a different home every Sunday evening when the chores had been done. At these Sunday evening get-togethers, games such as Schlüsselbund were played to their happy songs and ballroom dancing came into its own on the smooth painted floors of the living room (*Groote Stow*).

Next morning of course had a different aspect. The young men were busily doing their chores (*Ütmessten*) and field work, while the girls rushed through the milking in time for the herdsman to collect the cows as he herded them to the pasture, his long whip cracking to announce his approach. The busy week had begun in Grigorievka as it did in every Mennonite village in Russia. Due to the many social activities and festivals, few seemed to resent the monotony of village life—perhaps the security it offered far outweighed its shortcomings.

But the people who had built and loved Grigorievka, like so many other Mennonites, had to leave their home soil (*Scholle*) and crossed the wide seas for a new land of freedom. We met some of the Krahn's in Winkler: the Peter Krahn family with its lovely daughters—Linie, Herta ("Krohnen eari Meddelste," as my little five-year-old brother called her), Sonja and Frieda—lived on almost nothing until the breadwinner had taken teacher training courses and could once again practice his profession in a new land and in a new language. Cornelius Krahn's lived in Reinland and frequently visited us in our home in Winkler. Mr. Krahn had been my mother's advisor (*Gootmaun*) after the death of my father,

and we held him in high esteem. I remember that he performed the wedding ceremony of my sister Njuta and her husband, Hans Unruh. Mrs. Krahn's good sense of humour apparently never forsook her, even during the lean years when they first started farming on a shoestring in Canada. I still chuckle as I recall a visit they paid us one sunny September day when the purple berry clusters on the Virginia Creeper that covered two walls of our old house were gleaming in the sun. "Sennt die Beeren jefftich?" (Are the berries poisonous?), Mrs. Krahn asked my mother. "Etj weet nich, wie haben dee noch nie jischmatjt," (I don't know, we haven't tasted them yet), my mother replied. A mischievous twinkle came to Mrs. Krahn's eye as she teasingly told her husband: "Cornelius, schmatj emol." (Cornelius, why don't you taste them?)

And so the immigrants have lived away from their beloved Grigorievka, and many of them have died. They were happy in Canada, this wonderful land of freedom and opportunities, and yet surely there will have been times when they shared the nostalgia of the poet whose lines they all remembered since the time when they lost their homes and their youth.

*Aus der Jugendzeit, aus der Jugendzeit,
Klingt ein Lied mir immerdar,
O wie liegt so weit, o wie liegt so weit
Was mein, was mein einst war.*

.....
*Keine Schwalbe bringt, keine Schwalbe bringt
Dir zurück wonach du weinst—
Doch die Schwalbe singt, doch die Schwalbe singt
Im Dorf wie einst.*

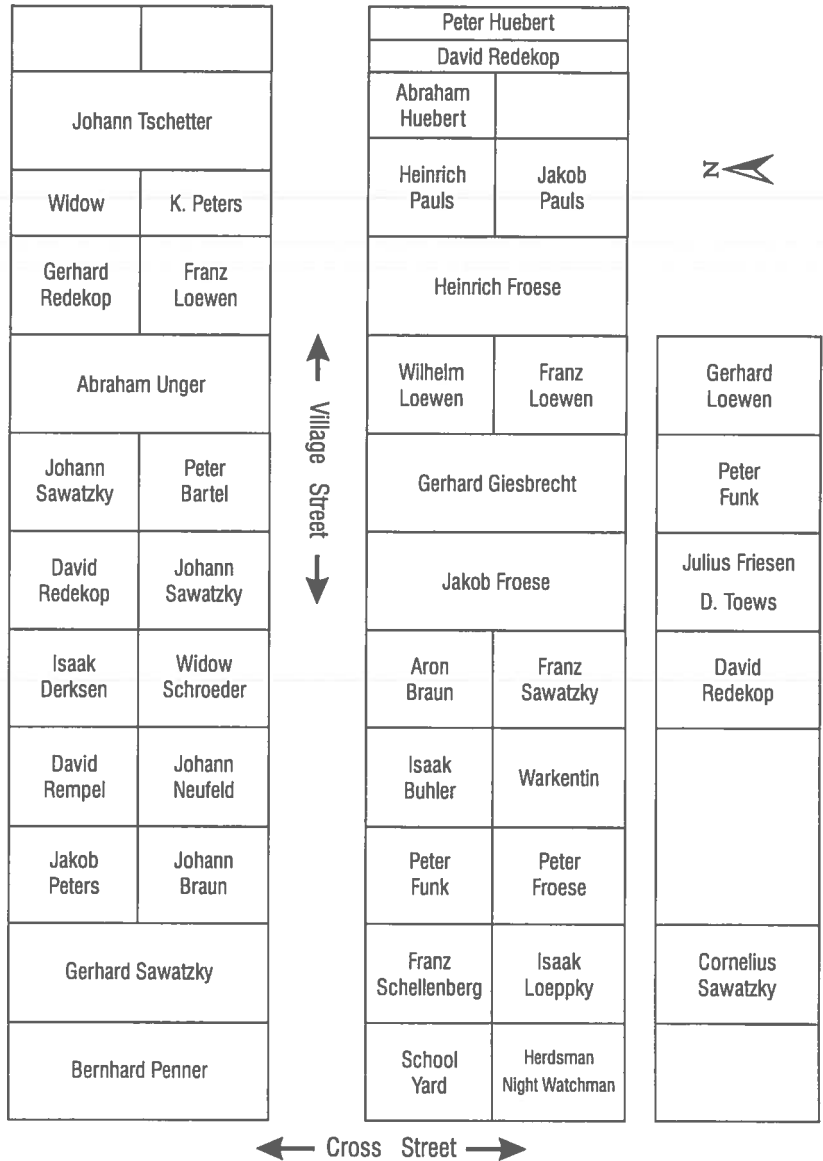
— Friedrich Rückert



Family Stories



The Village of Grigorievka



← Cross Street →

| | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| K. Krahn | G. Peters |
| Jakob Walman | Jakob Baerg |
| Peter Redekop | |
| Jakob Ketter | Jakob Braun |
| Aron Froese | |
| Peter Buhler | |
| Bernhard Krahn | |
| Peter Unger | |
| Johan Peters | G. Neufeld |
| K. Huebert | Gerhard Friesen |
| Jakob Pauls | |
| Peter Klassen | |
| Johann Baerg | |
| Friesen | |
| A. Peters | H. Braun |
| Mill Yard | |

↑ Village Street ↓

| | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| W. Poetker | G. Neufeld |
| Nikolai Albrecht | Wilhelm Dueck |
| Jakob Wiens | David Redekop |
| Franz Huebert | |
| Bernhard Buhler | Peter Klassen |
| Johann Thiessen | G. Thiessen |
| Franz Schellenberg | |
| J. Thiessen | J. Rempel |
| Aron Wiebe | |
| Peter Harms | |
| Franz Friesen | |
| Wilhelm Buhler | |
| Johann Dueck | |
| K. Huebert | |
| Franz Sawatzky | |

| |
|-----------------|
| Peter Froese |
| Friedhof |
| Bernhard Penner |
| |
| Isaak Toews |
| Peter Loepky |
| Bernhard Buhler |



Chapter 5

NIKOLAI AND SUSANNA ALBRECHT FAMILY

Henry Albrecht

Life in Grigorievka

Grigorievka, my birthplace, was founded in 1889 by courageous, young Mennonite farmers that came from the mother colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna. The village was located about eighty miles southeast of Kharkov, Ukraine.

Our father, Nikolai Franz Albrecht, was born June 7, 1876 in Rosenbach, Russia. His parents were Franz and Margareta (Friesen) Albrecht. Records show that the family lived in Pohonovka, a small Mennonite village not far from the town of Barvenkovo, and the Mennonite village of Grigorievka. There they farmed like all the rest of the villagers. When father was 18½ years old his father died at the age of only 45 years. Father was the oldest of the boys in the family so he carried on farming with his mother and siblings for two years. Then on November 21, 1896 his mother remarried her brother-in-law Heinrich Albrecht whose wife had also died. After that, father kept on farming; his older sister Elisabeth kept house for him.

On June 1, 1899 father married Susanna Rempel. By October 6 that year his mother's estate must have been settled, as on this date all inventory was sold by public auction. Father must have bought the homestead because, as a married couple, they kept on living in Pohonovka. There he conducted a youth choir and was prosperous in farming until 1910. After his wife Susanna died on July 28, 1910, at only 30 years of age, he sold that farm and bought one in the village of Grigorievka. Why he decided to do this is hard to say; was it because of the sad memories? Four of his children had died there in infancy, and now his wife. On August 16, 1910 he moved to Grigorievka with three small children, Jacob (9), Susanna (6) and Anna (3). This must have been a difficult time for him, lonely, with three small children in different surroundings and with strange people. No wonder he looked for a companion.

He soon found one in Sara Loepp from Muntau, the oldest in her family. At the age of 29, she accepted Nikolai Albrecht's marriage proposal. They were married on January 22, 1911. Life was more normal for father again, but mother might have found it somewhat difficult mothering three small children—on the other hand, she had moved into



*Nikolai & Sara (Loepp) Albrecht
at their wedding in 1911.*

a well established home. This was their home for the next 15½ years until 1926, when they emigrated to Canada. Father and his brother, Heinrich, were the only two from the Albrecht family to leave Russia.

Let me describe the village and life in Grigorievka. Before the Mennonites arrived, there were only a few buildings on the premises—mostly sheep barns and herdsmen's shacks. The village was built on the crest of a long, broad hill. Some distance away was the Russian town of Barvenkovo. Grigorievka eventually had two streets; the wide, longer one ran along the village from one end to the other, bordered by homes on either side with their beautiful fruit orchards and farmhouses. Our house was on one level and had seven rooms. The barn was attached to the house just as the feed shed was attached to the barn. Much of the grain was stored on the second floor of the house. The hog barn, chicken barn and cattle shed were in the back yard. The second street formed the crossroad in the centre of the village. The church, school buildings and the teacher's residence were built on one corner lot of the intersection. They were fine buildings of red brick with much space for a large playground. On another corner lot was the only store in the village. The villagers were fortunate enough to have their own water-wells in their farmyards. The village farmers could not all have their land adjacent to the village so it was divided up in small parcels. Thus, of necessity, some of the land was a distance away from the village, which made it harder

for the farms, because they had to take along food and feed for each day of seeding and cutting the grain.

All crops were hauled to the village, stacked in nice piles and threshed at a later date. Hauling the sheaves was done by racks (*Leiterwagen*) and the sheaves had to be laid nicely (an art) on the racks and later on the piles in the yard. We had our own threshing machine and a stationary motor to drive it. Before the sheaves were fed into the separator, the strings were cut with a hand knife. The grain was carried away in bags, the chaff blown into the barn loft for winter feed, and the straw stacked outside.

We seeded wheat, barley, oats, millet, winter wheat and rye. We also planted some row crops such as corn, sunflowers, sugarcane, potatoes and watermelons. These row crops had to be cultivated at different intervals. Riding a horse hitched to a garden cultivator, with someone else walking behind to guide the machine, was a job that I can well remember; I did it every summer holidays for as long as I can recall. To keep the horse between the rows on hot days was not that easy, but we did it and it never hurt us. We were employed all summer doing something. Another job that we had to do was to spread the manure pile in the back yard. After it was spread about eight to ten inches thick we trampled it with our bare feet and a wooden tramping device. After it had lain there a certain time it was cut up in square blocks and stood on end to dry. This stooking had to be done at different times until all blocks were evenly dry; then they were stacked in a shed for winter heating. We also heated our house with straw, if we had any.

At each end of the village was a man-made lake where we went bathing in summer and skating in winter. It was the custom to bathe the horses in the lakes on Saturday evening after they had worked all week. There were also fish in these lakes. Two community pastures at each end of the village provided sufficient water for the cattle. As soon as the grass was tall enough to graze, the animals were chased to the community pasture. The milk cows were the first to go in the morning immediately after they were milked. The herdsman would start at one end of the village and, as he went along Main Street cracking his whip, the farmers chased their cows from the back lane onto the street. They were then herded to either one of the pastures and watched there all day because there were no fences. The same procedure was repeated each day in summer. When they were brought home in the evening each farmer had to see to it that he got his cows off the street into his corral for milking. The same method of herding was used for sheep, calves and horses.

There was much fruit in the orchards—apples, pears, plums and cherries—some of which was pickled, canned or dried for winter's use.

Sweet syrup was produced from watermelons and sugarcane. The farmers produced almost everything they needed, wool from their sheep and leather from their own animals.

I can remember very little from World War I but two incidents are firmly etched on my memory. First, after the German Army had retreated from our village they left a cannon on our yard which was buried in our back vegetable garden. Second, the train from Barvenkovo to Gavrillovka bypassed the village of Grigorievka by about a mile and had to climb a rather long hill. A tragic train accident occurred. I don't know the details of this accident but I do know that many German army personnel were wounded and killed. These dead were buried in a mass grave in the village cemetery. A large memorial stone was put up with all the names engraved on it; a chain fence with steel posts was put around the cemetery which was just behind our farm and fruit orchard. I also remember how frightened we were when we saw soldiers and heard gun shots. We thought that was bad enough, but from 1917 the situation became worse. Before World War I, each farmer had about 200 acres; after the war much of this land was taken away by the government and given to the much poorer Ukrainian and Russian people who lived in villages nearby.

When Lenin took over leadership of the Bolshevik party in 1917, liquidation of property came in the form of ruthless seizure of land, money and property by anyone who wanted it. During the years following the Revolution of 1917 many privileges such as freedom of church services and school administration were taken away from the Mennonite people. Additionally, bandits would often attack innocent people and rob them of their belongings while government representatives looked the other way. I can still remember bandits coming into our yard riding their thin and sickly horses. They went into our barn, picked two of our horses, saddled them and rode away, leaving their horses in exchange. When spring came these horses were too weak to do the work on the field, so we hitched two milk cows with them on one team, and I had to drive them. What a team! I was almost killed. During the mid 1920s, in the period of the New Economic Plan (NEP), the situation improved somewhat but not to the level that had been enjoyed before the Revolution. The communist slogan was, "Destroy the old and start anew." They destroyed the old but have not yet rebuilt the new after some 70 years.

Ukraine, where most of the Mennonites lived, was one of the areas hardest hit by the civil war. The people lived under continuous fear of robbery, imprisonment, torture and murder. The wealthier Mennonite

land and factory owners were killed in gruesome fashion, and over 2,250 of the Mennonite population met death by violence or disease. In a few horror-filled years the peaceful and prosperous colonies had been stripped to the bone and driven to the brink of despair. Compulsory grain deliveries—"Prodnalog"—demanded of the villagers more than they were able to produce. They had to bag all the grain and deliver it to the next town where it was stacked outside in large piles. With the snow, rain and hot weather the grain was all spoiled—what a waste. It was shameful to see grain rotting and people starving. Grain taxes were collected in the most brutal fashion, so that very little was left after the plundering robber bands.

On educational matters the state assumed complete control—and then there was the clash in religion. An American relief worker reported on his return home: "It is difficult to be a Christian everywhere, but in Russia it is almost impossible." Churches were closed and turned into clubrooms or theatres.

Our father was an active person in the old country. During the latter years there, he was chairman of the village, which entailed much contact with government authorities and others who were writing new legislation. This was no easy task, since by then there was considerable tension between the communist party influences and those who preferred the former way of life. I will relate a few of these experiences.

During the mid-1920s, father was mayor of Grigorievka. The communist regime became more repressive in religious matters. Worship services were still permitted but, because they were held in German, they had to be translated into the Russian language and presented to the district commissioner. To give such a report, father had to go and give them the last Sunday's translated sermon. It was read, examined and discussed. These interrogations were always conducted in late evening or at night. At one such occasion it must have gone late into the night with father still defending his faith, arguing back and forth. During this particularly harassing interrogation, the commissioner banged his fist on the table and said, "I will prove to you that there is no God and you will renounce your faith."

Father stood up and pounded back, "I have had enough of this tonight. I will prove to you that I will walk out that door and no one will follow." He picked up his briefcase and did just that, leaving a puzzled group of men wondering where this man had received the courage to say and do what he had just done.

When father came outside, he saw one of his best friends sitting on the steps. "What are you doing here in the middle of the night?" father asked him. His friend told him that he had had a dream in which he was

urged to go to town to bring father home because of a difficult evening. "Yes, I have had a tough night. So let's go." They left and nobody followed them. "That is the answer to my prayer like so many others. To God be the glory," father announced.

Another incident also happened when my father was mayor of the village. It was harvest time. We had been threshing barley when a group of bandits galloped into our yard demanding lodging for the night and food for themselves and their horses. Father said that he would call his secretary to check out the list who was in line to house them. It did not take long until they were all billeted out to a family. One of the riders stayed with us. After he was shown where to tie his horse, he went and got a pail full of freshly threshed barley and put it in the manger for the horse to eat. Father remonstrated that horses which are too warm and eat too much fresh grain, especially barley, will stiffen by the following morning. The soldier began to curse father and insisted they see the supervisor. He would enforce the rules. "Good," father said. "Let's go. I know where he is staying." And they both went.

On the way down, they met some other bandits of this group. Father's "guest" rider explained to them that our father had refused to let him feed his horse so he was taking him to the supervisor to explain to him what had happened. The others said, "Why bother the boss. Just shoot him and there will be one less to get rid of later." But father insisted that they had agreed to see the supervisor.

When they arrived, the bandit told the boss his side of the story. Then the officer asked dad for his side, which was somewhat different. The officer turned to his recruit and said, "This old, experienced man did not care whether you fed your horse one or two pails, but he wanted to save your horse. He asked you to consider the circumstances. Now, if you ever act this way again, I will use my own method of punishment on you. For now, you may both go."

How glad our father was after this incident. Father's faith in God and his ability to speak fluently in Russian gave him the courage to act this way.

A third incident happened on the way to Moscow. Father was travelling by train to get passports for his family and some others in the village. Nobody else wanted to risk the trip to Moscow with so much cash. When he stepped off the train and went into the station in Moscow he saw a patrol officer standing guard. Father recognized him as one of his former employees. He thought, "What next?" This was no doubt the same man whom he had punished at one time for his wrongdoing. The officer must have recognized father because he came over and greeted him. After some conversation he said to father, "I would like to talk to

you in private.” What feelings must have gone through father’s mind! Could this mean revenge for the punishment he had given him? Had he not forgotten it?

Once they were in a separate room, he came to father, stretched out his hand, and said, “Do you remember the time that you punished me for my wrongdoing? At the time I was not happy about it, but now I would like to thank you for it. I had joined a bad group influenced by the Communists. If you had not punished me, I would have kept up with the gang and gone the way so many have: plundering, murdering and what not. Today I am a high-ranking officer and can see daily that I could not have been here if it hadn’t been for your guidance in stopping my very bad habits. Thank you again, and if I can be of some help to you while you are here, let me know.”

Father told him his reason for coming to Moscow but refused any help, since he would be staying only to get the passports. This officer certainly did not show any bitterness toward father. God showed him His love and care once again.

Emigration and Life in Canada

Emigration

During this time many Mennonites in Russia had already begun to plan for emigration, which also influenced the people of Grigorievka to consider the move, in spite of NEP promises for better conditions. Times in Russia did improve somewhat, but a good number still wanted to leave the country. Among those were my parents. We applied for emigration to Canada and were all declared healthy by the Canadian physician, Doctor Drury.

During the winter of 1925–1926 my parents sold our farmstead to two Russian families who agreed to take full possession on March 1, 1926. Our emigration papers came much later than that, so for three months we had to live in one house with these two Russian families. They occupied three rooms and we had two rooms; we used the kitchen together as needed, as well as the baking ovens, which were heated with straw. We also had an outside baking oven, which mother used a lot when she baked all those buns (*Zwieback*) and then roasted them for the trip. We had to prepare for a trip that could take three to five weeks. We got our own food ready: roasted buns, some hard boiled eggs and smoked ham, all of it put into a woven basket lined with a white sheet. That would be our only food until we got to Riga in Latvia.

Of interest is the cost of the trip from Russia to Canada. It entailed travel by train to Moscow and Riga, by ship through the Baltic and North

Sea to Southampton, England, then on the Atlantic Ocean to Quebec, Canada, and from there by train to Gnadenthal, Manitoba—our destination. The total cost per adult ticket was 147 ruble, 60 kopeki; children under 12 were half price: 73 ruble, 80 kopeki. This included all lodging for the trip. The total cost for tickets for our family was 1,180 ruble, 80 kopeki. The cost of the passports must be added to the transportation cost. At the time of our original application in 1925, the passports were 35 ruble for each parent. This was later raised to 270 ruble, and when we got to Moscow another 12 ruble per passport had to be paid. All the children were recorded on their parents' passports. The total cost of the trip was 1,744 ruble, 80 kopeki. The exchange rate at the time was 1 ruble, 94 kopeki for one Canadian dollar.

The first group of 175 people left our village on July 10, 1924. Our family, our parents and nine children, and another group of 129, a total of 140 people, left on August 8, 1926 and went to Barvenkovo on wagons. There we boarded a train; it arrived in Moscow on August 10, some 52 hours later. We all had to appear before the Canadian health inspector, by whom we were declared healthy and given permission to enter Canada. Under normal circumstances this parting would and should have been difficult, but the communist authorities had made things easier. Many of our emigrants feared, with good reason, that things would get worse. Before we left Russia father's youngest and only sister came to say goodbye. Mother went to bid farewell to her brothers and sisters in Muntau, and some of us children went along. At that time, in addition to the parents, the family consisted of nine children: Annie (19), Sara (14), Henry (13), Nikolai (12), Margaret (10), Agatha (8), Peter (6), John (3) and Mary (1).

More of our people gathered in Moscow from different places in Russia. From Moscow we travelled by train to Riga, Latvia. We had to pass through the Red Gate, or Gate to Freedom, as we referred to it. It was the last stop on Russian soil. This was the last chance for Russian authorities to check out all the passengers and their belongings—and they could make the stop very miserable.

At Riga we boarded a small ship called *Baltara* that took us through the Baltic Sea, then to Danzig, Germany; from there we crossed the North Sea to London, England, where we arrived on August 31, 1926 after travelling for twenty-three days. We were taken to barracks in Southampton where we stayed for three days, undergoing a thorough medical examination. After that was over with we boarded a large ship, the *Empress of Scotland*, to take us over the North Atlantic to Quebec, Canada, where we arrived on September 9, 1926. Father had a younger brother (Henry) who had come to Canada in 1924; he and his wife Sara

lived in Gnadenthal, Manitoba. After travelling for five weeks and appearing before various health inspectors, on September 11, 1926 we arrived at Gnadenthal, our final destination in Canada.

In his recordings, father mentions that all doors in Russia had to be locked for the night because of the stealing going on. In Canada we never locked any doors. Father also mentions that we were given the Gospel of John when we arrived in Canada, whereas we were dismissed from Russia with a Russian curse. What a difference! We were full of hope for our new life here.

Life in Canada

It was threshing time when we arrived. We noted with much interest the quite different methods of harvesting in Canada. Father immediately set about looking for a farm which we might purchase. This was not easy since most of the family savings had been used up to come to Canada; also, there were very few farms for sale. Our parents had friends and relatives in the Whitewater area so, after contacting a real estate agent in Boissevain, father learned that Mr. Lorne Dunn, a very fine gentleman, was willing to sell his farm. The site was five miles due west of Boissevain.

After some negotiation, the price was agreed upon and father went to Winkler to find someone who might share in the purchase—800 acres was considered too much for one family to manage. The P. H. Froese and the W. P. Buhler families, who had also come from Grigorievka, immediately expressed interest. Separate purchase agreements were drawn up and the Albrecht family bought the west half of 19-3-20 and the south half of the northeast quarter of 19-3-20, a total of 400 acres. Some horses, cattle and machinery were included in the sale. Our parents were very thankful that Mr. Dunn entrusted them with a purchase agreement of \$16,000 without any down payment. It was great encouragement during the difficult time of settling in a new country.

On November 25, 1926, taking our meagre personal belongings, we moved by train from Winkler to Cadzow, for many years a train stop midway between Boissevain and Whitewater. Our farm was one-half mile north of Cadzow. Finally the travelling had ended. The feelings of our parents at that time can hardly be described. The open prairie and the language difficulties both presented some problems, but they were happy and thankful that God had granted them the privilege and opportunity of coming to Canada, a land of freedom. The family will always be grateful to the David Baskervilles, our closest neighbours, who helped and advised them wherever possible.

Soon after the family had settled down, those of us who were of

sufficient age attended Caranton School, a distance of four miles. At intervals, all the children attended either Caranton or Strathallan Schools during the next several years. The winter of 1926–1927 was a very cold one with much snow. But the family soon established daily routines; all had their duties to perform. Spring came eventually, with much water and a late blizzard on May 8 and 9. The seeding was greatly delayed. However, we were happy to harvest a good crop that fall.

The Mennonite people had settled in the Whitewater district as early as 1925. They had come from different churches in Russia and felt the need to organize as one Mennonite church and plan for the future. There were 18 former Grigorievka Church members that were at a meeting held on April 18, 1927 to organize the Whitewater Mennonite Church. In the following years, fifty-four of former Grigorievka residents played an important part in the life of the Whitewater Church. Two former *Vorsänger* from the Grigorievka Church also became song leaders at the Whitewater Mennonite Church; they were Nikolai Albrecht and P. H. Froese. On April 26, 1987 the church celebrated its sixtieth anniversary with ten of the original members present.

At the organizational meeting on April 18, 1927, Nikolai Albrecht was elected as a member of the three-person steward committee (*Kirchenrat*). Some time later he was elected by the congregation as its first district contact for the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, where he attended a representative meeting (*Vertreterversammlung*) from December 4–6, 1929. That was where the travel debt (*Reiseschuld*) was discussed very seriously. The urgent plea from Ältester David Toews to make a personal effort to pay this debt was a very sensitive subject even in our congregation. In the fall of 1942 a district committee was elected. It gathered the list of all debtors and made a big effort to pay off this debt. By February 24, 1943, the remaining travel debt in our congregation was paid off. The total Canadian amount was \$1,767,398.68, including interest. If my memory serves me correctly, this money was paid just before Elder David Toews died. He had signed a credit note for all emigrants.

Our Farm Home in Canada. Let me describe the farm that father purchased in 1926. It had a six-room house plus hall and stairway, two rooms downstairs and four upstairs. The heating was done by the cookstove in the kitchen and a small heater in our parents' bedroom. Wood was used most often, but coal was also burned, especially for the nights. The only heat in the upstairs bedroom was from the stove pipes, a poor heating system that came through the floor into the chimney upstairs. This house had no insulation and poor storm windows, so you

can imagine the temperature in the upstairs bedrooms when it was windy and minus 30 to 40 degrees outside. For lighting we used glass chimney lamps in the house and lanterns in the barn. Kerosene was used for fuel.

There was a 32-foot by 24-foot long barn with room for 16 horses but some of this space was used for milking cows. It was about 200 steps from the house and had a shed attached to it. We used this shed for chickens and young cattle. The milk cows were in a straw shed added at the end of the barn. Everything was very different from what we had in Russia.

The cows were milked by hand. The milk was then carried into the house for separating because we shipped cream. The skim milk was carried back to the barn and fed to the little calves. Because of this inconvenience, plus the time spent feeding the cattle and cleaning the barn, it took much longer to do the chores. While milking cows by hand, we trained our cats to sit up while we squirted milk into their mouth. Another thing was to teach the little calves to drink milk out of a pail. Often we had them suck our fingers to get them started. All that work had to be done before we went to school in the morning and was repeated in the evening.

We also had a windmill on our yard, which was a great convenience; it was used to pump water out of the well. When there was no wind we could disengage it and put a handle on the pump. We had a large water trough which we kept full so when the horses and cattle came to drink there was always water for them.

Canadian Pacific Railway: Passenger Trains from Winnipeg to Napinka, 1885–1958. Train service operated six days a week, leaving Winnipeg in the morning and going as far west as Napinka, where it turned around for its 200-mile trip back to Winnipeg the next morning. The train carried passengers and express, including farmers' cream cans and all the mail for the towns it served. This train line also had a number of flag stops between the larger towns including Cadzow.

The train was so punctual that you could set your watch by it every day: at 9 a. m. going east to Winnipeg and at 3 p.m. going to Napinka in the west. This service was rendered for 73 years. On Friday, October 24, 1958 the train made its last trip. From September 1938 to June 1941, John Albrecht, my brother, used this means of transportation from Cadzow to Boissevain to attend Boissevain High School.

The Family Farm (19-3-20 W.P.M.), 1926–1942. The farm that father purchased consisted of 400 acres at \$40 per acre, a total sum of \$16,000 with no money as down payment. Five horses, some cattle plus some

machinery were included to be paid for by a half-share of the grain after each crop year. The first two years we had good crops and made good payments, but then came the lean years with little or no crops, not even enough feed for the horses and cattle. Those were the “Dirty Thirties” with dry storms, no rain, rust in the wheat and grasshoppers. We could not make any payments and soon the interest swallowed up what he had paid. After a while we owed more money on the farm than what we had bought it for in the first place. Eventually the farm went back to the original owner. We bought the inventory on a separate agreement, rented the farm on a third-share basis, and started anew. The years became better, the crops improved and we continued farming. At today’s high cost of living, we often have to say that what we haven’t got we don’t need. But all through those years God did perform miracles: things like keeping us together as a family and giving mother the wisdom to do it.

As the years went by there were many changes in the family. One by one we got married and it was time for mother to quit farming. Son Peter and his wife Erna rented the farm for a few years and then it was sold to different people. In October 1942 mother had an auction sale of her farm machinery and household articles and moved to 278 Cheriton Avenue in Winnipeg, where she had a nice little house built, John and Mary still with her. She loved her retirement there. She lived in this house until 1965 when it was no longer safe for her to be alone. It was time to make another move—this time to the Home for the Aged in Grunthal. She was well looked after until she became ill; after a short illness she died on September 21, 1968, at age 86 years, 8 months—a widow for 37 years. She was buried in the family plot in the Boissevain cemetery. We remember mother as an honest, courageous, hard-working, economical and thrifty lady.

Of the family members that came to Canada on September 14, 1926 six children have also died: Annie in 1974, Sara in 1994, Nikolai in 1935, Margaret in 1974, Peter in 1966 and John in 1982. Only three remain: Agatha Janzen and Mary Siemens, both widows who live in Winnipeg, and I (Henry).

Reunions. Since the early 1950s the Nikolai and Heinrich Albrecht families have held their family reunions yearly at different places, such as Rock Lake, the Peace Gardens, at different school yards and on family lawns. At the beginning the attendance was over one hundred, but in later years this declined. In 1991 it was decided to hold a reunion every second year. Since there were only four of the first generation left, the younger generation has taken over.

On May 19, 1984, at the 50th annual Sangerfest of Mennonite

Collegiate Institute (MCI), a grandson of Nikolai Albrecht, Professor Henry Engbrecht, was a guest choir director. He has been conductor of the Winnipeg Philharmonic Choir, First Mennonite Church choir, the Manitoba Opera Association chorus and now directs the University of Manitoba Singers and the Canzona choir. For many years, Ed Albrecht of the Whitewater Mennonite Church was the youth choir director and at times his sister Margaret was the pianist—both are also grandchildren of Nikolai Albrecht.

Henry and Susan (Rempel) Albrecht Family

I was born on June 22, 1913 in the village of Grigorievka in Russia. I attended school there for six years. The school system and education in Grigorievka were above average among the Mennonite villages. We had wonderful well-educated Christian teachers. We used three types of alphabets: the Gothic which was the main one in reading and in writing; the Latin alphabet which we learned to write and read; and the Russian alphabet which was altogether different, but we also learned to read and write it. Our teachers were strict and we managed to read and write very well. We spoke Low German at home.

As a thirteen-year-old boy, I emigrated to Canada with my family, consisting of my parents, four boys and five girls. We left our village Grigorievka on August 5, 1926 and arrived in Quebec on September 11, 1926. After two or three more days of travelling by train, we arrived in Gnadenthal, Manitoba, at our Uncle Henry Albrecht's place.

After living in Gnadenthal and Winkler for some time, on November 25, 1926 we moved to a farm five miles west of Boissevain. That winter five of us children attended Caranton School which was four miles from our farm, driving there with horse and sleigh. It was hard living on the open prairie in a strange country and with a different language. From the very beginning my brother Nick (12) and I (13) did the work of any adult. We drove the four- and five-horse teams on the field; we formed loose hay in the summer and pitched sheaves and hauled grain in threshing time. Most of the time we enjoyed it.

On November 3, 1931, my father, at the age of 55, suddenly passed away in the bush while hauling firewood home for the winter. I was 18 years old and the family carried on farming as best we could. On March 27, 1935 my brother Nick died at the age of 20 years. He was only one year younger than I and we were very close, but life went on and we continued farming.

Youth has a unique way when it comes to choosing your life's partner. Susan Rempel and I were no different. Her early life was similar to mine: born in 1918 in southern Russia (Arkadak) and emigrated to

Canada in 1924. The Rempel family lived in Arnaud, Dominion City, Grande Point and Brandon before settling on a farm near Oak Lake, Manitoba. Susan attended school there until age 14 and worked on the farm until we were married.

Our engagement was on June 27, 1936. I stayed at Oak Lake for a few days; then Susan came to stay with my family at Boissevain for a short while. At that time it was customary to visit relatives and friends to show off your bride or groom. Instead of driving a nice car we did it with horse and buggy. On one such visit we were overtaken by a lightning and thunderstorm and were soaking wet when we got home, but that was all in the game. Our wedding took place on November 8, 1936 in the home of Susan's parents.

We lived with her parents that winter because her dad was seriously ill with liver cancer. He died on January 24, 1937. In March of 1937 we started out on our own and moved by train to British Columbia. We built our own little shed (12 by 18 feet) in Oliver, our home for the next 2½ years. We did any type of work we could get, mostly in the fruit orchards, packing house and cannery, getting 25 cents per hour in the beginning and later 35 cents. In the winter of 1937–1938 I worked on a dairy farm, getting \$35 per month—plus one quart of milk a day. Hours were from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m., in which I milked cows by hand and washed 200 to 300 milk bottles a day. Susan also worked at different jobs. In the fall of 1939, after all the work was done, we bought a second-hand 1931 Model A Ford for \$237, sold our shed and moved back to Manitoba, arriving at my mother's place on October 31, 1939. We had been away for almost three years. It was so nice to see mother, brothers and sisters. We stayed with them all winter. We had saved \$500 cash and owned the car, not bad considering the wages we got.

In the spring of 1940, we rented a half section of land at SE 20-3-20 with a small two-room house on it. We purchased some furniture, farm implements and four horses and, with help from mother who gave us the seed grain, we started out farming on our own. I loved and was proud of my four-horse team. With them I did all the field work on a half section. While on this farm all four of our children were born. We stayed there for 12 years—until 1952.

Joyful times arrived after four years of marriage when we became parents of a lovely little girl. We called her Margaret Rose or just Gredel. What a bundle of joy she was. After two years and three months our second daughter, Helen Ruth, arrived, so chubby and with a smiling face. We called her Lenchen. Then after two years came Susan Jane, so much like her mother that we named her Susan or Suschen. We were and are thankful for all three of them, but we so badly wanted a boy also. Sure



Henry & Susan Albrecht with their four children.

enough, he was presented to us on November 22, 1947. We named him Edward Henry. That completed our family.

We lived only 2½ miles from mother, so brother Peter, who worked with mother, and I used the same implements during our early years on the farm. Later we bought our own implements. In a ten-hour day I could plough five to six acres with a two-furrow gang plough that took 28 inches. With a 20-foot harrow I could do 40 to 50 acres per day. Walking behind the harrow all day on loose ground was no small matter—that would mean about 25 miles a day; in later years I had a little cart to sit on. The drill seeder was ten feet wide and could seed about 20 acres a day. With an eight-foot binder we could cut about 15 to 17 acres a day. It would cut and tie the grain in sheaves which were later stooked, some eight sheaves in a stook. The hay was cut with a five-foot mower drawn by two horses; when dry, it was raked with a ten-foot rake, hauled home loose and stacked on the yard to put in the barn loft. Most of the threshing was done by some farmers working together, simply because not every farmer could afford his own threshing machine and tractor; they also pooled their manpower, teams and wagons.

The grain was hauled by team and wagon to the granary or to the elevator. Sometimes we even loaded train cars by hand with a scoop and shovel from a platform at Cadzow. After threshing was finished, or even in between when it rained, we started ploughing; all stubble fields were ploughed in fall, weather permitting. Usually, a cultivator or disc was

used to kill the weeds on the summerfallow. In a late spring this was also used to prepare the seed-bed. As a rule, one-quarter to one-third of the cultivated land was summerfallow each year. In those years there were no weed sprays or fertilizers.

Susan had been back to British Columbia only once—in 1944—since we moved back to Manitoba. So in 1952 we decided that we would take all four children and go to B.C. by car to see her mother, sister and brothers. It was a good time of relief and relaxation. Since then we have often made that trip by car, by train and by plane, with and without the children.

In 1972, when we had built a new house in the town of Boissevain, we retired. Sometimes I was busier than if we had stayed on the farm; on the other hand, it gave us more opportunities because we were not tied down. We had time to do some travelling in and out of the country. For the next three years I headed the Camp Koinonia Committee and did much volunteer work there, building and finishing jobs such as bringing the hydro, telephone and waterworks into the main lodge and building two cabins. In 1976, after having been on the Board of the Mentally Handicapped Association, I started to work with the handicapped boys in a wood-working area. It was quite a challenge. I did this for four years and as relief help after that. I also drove the van for quite some time, getting trainees from Killarney in the morning and taking them back home in the afternoon.

After I committed my life to Jesus Christ and was baptized on May 15, 1932, I was soon asked to teach Sunday school. I enjoyed that very much. My intention for a life's career was to become a teacher, but that was not to be. Later I was elected as the first Sunday school superintendent in our congregation. My total involvement in the Sunday school was fifteen years. Other positions I held in the church included: church leader, chairperson, treasurer, secretary, church book recording secretary, secretary-treasurer of the travel debt retirement committee, missions sale auctioneer, chairperson of the history book committee and lay speaker in the German language on Sunday mornings. We also served as caretakers of the church for three years.

In 1961 we celebrated 25 years of marriage. Then on October 11, 1986 we celebrated our golden wedding anniversary. At present we enjoy our retirement in town and are able to look after ourselves. To God be the glory!

Chapter 6

ARON AND MARGARETA BRAUN FAMILY

Elisabeth Peters

Aron Braun was born on August 19, 1860 in Osterwick where he spent his childhood and early youth. He married Margareta Janzen on February 16, 1884 with Ältester Anton Loewen officiating. The happy young couple moved to Gruenfeld where their nine children were born. Two of them died in infancy: Peter, the eldest, born in 1885, died of scarlet fever in 1886; and Helena, the youngest, born in 1900, died in 1901. The other children were: Maria, born 1887; Jakob, in 1888; Margareta, 1890; Anna, 1891; Susanna, 1894; Aron, 1896; and Katharina, 1898.

After the death of her youngest child, Helena was ailing. A devastating fire in July 1900 weakened her condition. She could not overcome the horror, the panic and terror of seeing their home destroyed. On July 9, 1902, she succumbed to asthma and heart failure and died peacefully in Gruenfeld, having lived in a harmonious marriage for over eighteen years. After her death, the family moved and lived in Hochberg for a year. On June 11, 1903, Aron Braun married the widow Kornelia (Dyck) Warkentin in Hochberg. Prediger Peter Plenert of Priiut, officiated. They moved to Grigorievka in 1904, the family having been increased by four more children of Kornelia's first marriage. The eldest, Johann Warkentin (1892), married Margareta Unger (daughter of Peter Unger) in Grigorievka, emigrated to Manitoba in the 1920s and farmed in the Fork River-Winnipegosis area. Kornelia (1893) married David Redekop, Grigorievka, emigrated to Saskatchewan in the 1920s. Maria (1897) married Bernhard Buhler, emigrated to Manitoba and farmed in the Fork River-Winnipegosis area. Anna, known by the diminutive "Nutt" (1899), married Henry Dyck of Morris after emigrating to Manitoba in the 1920s. When her husband died, she serenely and even joyfully lived out her life in the Salem Personal Care Home in Winkler—the marriage had been childless.

After the Braun family moved to Grigorievka in 1904, they lived on the south side of the eastern end of the village. They had a *Vollwirtschaft* (full-farm); Aron Braun was respected in the village as a good farmer. He had been involved with the unfortunate mill project but survived the financial hardships of its failure. Making the best of the situation, he turned to a treadmill business on his premises. After his death on January 17, 1917 at the age of 54, the property was sold to Abram Unger.



Aron Braun with his second wife Kornelia (Dyck, Warkentin).

Kornelia Braun was a frail looking old lady, whom her grandchildren called “dee denni Grossmau” (the thin Grandma). I remember her white hair swept up to the top of her head and secured under a tiny beautiful black lace cap, a truly aristocratic looking woman. She was often called on to attend the sick or suffering when old Mrs. Wiens was not able to visit two “patients” at the same time, and was known for her expertise and wise counsel in her treatments. She had read widely and could make interesting conversation. But she took life seriously and I remember dodging her when she came to visit us—we were distantly related to Aron Braun—because I anticipated harsh criticism and admonition about my much too lively behaviour. Her marriage to Aron Braun lasted only thirteen years, and she was dependent on her children for many long years. All the Warkentin family had emigrated to Canada. They took turns in the care of their mother, although she lived mostly in her youngest daughter’s home in Morris where she died. At her special request, Kornelia was buried in Haskett, a tiny hamlet on the Canada-US border, about 11 miles south of Winkler.

The Aron Braun children also emigrated to Canada in the 1920s. They had all married: Maria was married to Jakob Wallmann, a scion of the important industrial Wallmann family, whose impressive home in the village of Chortitza is still spoken of as “dee Burg” (the castle); the marriage took place in Grigorievka in 1908, Prediger Peter Funk performing the ceremony. In May 1911 Margareta was married to

Heinrich Penner in Grigorievka by Prediger Peter Funk. In May 1915 Susanna married Heinrich Loewen in Grigorievka, Prediger Jakob Baerg officiating. In August 1916 Anna married Heinrich Goerzen in Fuerstenaue, Prediger Jakob Rennpening performing.

The two sons of Aron Braun both had interesting lives. Jakob was married in 1910 to Aganeta Froese, a dressmaker, in Grigorievka, Prediger Gerhard Neufeld officiating. He took his young wife with him to Germany where he studied electrical engineering. He was known in Grigorievka as a gifted young man. They lived in Hildburghausen, Thuringia, where their oldest child, Neta, was born. When war broke out, they returned to Russia and Jakob served as *Sanitäter* (medical corps) in the Red Cross. Two daughters were born in Russia: Katharina in 1916, Helena in 1919. Perhaps due to the rigours of life at the front, he contracted tuberculosis and died in 1922 at age 34 in Schoenwiese after 12½ years of marriage. He had been employed as engineer by the Lepp & Wallmann factory in that village. His widow, Aganeta, and her three daughters emigrated to Canada in 1926, together with her mother, Mrs. Heinrich Froese. They arrived in Winkler, Manitoba, in January 1926 where she entered into a second marriage in October of that year with Johann Pankratz, a widower. The wedding took place in Winkler, Reverend Jakob Siemens performing the rites. Her second husband died in 1963 and she lived in Winnipeg for the rest of her life, where her oldest daughter, Nettie (Neufeld), also resided. She had some good years before she died in 1987 at age 97 in Bethania Personal Care Home, Winnipeg.

The younger son, Aron, left Russia during the war. After the dissolution of the White Army where he was serving, perhaps as a *Sanitäter*, he managed to flee to Germany, settling in Hamburg. There he married a war widow, Anita Ratjens, who had one little son, Edgar. The family emigrated to Canada in 1928 and lived in Winkler during the first few years. He was employed by our butcher, J. Penner, an unusual occupation for Aron Braun, but one which he grew to enjoy; he bought the shop a little later. His wife was in art mending and well known for her expert work in Hamburg. Her additional income helped the family in those difficult Depression years in Winkler. They had rented a small room in our not very spacious house, sharing a kitchen with us. Aron was intelligent, outgoing and friendly. He entertained us, and sometimes the neighbours, with his tales of life in Hamburg. He was asked to take part in an entertainment night in the Crystal Hall in Winkler where my mother and Mrs. Janzen, another member of our church, were staging some Low German plays. The evening was a great success, although my mother and Mrs. Janzen were on tenterhooks lest Aron Braun forget that he was in

straight-laced, conservative Winkler and not in a cabaret in Hamburg, but he stayed with his guitar, singing folksongs. The town regretted the family's departure when they moved to Winnipeg where Aron Braun died in 1959. His wife suffered the loss of her son, Edgar, a war casualty in Germany. She died in Winnipeg where she lived in Arlington House, an apartment building for senior citizens. She was tired at the end of a long life that must have been very lonely since Edgar's widow and child lived in Germany.

The family of Aron Braun, Sr., left its mark in Grigorievka, but its members were too scattered in Manitoba and Saskatchewan to remain cohesive as a family.

[Information was provided by Nettie Neufeld, granddaughter of Aron Braun, Sr.]

Chapter 7

JOHANN AND JACOB BRAUN FAMILIES

Johann and Helena Braun

Susanna (Braun) Loewen

My parents Johann and Helena (Martens) Braun lived in the village of Grigorievka, Ukraine, where my sisters, brothers and I were all born. The streets were hard earth, swept with branches (*Struk*) and sprinkled with white sand for Sundays. White picket fences, trees, fruit trees and acacia hedges lined the streets. Our house was built of white brick with a red tile roof, nestled among fruit trees and many perennials. We did not have a white picket fence, only a wooden one (*Brädatun*). Ours was the third house from the centre street, the street on which the store and the school were located. We lived so close to the school that many a morning the nanny would come to fetch me home so I could have my hair properly braided before school started.

Our neighbours were the Sawatzkys and the Neufelds. Neufeld's mulberries seemed to taste so much better than ours that guilty feelings didn't stop my sister Helen and her friends Elisabeth (Dyck) Peters and Margaret (Albrecht) Engbrecht from helping themselves to the berries hanging on our side of the fence. Uncle Jacob Braun and family lived just five houses away. The brothers, Jacob and Johann, shared a threshing machine until our father received his own from his father-in-law. This was part of my mother's inheritance.

All the farmers in the village shared the pasture. The cow-herder led everyone's cattle to the pasture in the morning. In the evening we could see from afar that the cattle were pushing toward the side of the road to find their home. We thought the cows were very smart. They were fed corn and pumpkins; the corn was stored in a "corn crib." It was exciting to find a dried cob of corn with red and darker coloured kernels. We saved these cobs and used them for decoration. The pumpkin seeds were washed and roasted for our use. The cattle manure was piled, then spread evenly for the horses to trample and compact. When this dried it was cut into squares with a spade and stacked in a pattern for intense drying. The squares were then stacked again in a large, beehive shape. This big beehive was an excellent spot for playing hide-and-seek. Later the dried squares and straw were used as heating fuel.

On a big table in a separate room of the house, we fed mulberry leaves to silkworms. They were very noisy eaters. When the cocoons

were ready, they were placed into a pot of boiling water and tapped with a wooden spoon. Each cocoon gave off a single silk thread. When there were enough silk threads, they were rolled into a ball. We kept a few silkworm eggs in a cold place over winter. In spring, when the time was right, we brought the eggs into the warmth and shortly thereafter hatched lots of little worms and started the process all over again. Mother also spun wool and by profession was a seamstress. She taught young women how to make basic patterns out of balsa wood.

My sisters and I had a good opportunity for education. I attended high school for two years. Our father encouraged us to do gymnastics and taught us to walk a tight rope.

With the beginning of the Russian Revolution times changed and life became more and more difficult. Plans were made to emigrate. We were all infected with trachoma and were treated accordingly. Upon completion of treatment and reexamination it was discovered that Melita and Hans were not cured. As the oldest child (13) I was entrusted with the care of my sister (5) and brother (4). I took them to Ekaterinoslav for further treatment. We were away several months. After the treatments, my brother was cured but not my sister. Arrangements were made to go to Moscow for treatment. I took Melita to Moscow but our physician, Doctor Drury, could not give her a clean bill of health. I immediately wrote to my father, but unfortunately the plans for emigration had been finalized and our departure could not be delayed. Melita had to stay behind. Father arranged for Uncle David Martens to bring her back to Einlage where she lived with her step-grandmother for over a year. Aunt Neta Martens cared for Melita. They say when Melita got a new dress she would gaze into the mirror and say, "If only my mother could see me."

In June 1925 we left Gavrilovka by train for Moscow, continued on to Riga, the capital city of Latvia, and from there to the seaport where we boarded the *Baltara*. I carried the guitar; my sister Tina carried the commode discreetly tucked into a bag. Five days later we landed in England. There we were bathed and combed and all our clothing was disinfected. After medical examination, it was thought our brother had tuberculosis. The authorities decided our family would not be allowed to go to Canada. Paraguay would be our destination instead. After all the tearful farewells to relatives and friends, our father rushed over to us. He handed mother the passport and said, "You and the children can go to Canada. Hurry. I will stay with Hans."

My mother and five of her children—Melita and Hans excluded—boarded the *Empress of Scotland*. During the voyage everyone's pass-

port was validated by the captain. When he opened my mother's passport, he looked down at it and back at her. In father's haste and excitement, he had given mother his own passport. Our group leader, Johann H. Enns (later Ältester J. H. Enns), explained the situation to the captain through an interpreter. The matter was clarified by telegraph communication to Southampton. Seven days later, July 4, 1925, we arrived in Quebec where we boarded a train for Springstein via Winnipeg. I was invited to live with Gerhard and Maria Dyck where I enjoyed my first taste of porridge together with bread and butter. It was very good and I got a little stout. My mother, brothers and sisters were invited to stay with the J. Braun family. Mr. Braun was a very strict teacher from Grigorievka. A month later my father and Hans joined us in Canada. The family moved to Pigeon Lake. Our home was an old granary which we shared with Henry Braun, his wife and their two children. We lived on Henry Dyck's yard until the weather got too cold.

Father and his brother Henry bought a 1,000-acre farm near the white horse west of Headingley. One old two-story house was home for two families. Gerhard and Justina Friesen and their family came to Canada at this time and were welcomed into our home as well. It was getting very crowded so two more houses were moved onto the acreage. The Friesens didn't stay very long. Reverend Victor and Lydia Schroeder and their family became our neighbours. Firewood and food were scarce. The girls were instructed to go into the bush to gather fallen branches. We also had to dig left-over potatoes out of the frozen ground (I often wondered what the boys were doing). Many times I felt very lonely for the home we had left behind in Grigorievka.

During the Depression, it was impossible to pay off the farm debt, the purchase contract was annulled and the land was leased from the landlord. Two more farms were leased during this time. One of the farms belonged to Doctor Hiebert. In 1935, Henry Braun and his family moved to Starbuck and our father bought the Bull farm at Pigeon Lake. He farmed there until his retirement in 1946.

I had a limited education in Canada. I started school in fall and attended until Christmas, at which time I got the flu. I never went back. I taught myself to read and write adequately in English. My siblings, on the other hand, had the advantage of a better education.

The girls in our family were the oldest and it was our responsibility to help with the farm labour. We did the farm chores: milking, gathering firewood and getting water from the river. We stooked the grain, made hay and ploughed fields. I got so angry when the horse stepped out of its furrow that I stopped the team, faced the horse directly and pinched

and shook the soft part of its muzzle. Then the horse would obey—I learned this in Grigorievka. We considered our sister Tina lucky because she was chosen to stay inside to help with the household tasks and look after the younger children. Our sister Liese did not agree; she thought herself the luckiest because she was happiest working outside.

The first priority of any Mennonite group was to establish a place of worship. In our area a committee was selected and they purchased the former United Church building in Rosser. It was moved under the supervision of our father to its present location in Pigeon Lake. There was enough land for an adjacent cemetery. We were members of this *Friedenskirche* (peace church). Our sister Tina was a candidate at the first baptism in 1930. Melita was a soloist in the church choir and Helen taught Sunday school. The boys in her class argued about which one of them Helen had favoured with a special glance.

In the autumn of my seventeenth year I went to work as a domestic in Winnipeg for the winter. In the summer I came home to help on the farm. All my wages were sent home to meet family expenses. My starting wage was \$15 a month, which increased to \$32 a month. I worked as a domestic for seven years. Tina and Liese followed in my footsteps two years later. Helen, Melita and my brothers continued to work on the family farm. While in Winnipeg, we attended the Alexander Avenue Mennonite Church where Ältester Klassen served. We were always happy at the *Mädchenheim* (girls' home) on Bannatyne Avenue where we learned to sing evangelical songs.

During the next twenty years, my sisters, brother and I all married and set up house and home. Every Sunday after church we would come home to share the noon meal with our parents. They would go visiting later in the afternoon, but we stayed at the house, cracked sunflower seeds and caught up on all the news and gossip while the grandchildren played together.

I, Susie, married David Loewen, son of Peter and Maria (Goerz) Loewen. We farmed at Headingley until our retirement. We have two children: Frieda who married Edward Epp and Karl-Heinz who married Linda Regnier. My husband David passed away and I currently reside at Autumn House in Winnipeg.

Tina married George Bock, son of Gerhard and Susanna Bock. George worked as a section boss for Canadian Pacific Railway. They had six children: Hansi, tragically killed in a train-car accident when he was six; Victor married to Selma Isaak; Eleanor to Hal Siemens; Helene to Jake Dyck; Karen; George-David to Audry Godfrey. Tina and George have passed away.



Johann & Helena (Martens) Braun family in 1940, from left (back): Hans, Harry, Jacob Driedger; (centre): Gerhard Bock, Helene, Melita, Elizabeth (Braun) Driedger, David Loewen; (front): Katharina (Braun) Bock, Hansi Bock, Mother Helena with Edith Driedger, Father Johann with Victor Bock, Frieda and Susie (Braun) Loewen.

Liese married Jake Driedger, son of Reverend Johann A. and Agatha (Friesen) Driedger. Jake was a farmer and driving instructor after retirement. There are three children: Edith married Frank Derksen; Ernest married Joann McCauley; and Paul married Lynn Rogers. Liese and Jake have passed away.

Helen married Abraham Driedger, son of Abraham and Aganetha (Enns) Driedger. Abe and Helen owned and operated a service station and The Rainbow Inn Restaurant in Grunthal, Manitoba. They have two children: Harold married Lorraine Boivin; Melita married Dave Innes. Abe passed away and Helen now resides at Autumn House in Winnipeg.

Melita married Edward Klassen, son of Ältester Johann P. and Katharina (Dyck) Klassen. Melita worked at the Department of Agriculture for many years. Eddy was a self-employed painter and a commercial salmon fisherman in British Columbia. They returned to Winnipeg where Eddy continued to paint until his retirement. Melita and Eddy resided in Winnipeg; he died of a heart attack in September 1996.

Hans married Anne Thiessen, daughter of Aron and Margaretha (Driedger) Thiessen. John was a farmer at Pigeon Lake, reeve of St. Francois Xavier municipality for many years, and later sold real estate until his retirement. They have four children: Edward married Deb

Dutton; Carolynn married Rob Kathler; John married Lynn Premachuk; Ken married Marilyn Gilmore. Hans (John) and Anne currently reside in Winnipeg.

Harry married Erika Dyck, daughter of Gerhard and Maria (Braun) Dyck. Harry was a farmer at Starbuck. They had three children: Eric who died December 1995, Darlene, and Constance who married Malcom Forsythe. Harry died tragically in a train-truck accident in August 1959.

Our parents retired and moved to Winnipeg in 1946. Brother Hans bought the family farm at Pigeon Lake. During his retirement years, father was involved as a fundraiser for Concordia Hospital and also for the building fund for First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. Our parents, most of their children, and many of their grandchildren are members or regularly attend this church. Father passed away February 2, 1952 at the age of 68 years. His was the first funeral to be held in the newly finished sanctuary of First Mennonite Church (previous funerals were held in the lower auditorium). Mother lived another 24 years, always in the close embrace of her loving family. She lived at Bethania for a short while before she passed away on August 5, 1976 at the age of 89 years.

The Jacob Braun Family

Victor Wieler (grandson)

Jacob Braun (1879–1964), a successful farmer, lived in Grigorievka with his wife Katharina (Janzen) until her death in 1925, after which he moved to Shostok. Of seven children born, the following survived: Katja (1906–1989), Jasch (1908–1982), Hans (1910–1956), Margaret (1912–present) and Maria (1914–1995). His wife was buried in Petershagen where his two married sisters lived, and where her great-grandmother Mrs. Johann Janzen settled in 1804, having emigrated from Schoensee, Prussia. Jacob Braun remarried Margaret Schellenberg (1894–1980) in 1920, after which they lived in Kleefeld until fleeing to Moscow in November 1929. Then they continued on to Germany via Hammerstein and Mölln where they celebrated Christmas. Finally, the family, without Katja, arrived in Canada on April 16, 1930 and settled on a farm near Headingley, Manitoba.

Jacob and Katharina's oldest child Katja and husband Cornelius Lepp, a teacher at the Zentralschule, were to leave also, but unfortunately the borders were closed. They remained behind with their five daughters. During World War II they were exiled to central Asia and

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eventually ended up in Frunze, Kirghizia (now renamed Bishkek, Kirghistan) where they and one daughter Rita are buried. Some of the remaining family recently emigrated to Germany. With the hope that the rest of the family will leave soon, the Russian connection may close to any living descendants of Jacob Braun.

Chapter 8

WILHELM AND TINA BUHLER FAMILY

The Buhlers were an important family in the village of Grigorievka. Wilhelm W. Buhler (1841–1908) moved there in 1888. He married Tina (Sawatzky) Buhler (born 1842). Both Wilhelm and Tina were born in Georgsthal, Fuerstenland, in southern Russia, and lived there for the first forty-six years of their life. His second marriage was with a Bueckert. He farmed like all the rest but was also a blacksmith. He had a small factory where he built *Schräg* ploughs, wagons and small items. His request for a second yard at the end of the village to build a larger factory was granted. Soon after, when his wife Tina became sick, he lost interest in this large undertaking. He built not a factory but a larger blacksmith shop close to the street. It had two forges for heating iron. In 1908, twenty years after he settled in Grigorievka, Wilhelm passed on to his reward.

The Descendants of Wilhelm and Tina Buhler

Isaac Buhler

Wilhelm W. Buhler (July 23, 1867–March 25, 1925)

married Maria Redekop (Oct. 26, 1872–June 16, 1953)

Children of Wilhelm & Maria:

- I. Wilhelm Buhler (March 12, 1894–1897)
- II. Abraham Buhler (Aug. 21, 1895–1920)
- III. Maria (Buhler) Loewen (Oct. 5, 1897– Dec. 5, 1983)
m. May 23, 1921 to Isaac F. Loewen (Nov. 15, 1896–Jan. 1, 1989)
- IV. Wilhelm W. Buhler (Aug. 8, 1899–Jan. 29, 1978)
m. Sept. 17, 1923 to Anna Unger (Dec. 1, 1902–Feb. 19, 1969)
- V. Isaac W. Buhler (March 7, 1901–April 12, 1970)
m. Sept. 7, 1924 to Elisabeth Unger (b. Feb. 8, 1899)
- VI. Bernard Buhler (May 16, 1903–Nov. 1, 1904)
- VII. Frank Buhler (July 23, 1905–July 27, 1982)
m. June 27, 1926 to Maria Pauls (b. Jan. 4. 1907)
- VIII. Bernhard W. Buhler (Aug. 4, 1907–Dec. 29, 1977)
m. Nov. 26, 1941 to Maria (Pauls, Driedger) (b. Sept. 20, 1907)
- IX. Lena (Buhler) Enns (July 22, 1909–Aug. 25, 1993)
m. Dec. 20, 1931 to Peter W. Enns (b. June 1, 1912)
- X. Katie (Buhler) Pauls (b. July 19, 1912)
m. June 10, 1934 to Henry H. Pauls (b. Nov. 22, 1910)

XI. Peter Buhler (Aug. 11, 1915–June 1916)

He had a large growth on the side of his neck.

Wilhelm W. Buhler, Jr., (1867–1925), married Maria Redekop (1872–1953). Wilhelm moved with his parents from Georgsthal to Grigorievka in 1888 when he was 21 years old. It seems that Wilhelm purchased the homestead because he lived with his parents. Eventually he owned about 100 acres of land. When finally the Red Army took over they could only keep four-and-a-half acres per person which left him with about 60 acres. The poor Russians received the rest. Wilhelm, Sr., who also operated the blacksmith shop and workshop, tried hard to get his son to work in the shop but Wilhelm Jr., didn't have any interest. Father wanted Wilhelm in the shop because he was right handed. His son Isaac had great interest in this type of work but was left-handed. Since father couldn't get Wilhelm into the shop he allowed Isaac to work there. This Isaac did with great delight; he was more of a blacksmith than a farmer anyway.

At one time when the Makhno bands were going from place to place they also came to the village of Grigorievka. Three men came into the Wilhelm Buhler residence and demanded money. After the family gave them all they had, the thieves demanded even more. Receiving nothing more, they prepared to murder Wilhelm. All the while he had to hold his hands up high. They cocked their guns, putting two to his head and one gun to his chest. "Now let's see if there is any more money," they sneered. At this moment their superior stepped into the room. He said one word and the guns went down.

He smiled at Wilhelm. "Don't you know me?" he said, but Wilhelm was in such shock it took a long time until he realized that it was one of their former employees in the blacksmith shop. Wilhelm had taught him to weld; after the training he was given a good job at another place and had very good earning possibilities.

"Why don't you put your hands down," he said. Wilhelm was still holding them up. "We won't do anything to you. You scolded your own boys but you never scolded me." With this they left. Mother Maria and Katie were with Wilhelm all this time. Peeking out from behind mother's apron, Katie witnessed the whole event.

Wilhelm got cancer of the lip and died on March 25, 1925. He had encouraged his family to emigrate to Canada after he passed away; this they did. Wilhelm had asked his brother Bernard to take care of his family. When the time came Bernard was somewhat opposed to the move to Canada. But the Buhler family was determined to go, as their



Maria (Redekop) Buhler (front, centre) with her children and their spouses, from left (back): Peter W. Enns, Isaac, Ben, Wilhelm, Henry Pauls; (centre): Lena (Buhler) Enns, Elisabeth (Unger) Buhler, Maria (Driedger) Buhler, Anna (Unger) Buhler, Katie (Buhler) Pauls; (front): Isaac Loewen, Maria Loewen, Mother Maria, Frank, Maria (Pauls) Buhler.

father had wished. Both of Wilhelm's brothers, Isaac and Ben, also lived in Grigorievka, but neither emigrated with Wilhelm's family.

Wilhelm had always been a quiet person, whereas his wife Maria often took the lead. When the time came to move, Maria again led the way. On August 9, 1926 she, with her children, Isaac, Maria (Buhler) and Isaac Loewen, Frank, Maria (Pauls) Buhler, Ben, Lena and Katie Buhler left Grigorievka. Wilhelm and Anna had emigrated earlier in 1926, Isaac and Elisabeth in 1925.

Maria with her family of eight left together only to be held up in Moscow for one month. Isaac and Maria (Buhler) Loewen were given permission to leave for Canada in 1926. The six left behind finally decided to go to Mexico. They went to Germany and on October 27, 1926 boarded a ship in Rotterdam. The trip via Spain to Cuba took two weeks. At last they could spend some time on land, but just as they were settled in, the captain of the freighter ship heard the weather forecast. There was a warning of a huge hurricane coming in exactly the same path in which they were anchored. The captain could not be persuaded to stay, so off they were back at sea. Next day they met up with a terrible storm. The water splashed over the ship, a very rare occurrence, but they made it. They got a message from Cuba that twenty-three of the ships that stayed in the harbour had sunk.

Just before they left the ship at the harbour in Mexico, a minister stepped forward and asked a group to sing, “Nun danket alle Gott” (Now thank we all our God). Many on the ship came and sang along, grateful to the Lord for protection. They stayed in Mexico for a while during which time their eyes healed so they could emigrate to Canada.

On November 17, 1926, one month after they left Rotterdam, they arrived at Veracruz, Mexico. From there they travelled north, arriving at Grand Forks, North Dakota, on February 6, 1927. Because the train didn’t travel on Sunday they waited until the next day to continue. Maria, Frank Buhler’s wife, could hardly wait a whole day, being so close to Canada. If she could have walked she would have; being just married and separated from the family for so long was overwhelming. They finally arrived at son Isaac and Elisabeth (Unger) Buhler’s place at Haskett on February 7, 1927. From there each family member found a job and a place to live. Lena worked at Abraham Kroekers, Bernard at Kroeker Farms, Frank and Maria at John Wiebes in Burwalde.

Abraham Buhler (Aug. 21, 1895–1920)

Abraham never married. He was drafted into the White Army. The family received a few letters from him, and then they heard nothing for twenty-five years. In his last letter he stated that if he would ever survive this trauma, it would be a miracle. He did not survive. Twenty-five years later a Mr. Wiebe from Ontario informed the family that he had been at Abraham’s bedside when he died. He had packed his clothes, his finger-ring and belongings with a letter and sent them to his parents—the package never arrived. The cause of his death was believed to be typhoid fever.

Maria (Buhler) Loewen (Oct. 5, 1897–Dec. 5, 1983)

m. May 23, 1921 to Isaac Loewen (Nov. 15, 1896–Jan. 1, 1989)

Children of Maria & Isaac:

1. Agnes Loewen (b. June 24, 1922)
m. Oct. 15, 1964 to Jake Neufeld (b. July 27, 1921)
2. Isaac I. Loewen (Feb. 15, 1925–Dec. 18, 1978)
m. July 15, 1951 to Helen Penner (b. June 16, 1928)
3. Frank C. Loewen (b. Sept. 6, 1926)
m. June 10, 1952 to Mary Thiessen (Oct. 20, 1927–Sept. 12, 1995)
4. Willie Loewen (b. Jan. 22, 1928)
m. June 12, 1954 to Betty Dyck (b. May 1, 1933)
5. George I. Loewen (b. Nov. 1, 1930)
m. Aug. 11, 1957 to Elma Giesbrecht
(Sept. 17, 1928–Dec. 11, 1979)



Isaac F. & Maria (Buhler) Loewen family, from left (back): Frank, Willie, Agnes, Isaac, George; (front): Mother Maria, Henry, Father Isaac.

rem. June 22, 1985 to Evelyn Dyck (b. Dec. 4, 1954)

6. Henry Loewen (b. Sept. 28, 1936)

m. Aug. 14, 1960 to Cora Enns (b. Nov. 29, 1938)

Maria was born on October 5, 1897 in Grigorievka where later she found her lover, Isaac Loewen. They married there on May 23, 1921. They had two children when they emigrated to Canada; the third one was born on the trip. They arrived in Manitoba in September 1926, finding a farm west of Winkler on NE 1-3-5. They raised all the grains plus sugar beets; for years they were into dill farming and later potatoes. Sons Frank and Willie were mostly involved in this work. Just a mile from the family home at the three-mile corner, Isaac had a service station and a food bar. George was an x-ray technician at Bethel hospital; Henry was a teacher and later a minister in Winnipeg; Agnes and Jake were farming on their own. Mr. Loewen was a well-known deacon in the Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church. Upon retirement in 1960 they moved to Winkler.

Wilhelm W. Buhler (Aug. 8, 1899–Jan. 29, 1978)

m. Sept. 17, 1923 to Anna Unger (Dec. 1, 1902–Feb. 19, 1968)

rem. Dec. 6, 1969 to Anna (Neufeld) (Fast) (b. Aug. 5, 1905)

Children of Wilhelm & Anna:

116 Memories of Grigorievka

1. William (Bill) (Aug. 14, 1924–June 16, 1963)
m. Sept. 15, 1945 to Tina Toews (July 14, 1925–Oct. 7, 1995)
2. Abram (Sept. 2, 1928–June 25, 1988)
m. Aug. 9, 1952 to Susie Enns
3. Mary (b. Sept. 11, 1930)
m. June 15, 1952 to Harvey Wiebe (May 19, 1929–Mar. 7, 1994)
4. Anne (b. Jan. 25, 1933)
m. Nov. 13, 1960 to John Hildebrand
5. Henry (b. June 17, 1934)
m. July 6, 1957 to Anne Thiessen
6. Peter (Jan. 23, 1936–Sept. 15, 1936)
7. Susie (b. Oct. 13, 1937)
m. June 21, 1959 to Leonard Reimer
8. Peter (b. June 23, 1940)
m. Aug. 27, 1963 to Susie Dyck
9. Harry (b. April 17, 1943)
m. Aug. 17, 1963 to Nettie Hiebert

Wilhelm, like his brother Abraham, was conscripted into the White Army. After conditions became very bad, he escaped into the Red Army. There the situation was no better so he escaped the military altogether. Exhausted, he came to a Russian village. He no longer could keep on going without food and rest, so he identified himself to a couple and asked for food and shelter. Because he was totally exhausted, they took him in and fed him; for long periods of time he hid under their bed.



Wilhelm W. & Anna (Unger) Buhler family, from left (back): Henry & Anne (Thiessen) Buhler, Harvey & Mary (Buhler) Wiebe, Tina (Toews) & Willie Buhler, Susie (Enns) & Abe Buhler; (front): Harry, Anne, Mother Anna, Father Wilhelm, Susie, Peter.

When the army was looking for runaways he ran out and hid under an uprooted plum tree on the yard. He couldn't quite get under the prickly branches, but nobody found him.

He finally got homesick and returned home, full of lice. Before he was allowed in the house, the boys shaved off his hair, cleaned him up and burned his clothes. He had promised the couple that took him in that if they should be in trouble he would help them. In 1921, the year of famine, they came for help.

Wilhelm met Anna Unger in Grigorievka and married her on September 17, 1923. Three years after their marriage they had their first child, William. They decided to move to Canada with all the rest of the family. They settled on a farm at Niverville, grew sugar beets and other crops and raised livestock. Anna passed away when Wilhelm was 70 years of age. He remarried Anne (Neufeld, Fast) and moved to Ontario where he passed away on January 29, 1978.

Isaac W. Buhler (March 7, 1901–April 12, 1970)

m. Sept. 7, 1924 to Elisabeth Unger (b. Feb. 8, 1899)

Children of Isaac & Elisabeth:

1. Isaac I. (b. Oct. 11, 1925)
m. Oct. 9, 1949 to Sarah Janzen (b. Aug. 19, 1925)
2. Lorina (b. Feb. 6, 1928)
m. June 27, 1948 to Corny Wieler (b. March 2, 1919)
3. Helen (b. Feb. 6, 1930)
m. July 22, 1961 to James Orton
rem. Nov. 7, 1980 to Bruno Pranke
4. Mary (b. June 7, 1933)
m. Sept. 12, 1954 to John Dyck (b. Oct. 6, 1931)
5. Justina (b. Oct. 25, 1935)
m. Sept. 1, 1957 to Peter Suderman (b. May 24, 1931)
6. Tina (Aug. 6, 1937–July 4, 1963)
m. July 16, 1961 to Herb Penner (b. March 29, 1934)
7. Willie (b. Aug. 31, 1939; died at birth)

Isaac grew up on the yard where his grandfather built the blacksmith shop in which he loved to play. There he had become interested in this type of work. After baptism in 1922 he was called to alternative service for the government. He served in Elisabethgrad Army hospital and returned a year and seven months later in June 1924. All this time he had been writing letters to someone at home. Three months after he came back, on September 7, 1924, he married Elisabeth Unger. At this time there was a strong movement in the village to emigrate. It was



Isaac W. & Anna (Unger) Buhler family, from left (back): Mary, Lorina (Buhler) & Corny Wieler, Isaac & Sarah (Janzen) Buhler, Helen; (front): Justina, Mother Elisabeth, Evelyn Suderman, Father Isaac, Tina.

grandfather's blacksmith shop that gave Isaac the extra money to pay for the trip and costs of emigrating to Canada.

On September 21, 1925 they arrived at Winkler, where the Jacob Kroeker family took them in. For a week they stayed in a small hut. Then they moved to Martin Hieberts northeast of Plum Coulee where their first child, Isaac was born, just twenty days after their arrival in Manitoba. They lived at Rosenort (now Rosetown) for six weeks and settled down on the farm at Haskett on December 27, 1925. The farm was purchased from Jacob Kroeker, the family that took them in upon arrival. Due to the hard times in the 1930s, Isaac gave back the farm, but bought it again when their situation improved. In the later years he farmed together with his son-in-law, Corny, and son, Isaac. They each bought half of the farm. Isaac raised grain, corn, sunflowers, peas and livestock. In 1968, his son Isaac also started raising potatoes. At present, the grandson Leonard (Isaac I.'s son) raises over 600 acres of potatoes, mostly under irrigation.

Frank W. Buhler (July 23, 1905–July 27, 1982)

m. June 27, 1926 to Maria Pauls (b. Jan. 4, 1907)

Children of Frank & Maria:

1. Lena (b. May 16, 1927)

m. Aug. 11, 1955 to Bill Brown

2. Frank (b. Feb. 12, 1929; died at birth)

3. Frank E. (b. Oct. 8, 1931)

m. July 11, 1954 to Winnie (Melvina) Johnson (d. Dec. 17, 1970)

rem. Dec. 27, 1971 to Lois Hunter

4. John E. (b. July 1, 1933)
m. March 25, 1954 to Ruth Krushel
rem. Oct. 6, 1985 to Bonnie Telford
5. Jacob Peter (b. Nov. 29, 1934)
m. Aug. 4, 1969 to Margaret Loraine McGill
6. Bernard Arthur b. (Feb. 25, 1937–Jan. 13, 1960)

Frank met Maria Pauls in Grigorievka where they were married on June 27, 1926. Just over a month from the wedding day they were on their way to Canada. Emigrating via Mexico because of eye trouble, they entered Canada with his mother and his siblings on February 7, 1927. They lived with brother Isaac at Haskett for a while.

Then they made their home in Morden where Frank found employment at Krushel Manufacturing for nineteen years. This connection gave his son John the chance to become involved with the factory; he also married Adolf Krushel's daughter. The business is now Buhler Industries, Inc. with Farm King, Morden, being but one branch of the company. September 30, 1995 showed sales of almost fifty-seven million dollars.

In the early years at Morden, Frank dedicated his life to the Lord. After this he became very zealous in the Lord's work. Frank and Maria were instrumental in starting a new church in Morden. Maria was a



Frank W. & Maria (Pauls) Buhler family, from left (back): Jake, John; (centre): Frank, Lena; (front): Mother Maria, Bernard, Father Frank.

model Sunday school teacher. After retirement Frank worked on family records. After illness, he passed to his reward on July 27, 1982.

Maria worked in the poultry plant in Morden for 33 years. Her job was to grade chickens; later she became a supervisor. At one time she handed out up to 90 cheques to employees. At age ninety she still drives a car and works at Farm King cleaning for eight hours a week.

Bernhard W. Buhler (Aug. 4, 1907–Dec. 29, 1977)

m. Nov. 26, 1941 to Maria (Pauls) (Driedger) (b. Sept. 20, 1907)

Children of Maria & Cornelius M. Driedger (her first marriage):

1. Leo Driedger (b. June 27, 1928)
m. June 1, 1956 to Darlene Koehn
2. Otto Driedger (b. June 11, 1932)
m. Oct. 10, 1954 to Florence Hooge
3. Irvin Driedger (b. Feb. 13, 1935)
m. Aug. 16, 1958 to Donna Lobe

Children of Maria & Bernhard W. Buhler:

4. Jake M. (b. Nov. 28, 1942)
m. May 20, 1967 to Louise Wiebe
5. Ruth M. (b. April 24, 1944)
m. July 16, 1965 to Jake Wiebe
6. Wilfred B. (b. June 4, 1946)
m. June 1, 1968 to Ruth Neudorf
7. Ben L. (b. June 8, 1951)
m. June 1, 1972 to Diana Braun

Bernhard was born in Grigorievka. At age nineteen, on August 9, 1926, together with his mother and siblings, he left Grigorievka to emigrate to Canada via Mexico. They arrived at Haskett, Manitoba, on February 7, 1927. He homesteaded southwest of Winkler on SE 31-2-4 together with his mother. He farmed on forty acres, raising some cattle. Christmas and Easter gatherings were held at his home. As years went by he learned of the passing of Maria (Pauls) Driedger's husband. Knowing Maria very well from the home village, he made contact with her. In time they were married. He sold his farm at Winkler and moved to Osler, Saskatchewan.

Ben was a very well-liked person, a deacon in the church. He had a grain and dairy farm close to Osler. Wilfred and Ben took over this farm later. At seventy years of age he succumbed to cancer. Maria retired to Saskatoon.

The eldest descendant of Maria (Driedger) Buhler is Leo Driedger who has been professor of sociology at the University of Manitoba in



Bernhard W. & Maria (Pauls, Driedger) Buhler family, from left (back): Irvin Driedger, Ben Buhler, Jake Wiebe, Wilfred Buhler, Leo Driedger, Otto Driedger; (centre): Donna (Lobe) Driedger, Ruth (Buhler) Wiebe, Darlene (Koehn) Driedger, Florence (Hooge) Driedger, Jake Buhler; (front): Mother Maria, Father Bernhard.

Winnipeg for thirty years. He has published extensively in many scholarly journals and has authored a dozen books. Work in the church has taken Leo to more than 50 countries. He has been on boards and numerous committees of Mennonite Central Committee and has served on executive boards of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, General Conference Mennonite Church, as well as on their Peace and Social Concerns committees. Otto Driedger, the second son, is a social worker in Regina. Many times he has been on a mission to Russia for the government. His wife Florence is also involved in social work. She has been moderator of the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America. Irvin and Donna Driedger are farming near Osler, Saskatchewan, where both are very involved in local church, school and community activities. Jake Buhler was school principal at Martensville near Saskatoon. He did MCC work for about six years. He was stationed in Bangkok, Thailand, then moved to Vietnam where Louise has worked for ten years for "Brot für die Welt," a German agency. Jake and Ruth (Buhler) Wiebe are both teaching at Rosetown, Saskatchewan. Wilfred and Ruth Buhler and Ben and Diana Buhler are on the parents' farm near Osler.

Lena (Buhler) Enns (July 22, 1909–Aug. 25, 1993)

m. Dec. 20, 1931 to Peter W. Enns (b. June 1, 1912)

Children of Lena & Peter:

1. Erna Elsie (b. Jan. 5, 1933)
m. June 29, 1952 to Peter Elias
2. Harold (April 26, 1938–April 27, 1938)
3. Katie Evelyn (b. July 19, 1939)
m. Sept. 17, 1960 to Philipp Rudolf Ens
4. Janie Hildegard (b. March 11, 1948)
m. June 30, 1967 to Harold James Peters (b. March 2, 1948)
5. William Clifford (b. March 14, 1951)
m. Dec. 29, 1973 to Sharon Louise Neufeld

Lena was born in Grigorievka and left for Canada on August 9, 1926. She emigrated via Mexico because of eye trouble. She entered Canada with her mother and siblings on February 7, 1927. Her first place of residence was with her brother in Haskett. She married Peter Enns on December 20, 1931. They spent the first years at Greenfarm and about eight years in Niverville. Peter started out as a cobbler and later became a John Deere dealer. In 1944 they moved back to Greenfarm and lived there until 1955. However, Peter's heart was not in farming. At one time he was interested in building swathers, but he gave up that idea. He said life was too short to start such a venture.

Later Peter noticed there was an opportunity in manufacturing recreational vehicles, which he could not resist. Together with his sons-in-law he began "Triple E. Canada Ltd.–1995," which stands for Enns, Ens, Elias. This company has grown to be a major company in Winkler, employing between 550 and 700 people, with sales reaching close to 100 million dollars. Giving people employment was very important to Peter. He later left the company as partner but remained employed there until he became ill. The whole responsibility slowly shifted to Phil when his father-in-law's health gave way and he retired.

The Enns's only son Willie became an airplane pilot and worked with Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) for twenty years. At present he is living in Winkler with his family. The family has always been involved in music. Phil loves choirs, singing and directing; Erna has played organ at church for much of her life; both Erna and Katie have given music lessons. Harold Peters is a sales person.

Phillip Ens, Jr., grandson of Peter and Lena (Buhler) Enns, is a leading bass with the Staatstheater Stuttgart. He has sung to critical acclaim in numerous operas. He made his operatic debut in the 1985 Manitoba Opera production. Since then he has performed leading roles



Lena (Buhler) & Peter W. Enns with their four children and families (at left): Erna (Enns) and Peter Elias; (back centre): Harold and Janie (Enns) Peters; (back, third from right): William Enns; (at right): Katie (Enns) and Philipp Ens; (front, centre): Mother Lena, Father Peter.

with every opera company in Canada, including the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. His work with Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony includes a recording on the Decca label. In 1989 he made his U.S. debut with the Philadelphia orchestra, and has since performed with the Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Denver operas. Shirley Sawatzky, also a granddaughter of Peter and Lena (Buhler) Enns is one of the most promising pianists in Manitoba. She has had rave reviews in the Winnipeg press for her musical accomplishments and is well known in top musical circles in Canada.

Katie (Buhler) Pauls (b. July 19, 1912)

m. June 10, 1934 to Henry H. Pauls (b. Nov. 22, 1910)

Children of Katie & Henry:

1. John (b. April 8, 1935)
m. Dec. 1, 1961 to Mary Schrag
2. Helen (b. June 18, 1937)
m. July 30, 1960 to Herman Kuhl
3. Jake (b. Aug. 29, 1940)
m. Aug. 22, 1960 to Irene Rempel
4. Edwin (b. April 18, 1943)
m. June 7, 1970 to Ruth Enns
5. Henry (b. Nov. 30, 1936)
m. May 30, 1970 to Joyce Rachul

6. Ben (b. Jan. 25, 1949)
m. May 25, 1974 to Pat Gerber
7. Joyce (b. Nov, 27, 1954)
m. May 25, 1974 to Barry Suderman

Katie was born in Grigorievka and left for Canada on August 9, 1926 when she was fourteen years old. She emigrated via Mexico also because of eye trouble, entering Canada with her mother and siblings. On February 7, 1927 she arrived at her brother's home at Haskett. For seven years Katie worked at many different places to make her living. She was at Jacob Kroeker's the longest, over a year, and also worked at the experimental farm in Morden and in Winnipeg. In the summer she helped make hay for her mother and brother Ben.

On June 10, 1934, she married Henry H. Pauls whom she knew from Grigorievka. For five years they lived in various places: Kroeker Farms, mother's place and at Jacob Pauls' (Henry's father's) home. In 1939 they settled in Grunthal and lived there for seven years. In April 1946, they sold their farm and moved southeast of Morden and farmed there for twenty-three years. In April 1969 they moved to 426–10th Street in Morden and, in 1995, to the John Buhler apartments. After retiring they took a trip to India to visit son John who was in mission work there. They also travelled to Russia to visit the places where Henry had lived.

If you talk with families who emigrated from Ukraine, you sense a great thankfulness that this was possible, also thankfulness to God for the freedom they have in North America. They often look back to the good things they had in Ukraine. The freedom for progress in education, economy, trade and industry was all taken away, but many found this freedom again in Canada. It seems that those who stayed behind made a huge mistake.

At the time of writing, only Katie (Buhler) Pauls, the youngest daughter of Wilhelm, Sr., and Maria Buhler is alive; she is eighty-four years of age. Both Henry and Katie have many stories to tell. In Buhler, Kansas, John Buhler found the family records that go back to the 1700s. This Buhler family has a deep-rooted faith in God, a faith they seek to promote. Most of the children and grandchildren were and are involved in some kind of service within the church. This is a great blessing derived from our forefathers.

Chapter 9

PETER AND SUSANNA BUHLER FAMILY

Elfie Krahn

Peter B. Buhler was a descendant of Wilhelm Ballee, originally from Schidlitz, Prussia. This family emigrated to Russia in 1788 and settled in Schoenhorst. After Wilhelm Ballee died the children changed their name to Buhler. Peter Bernhard Buhler was the sixth child born to Bernhard and Anna (Zacharias) Buhler on September 10, 1855. After several moves the family eventually settled in Grigorievka.

Peter married Aganetha Funk on October 12, 1876. There was one child from this union, Anna. After Aganetha's death on June 5, 1879, Peter married Susanna Block on November 18, 1879. They had thirteen children. The Peter Buhlers were wealthy farmers who apparently had Russian servants living with them. At first they are recorded as living in Eichenfeld, later in Grigorievka. Peter was a good woodworker, a talent his sons inherited. Peter and Susanna Buhler, their son Wilhelm and his wife Sara Buhler, and some of their daughter Aganetha's children—Aganetha and her husband died of typhoid fever in 1920—all came to Canada in 1926. They settled in Reinland, Manitoba. After Peter's death on February 24, 1930, his widow Susanna and their daughter Elizabeth moved to Drake, Saskatchewan, where they lived with Susanna's daughter and son-in-law, Johann and Maria Bergen.

Following are stories of the descendants of the Peter Bernhard Buhler grandchildren as they remember the life of their parents and their own experiences during emigration.

The Journey from Russia to Canada

Anne (Buhler) Rempel

Times were getting very hard and, after several trips to Moscow, we still did not seem to be any nearer to leaving Russia. Everything that we did not want or could not take along was sold in October of 1923. It was a very good all-day sale, worth much in terms of money. Every two hours, a trustworthy friend was sent to Arkadak to trade the "Sharvunce," the old Russian money which was rapidly losing its value, into the new Russian rubles. The money was not left in the bank, but taken back to the village and hidden with willing, trustworthy friends until we

could leave. We dared not keep it with us because of the many bandits that always came by night and because, if it was in the bank, the government would know how much money we had. It was very risky for those friends to show us this kindness. Only one person betrayed us, and there was nothing we could do about that.

During this time several trips were made to Moscow to obtain the required documents. The rush was on to reach the Latvian border. For six months we lived in our house with hardly any furniture and no milk or eggs of our own. For the trip, a large wicker basket, like a large trunk, was filled with baked and roasted *Zwieback* (buns) and some hams which had been slow-smoked for days so they would keep. How they got milk and butter to bake all those *Zwieback* for the trip, I don't know—they must have bought them, and having to buy everything put a big strain on the money situation. For the first few days of our trip we ate hard-boiled eggs and smoked sausage, but they did not keep as well as the hams. For drinking, we had tea and *Pripps*, which was home-roasted barley. We ate well, but did not have a great variety of food.

We left for Archikuva, which was forty miles from Arkadak, where we boarded the train. Three sleighs were used for this trip. The train then took us to Moscow. There we lived with the C. F. Klassen family who had rooms for rent for this purpose. We were not there very long when our passports came through. With Moscow behind us, the tension was somewhat easier, but there was still the checkpoint at Zebezh before the Russian personnel left the train and the Latvian personnel came aboard. We must have been there for some time because we had food given to us—very salty sardines, hot cocoa, bread and strawberry jam. The latter two we enjoyed very much because by now we were getting very tired of roasted *Zwieback*, cold ham, *Pripps* and tea.

Finally we were on our way to Riga in Latvia—and freedom. But in Riga there was one more hurdle to overcome: the medical health unit which checked us for lice, bed bugs and trachoma (an eye disease). Those diagnosed with trachoma had to have their eyes burned out repeatedly with bluestone. None of us had it, but they did “treat” Anne's eyes which caused her to lose sight in the left eye completely. Her hair was cut off in big wads which made her look awful. They did it because they seemed to like to do something to pretty young girls—we could think of no other reason for this kind of treatment. Susan was spared this procedure. In Riga they also put all our belongings through the disinfection process, which left a lot of our trunks practically falling apart due to the rough treatment and the very hot temperatures which they had to go through.

There was much jubilation to be out of Russia at last. After traveling all night, we arrived at Kiel where we boarded a small steamer that would take us through the North Sea, the Kiel Canal and into the English Channel. Because of rough waters, nearly everyone experienced seasickness. The food on this ship was very poor, so again we had to eat our own food. Upon arriving in Liverpool, we were taken to Southampton by train. We were detained in England about a week. We were housed in barracks which were in a poor neighbourhood where a lot of stealing went on. Again we were put through the familiar routine of health inspection and baggage disinfection. One man and his family that were in a hurry to get to Canada could not get passage right away, so he asked for our Second Class Passage; we could then use his First Class passage when it came up.

Finally we were taken to Southampton harbour by train. While we were in England, the Canadian Pacific Railway paid for everything. The ship that was to carry us across the Atlantic Ocean was the *H.M.S. Montcalm*. We were given good staterooms as we were now going First Class. Getting as far away from Russia as possible lightened our burdened hearts. It was still not easy because now the language barrier had caught up with us. The meals were very good, but most of us again experienced seasickness and could not eat for the seven days we were on the ship.

St. John, Canada, was to be our destination but, because the waters were still frozen over in early April, we first landed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on April 25, 1924. From there it was on to Montreal, then on to Rosenfeld, Manitoba, to the J. A. Thiessen family who sponsored us. Looking out of the train window, "Canada, the Land of Plenty" cast a worried look on our parents' faces. The brush and the large flat stones did not look as though one could harvest a large abundance of wheat. We were only interested in becoming good farmers again. The letters we had received spoke of flat land well suited for grain farming. Canada did not look as we were led to believe.

Not all people were very accepting of the Mennonites who could not speak English. Some new immigrants found themselves "used" by landowners to do the hard work, while they reaped the money and paid the workers very little. Speaking and reading English was the hardest thing for our parents, but they did it. Father learned from bitter experiences to read and study every paper before he signed it. He had been cheated so many times that this became his greatest concern. The descendants of this family eventually settled in Boissevain and Steinbach, Manitoba, and in British Columbia.



Peter & Susanna (Block) Buhler family, from left (back): Jakob, Wilhelm Poetker, Abram Rempel, Bernhard, Peter, Johann Funk, Wilhelm, Maria; (front): Susanna (Buhler) Poetker, Anna (Buhler) Rempel, Mother Susanna, Father Peter, Aganetha (Buhler) Funk, Elizabeth.

Susanna (Buhler) Poetker

The descendants of this family eventually settled in Manitoba.

Aganetha (Buhler) Funk (d. 1920)

Aganetha and her husband Johann Funk both died of typhoid fever in January 1920. Their eight children were divided among family members and raised by them. The descendants of this family settled in Canada wherever their uncles and aunts with whom they were living settled. Their initial destinations were Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Peter Buhler (1883–1957)

married 1920 to Susanna Huebert (d. 1952)
Susie Buhler (daughter)

Peter was born in 1883 in Grigorievka. When World War I broke out, dad went with the Red Cross. He told us that many were wounded on the front line but he was spared. When the war was over and typhoid fever broke out, dad helped look after the sick. In 1920 he married Susanna Huebert, daughter of Franz Huebert. Mother had lost both her parents through typhoid fever. Because she was one of the older children, she had to help look after the younger ones. While they were still in Russia, three daughters were born: I (Susie) in 1921, Agatha in 1923 and Liese in 1925. During this time Peter Funk, a nephew, came to live with us, due to his parents' sudden deaths from typhoid in 1920.

Times were becoming very hard, so in 1926 our parents decided to go to Canada. They were fortunate that they didn't suffer hunger as many did. Some of the other families from the village had already gone to Canada. Because mother had trachoma, they could not go to Canada, so they decided to go to Mexico. They could get papers for this country and many more families were going there. I remember father saying, "God will find a way to get us to Canada." He always had courage and faith in the Lord.

In August, 1926, we left Grigorievka for Kharkov, where we took the train to the port in Holland to board the Freighter *Rotterdam* to go to Mexico. We were on the ship for one month, landing in Veracruz, Mexico. There we went by train to Los Anamos where we stayed for three months. Mother took treatments for her eyes which was very hard on her. Her eyes were covered because they burned so badly so dad always had to lead her.

After three hard months in Mexico—to make a little money, Peter Funk even dug peanuts—we got the papers required to go on to Canada. We left by train and seven days later, on February 9, 1927, landed in Haskett, Manitoba. It had taken six months to finally get to Canada. From Haskett we were picked up by sleigh and taken to Reinland to see Grandpa and Grandma (Peter B. Buhlers) and Aunt Elizabeth, dad's sister. From there we went to Winkler where some folks gave us a house to live in. I was told dad worked here and there to make a little money. People were good to us. During this time the twins were born, but one lived only eight days. In spring, Uncle Jacob Buhler and dad decided to move to Holmfield, Manitoba, where they bought some land; we lived together in the stone house until we built a small one. Three sons were born in Holmfield: Abe in 1929, Bernhard in 1930 and Henry in 1933. When the owner passed away and the farm went to the estate, everything had to be sold and our family could not afford to buy it. Dad and Uncle Jacob decided to go to Fork River where Uncle Bernhard Buhler had moved.

In the fall of 1934, everything was loaded into a box car and sent by train to Fork River. Uncle Jacob and dad each got two horses, two cows, a sleigh and a wagon, along with a few household belongings. Uncle Jacob had a Model T or A, and dad hired another car to take us to Fork River. There we were given a house on a farm and a quarter section of land. Dad must have put down only a few dollars because we had no money. People were good and helped us build the house with its mud floors and straw roof. For winter, dad, mom and I managed to build a small log barn where the horses, cows and a few chickens could bed.

That winter one horse died; dad replaced it with one which cost him \$7, but that one did not live very long either. Those were hard days. We had a garden, grew sugar beets and made our own syrup. The younger ones really got tired of that as that was their lunch, with sometimes *Grüben Schmalz* (lard) for sandwiches. But we never stayed hungry. The parents always kept their faith. Agnes was born in Fork River in 1936.

Things did get a little easier as the children got older and married. But when mother passed away on June 14, 1952, dad was very lonely. He always wanted to go before mother, but God's ways are not ours. My brother Peter and his wife Erna stayed on the farm with dad until he passed away on December 14, 1957. Descendants of this family live in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Some have gone overseas into missionary service.

Elizabeth Buhler

Elizabeth, known as "Tante Liese," remained single all her life. She emigrated to Canada with her parents and lived with them there. After her father's death, she and her mother moved to Drake, Saskatchewan, to live with her sister Maria and husband John Bergen.

Bernhard Buhler

This family is the first of the Buhler family to move to Fork River where they farmed. Other family members joined them there. The descendants of this family live in Manitoba and British Columbia.

Wilhelm P. Buhler (1895–1967)

married Nov. 4, 1920 to Sara (Froese) Krahn (d. 1965)

Wilhelm (Grandpa) Buhler was born December 29, 1895 in Grigorievka, Kharkov. He was the eleventh of thirteen children born to Peter and Susanna (Block) Buhler. Not much is known of grandpa's childhood, although he was raised on a farm. Prior to his marriage he was a member of the Red Cross non-combatant medical unit in Russia where he worked in the hospital emergency room. He loved medical work and, if times had been better, he probably would have chosen medicine as a vocation. In the USSR he was a storekeeper. He never really cared for farming.

On November 14, 1920 he married widow Sara (Froese) Krahn, in Grigorievka. They had grown up in the same village. Grandpa then became father to her son, John Krahn. When Grandpa's sister and her husband had both passed away by 1924, their children were divided among relatives. So, along with their own children, grandpa and grandma raised their niece, Aganetha (Funk) Giesbrecht.



Wilhelm P. & Sara (Froese, Krahn) Buhler (front, centre) with family.

In May of 1926, it was decided to emigrate to Canada. They, their four children, Aganetha and great-grandmother Sara Froese, boarded the *S. S. Melita* in Southampton, England. They arrived in Montreal on May 15, 1926, where they boarded a train for Winnipeg, Manitoba. They first settled near Winkler, Manitoba, living in the small village of Chortitz. Grandpa first worked in a store, then got work during harvest time on a farm. Within a year they, together with Sara's brother, Peter Froese and his family, moved to a farm at Boissevain. The Buhler family lost their two-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, to diphtheria in 1927. From 1927 to 1931 were good years, which allowed the family to pay off some of the debt on their Boissevain farm and the machinery which grandpa had purchased. On November 30, 1931, grandpa received his citizenship through naturalization.

After 1931 they again encountered hard years. Grandpa purchased a Model T in 1932, which he used to drive 50–60 miles to cut stumps for firewood which they could not afford to buy. Hard times made it impossible to keep the car running, so it just rotted away. There was very little food and in 1937 there was no hope that they would survive. The farm's only water supply was from seepage, and grasshoppers ruined their crops. They sold the farm in 1938 and rented a farm north of Ninga, where they worked three quarter sections of land. Their belongings were loaded onto wagons for the trip to Ninga. Grandpa was the last to leave and, as he drove the wagon through the gate, he stopped and knelt at the gate post for a long time. He was not only leaving his land, but was possibly thinking of the small grave they were leaving behind.

They farmed in Ninga, Manitoba, from 1939–1941. Grandpa was also a Sunday school teacher and song leader in the church they attended. For his entertainment, he enjoyed walking and reading, especially the Psalms

of David. In 1941 they moved to Lena, Manitoba, where they farmed seven quarters of land which they had purchased. In 1958, they moved off the farm into their new home on their property along highway 18. They lived there until 1962 when they had the house moved, intact, to Killarney, Manitoba. With their children now all married, their last seven years together were spent in this house.

Grandpa received strong support from his wife Sara. Grandma was a strong, calm, deep-thinking woman, who had a large degree of patience and understanding. Her strong nature helped them through many struggles in their life. She had a genuine interest in her children and grandchildren.

We will always remember the big gardens she had on the farm and the many meals she cooked for her family. Friends and family were always welcome. Many times when my sister and I walked home from school, grandma would be waiting on the porch for us and waved for us to come to the house. We were greeted with milk and cookies or some fresh buns. When my sister and I stayed at our grandparents the discussion usually was, "Who will sit between Uncle Will and Uncle Henry at mealtime?" They were more like brothers than uncles to my sister and me. Even then, Uncle Henry decided it was time to stop going to school when his niece started attending the same country school. Looking back I often wonder how grandma survived a house full of children and grandchildren on holidays. But she always took things in stride. While living in the Boissevain, Ninga, Lena and Killarney areas the family attended the Whitewater Mennonite churches.

In November 1964 grandma was diagnosed with cancer of the throat which had spread to her lungs. She spent the first months in the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg, then was transferred to Killarney Hospital so that she could be closer to her family. This was a difficult time for grandma, as she was not able to speak due to a tracheotomy—she had always loved to visit with family and friends. Grandpa and her family were at her bedside throughout the day and night during her last weeks in the hospital. Despite her intense suffering, she never complained. She learned to communicate with gestures and whispering, which at times became very frustrating when people could not understand her. Grandpa found it very difficult to see her suffering.

After grandma passed away in 1965, grandpa continued to live in the house by himself. He was very lonely, but insisted on staying in his own home since he did not want to impose on the children. His children visited regularly and assisted him with laundry, cooking and cleaning. His vision deteriorated rapidly during this time, so it was increasingly difficult for him to remain independent. He had finally agreed to move

to a Senior Citizens Home, but died in Killarney Hospital on February 23, 1967, prior to his admission to the home. He is buried in the Killarney cemetery.

Children of Wilhelm P. and Sara Buhler

Sarah Buhler (b. May 15, 1922)

married 1945 to Karl Klaassen

Sarah and her twin sister Susan were the first children born to the marriage of Wilhelm and Sara (Froese, Krahn) Buhler. In 1926 she emigrated to Canada with her family aboard the *S. S. Melita*. In Canada, their first home for eight months was on a farm near Winkler in the village of Chortitz. In 1927 they moved to Boissevain, Manitoba. Sarah attended the Caranton School until she completed seventh grade. On December 16, 1931 she received her citizenship through naturalization at Boissevain. In 1938 her family sold the farm and moved to Ninga where they lived on a rented farm until they bought their own farm at Lena in 1941.

Although Sarah grew up on her parents' farms and did a considerable amount of work at home, she also worked for other people and would board at their home during her employment. At age sixteen, she got her first job which consisted of housework, child care and cooking. At age twenty she was baptized and joined the Whitewater Mennonite Church at Lena where she had been attending.

In 1943 Sarah met her future husband Karl Klaassen in Lena during harvest time in 1943. The men from Morden finished their harvesting earlier and would come to the Lena area to work during harvest. Sarah and Karl were married on her parents' farm on October 27, 1945. After their marriage, they farmed in Killarney where their first two sons were born. Sarah remembers being afraid about giving birth to their third child because he was born in the hospital and she didn't know what to expect. Sarah and Karl farmed until 1953 when Karl began work for the Manitoba Telephone System in Morden. In April 1957 they moved their family to Pomona, California, where their youngest son was born. Sarah became active in the ladies' group of Faith Mennonite Church, which they attended when first coming to Pomona. Later, they joined First Mennonite Church in Upland where Sarah was involved in various committee activities. She always enjoyed people and entertaining. It was a rare Sunday that they did not have a full dining room table. There is no end to her hospitality, meals and baking.

In 1972 Sarah and Karl moved back to Canada to be closer to her siblings and now reside in Kelowna, B.C. Sarah again became involved in the ladies' groups of their church, Kelowna Gospel Fellowship.



Sarah (Buhler) & Karl Klaassen with family.

During her school years she changed her name from “Sara” to “Sarah.” Karl changed his name from “Carl Klassen” to “Karl Klaassen” after all their children were born. He worked with telephone companies in Manitoba, California and British Columbia until his retirement. He has been very active in the various churches that they have attended.

Susan Buhler (b. May 15, 1922)
married 1956 to Henry Thiessen

Susan came to Canada with her parents when they emigrated in 1926. They settled at Winkler, then moved on to Boissevain, Ninga and Lena. Susan attended school at Caranton School and completed grade seven. After that she lived at home with her parents and helped on the farm until



Susan (Buhler) & Henry Thiessen

her marriage in 1956 to Henry Thiessen. They lived on the Thiessen family farm south of Mather and helped with the operation of the farm. Susan and Henry moved in with his parents, so caring for them as they aged also became Susan's responsibility. She has been very active in the church in Mather.

Henry had emigrated to Canada with his parents who settled on a farm south of Mather, Manitoba, where Henry has lived his entire life. They have built their retirement home on the farmstead as well. Henry still assists with the farming as much as possible.

Peter William Buhler

married 1949 to Anna Dyck

Peter was born in Winkler, Manitoba, and moved to Boissevain, Ninga and Lena with his family as they relocated from place to place. He completed his elementary school education. Peter met Anna Dyck after they moved to Lena, Manitoba, and they were married there on June 25, 1949. At first they rented land from Anna's father and lived with them for a year or two. They moved to Enterprise in 1952, bought a farm at Wakopa, Manitoba, in 1957 and lived there until they moved to Killarney in 1984 for their retirement.

Anna has been a homemaker and was very active in the farm operation. She also has been very involved in the Lena and Killarney Mennonite churches. Both Peter and Anna have been deacons in the Killarney Church.

Ellie Buhler

married 1951 to John Dyck

Ellie was born in Boissevain, Manitoba, and moved with her family to Ninga and Lena until her marriage to John Dyck in 1951. She was a homemaker during the years when their children were growing up. After their move to Winnipeg, Ellie worked as an income tax consultant for four years, then as assistant manager of Lighting Unlimited in Unicity Mall until her retirement.

John worked for fifteen years as a teacher and principal and twenty years in government services, the last four as assistant deputy minister of education in the Manitoba government. After retirement he has been involved in church conference work, and was interim executive secretary of MCC Canada for a year.

Since their baptism in 1946 into the Lena congregation of the Whitewater Church, education-related moves led John and Ellie to various churches (Blumenort, Gretna, North Kildonan, Lena, Boissevain, Winnipegosis and Winnipeg). Since 1971 they have been members of the



John & Ellie (Buhler) Dyck with family.

Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church. They have travelled extensively since their retirement, serving as tour guides on several overseas tours.

William Buhler

married 1956 to Annemary Thielmann

William was born in Boissevain, Manitoba, and later moved to Ninga and Lena with his family. He completed his elementary schooling and then helped his parents on the farm until his marriage in 1956 to Annemary Thielmann. In 1957 they moved to a farm in Enterprise, Manitoba,



William & Annemary (Thielmann) Buhler with family.

for a short period of time. Then William entered the field of auto mechanics and worked as a mechanic in Killarney, Winnipeg and, until his retirement, in Calgary

Annemary was a school teacher prior to her marriage. She and William met while she was teaching in the Plum Hollow School in the Lena area. Immediately after her marriage she was a homemaker and in later years worked as an office clerk, then taught German classes for many years. William and Annemary are both active members of First Mennonite Church in Calgary.

Henry Buhler (b. 1934)

married 1957 to Agnes Heide

Henry was born in Boissevain, Manitoba, and moved to Ninga and Killarney with his family. After completing his elementary school education, he worked on his parents' farm. He helped in a store in Boissevain one winter where he first met Agnes. They were married in 1957 and lived with Henry's parents until 1958. For the next four years they rented the family farm. In 1962, they decided to purchase a farm north of Boissevain and resided there until their retirement to Boissevain.

Agnes was born in Deloraine, Manitoba, and grew up in the Boissevain area. She obtained her education in Strathallen and Boissevain schools. After completing school she worked in the egg-grading station in Boissevain until her marriage to Henry. After her marriage she was a homemaker and assisted with the farm operation. She has also been active in the churches they attended.



Henry & Agnes (Heide) Buhler with family.

Maria (Buhler) Bergen

married John Bergen

Katherine (Bergen) Bartel (daughter)

John and Maria (Buhler) Bergen left Russia in September of 1926 with their three-month-old daughter Katherine. It had taken over a year to work out their emigration papers. Dad had to do a lot of travelling from one place to another until he finally got this all arranged. When they finally got their papers they left immediately because they were afraid they would be detained and not be able to leave at all. In the group were John's parents and two single sons, three married sons and families, plus some friends—forty-two persons in all. When we got to England, dad was not allowed to go any further; they told him he was sick. He was put into a hospital and was not allowed to get up for 120 days. Mother and I went on to Canada with the rest of the group.

In Canada, mother was met in Winnipeg by her parents from Reinland. Dad was finally able to leave England and joined the family in April 1927. He got a job on a farm for the summer and in fall they moved to Drake, Saskatchewan to join his parents. They lived and farmed there until 1958. Then they retired from farming, and moved into the town of Drake until 1979. Illness and "old age" caught up with them and they moved to Parkland Lodge in Lanigan where they stayed until their deaths. The descendants of this family live in Saskatchewan and in Kansas.

Jakob Buhler

married 1920 to Lena Huebert

Jakob was born in Grigorievka, Russia and married Lena Huebert on August 22, 1920 in Russia. They originally settled in the Reinland area with Jakob's parents, then moved on to Holmfield with his brother Peter's family. From there they moved to Fork River. They eventually settled in Boissevain, Manitoba. Jakob and Lena had taken in Jakob's niece, Anna Funk, who was raised by them and lived with them until the time of her marriage. The descendants of this family live in Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia.

Chapter 10

FRANZ AND GERHARD FRIESEN FAMILIES

Franz Friesen (d. 1923)

Elisabeth Peters

Franz Friesen was born in Schoensee where they had an estate (*chutor*) not too far from Grigorievka. He moved to Grigorievka and, since he was a man of means, bought a full-farm (*Vollwirtschaft*) across the street from his brother, Gerhard. He had had much sorrow in his life due to the death of three spouses. His fourth wife outlived him and emigrated to Canada. There were no children from the first marriage, but his second wife, nee Sawatzky, died in childbirth when a son, Bernhard, (informally called Boris) was born. A sister-in-law, Justina (Mrs. Gerhard Friesen), a sensitive compassionate woman, took care of the baby until Franz Friesen was married again to a woman named Wall. They had four children—with Boris there were five. This third wife also died and Mr. Friesen married a Mrs. Wiens from Molotschna (Bechok) who had seven or eight children by her first marriage. Inevitably there were many name duplicates, two Suschens, two Jaschs, two Katjas. The youngest three children of Mrs. (Wiens) Friesen were Peter, Katja and Dietrich, with whom I frequently played after they lost their home in a terrible fire and moved in with the Neufelds on whose yard our summer house (*Nebenhaus*) was located.

The fire which totally destroyed the stately Friesen home occurred in the fall, perhaps in 1922. Since Franz Friesen's farmstead was kitty-corner from our home which was next to Gerhard Friesens, we children stood at our picket fence and watched as the flames leaped up from every point of the burning building, creating more draughts when the crackling flames lit up the black night sky and engulfed everything in a blazing inferno. The horses had been driven out of the stables but immediately turned back to get into what they knew as their place of safety. The pigs squealed in terror in their sties; cows and other farm animals bellowed in the heat. Inside the parlour (*Groote Stow*), Mr. Friesen was trying to save some valuables until some men jumped into the room through the large windows and managed to get him out. He sustained terrible burns and, while his wife was looking after the family, Justina Friesen and my mother tried to ease the pain of the moaning man by applying oil to his baked back and shoulders with a soft feather quill. Later a doctor looked after the injuries while Boris sprayed water on the badly burned horses.

The male population of the village turned into firefighters and sprayed water onto Gerhard Friesen's house and onto our roof to prevent the fire from spreading when a wind arose and blew in our direction. The most dramatic moment of the fiery catastrophe came when the tall poplar tree in front of the house caught on fire, striking terror in the onlookers. The threshing had been completed, granaries and cellars were filled with food and fuel after a rich harvest. Some of the grain stored in the attic caught fire and spread a terrible stench of smouldering wheat mingled with the smell of charred pigs and stock. For days we kept our windows closed to keep out the dreadful odour. The cause of the fire could not be pinpointed—perhaps a cigarette carelessly lit by the workers, although arson could not be ruled out completely.

Mr. Friesen's wounds healed, but apparently because the skin pores were no longer elastic, his body temperature could not be regulated as before. He caught a bad cold and died of pneumonia in 1923. Boris, eighteen at the time, did the best he could with the help of Mrs. Friesen's brother Johann (Wanj Peters), who was still single and came to live with the family. They attempted to emigrate but due to trachoma scars were detained in Moscow and not allowed into Canada. Together with the Wilhelm Buhler family, they went to Mexico. In January 1927, they were able to continue on to Canada and arrived in Graysville, near Carman, Manitoba, where two brothers of their mother lived.

They stayed with their aunts and uncles for two years. The girls went to work as domestics in Winnipeg where they frequented the *Mädchenheim* (girls' home) on Bannatyne Avenue. Mrs. Friesen and some of the children lived in the Killarney-Boissevain area before she moved to Winnipeg. The men obtained work, some on farms. Bernhard (Boris) was successful, but after the death of his wife he moved into Bethania Personal Care Home for physical care, although he has remained interested and young in spirit. Njuta (Wiens), now Mrs. Peter Friesen, lives in British Columbia, as does Agnes (Friesen) Bergen. Suschen Bartel died of cancer and Jasch Friesen lives in Winnipeg. Some of the younger Wiens children with whom I played so many years ago in Grigorievka—Peter and Katja—died at an early age.

Gerhard Friesen (1882–1966)

Katharina (Friesen) Giesbrecht

I was born in the Grigorievka area to Gerhard and Justina Friesen, and will be better known to some readers as "Friees Katja." My father, Gerhard Friesen, was born on December 19, 1882 in Schoensee, Molotschna; my mother, Justina Martens, on December 9, 1886 in

Einlage, Chortitza. My father was raised on a *chutor*. When he got his inheritance he purchased a full-farm (*Vollwirtschaft*) in Grigorievka, a community known for its progressive lifestyle and the excellent humus soil on which it was located. I remember it as a beautiful, long village. Our farmstead was the fifth from the mill yard (*Mühlenhof*). Jacob Pauls lived on the yard to the right of us and the widow of Gerhard Neufeld and family to the left, while Franz Friesen, my father's brother, lived directly across from us.

In school we learned High German and Russian but at home we always spoke Low German. When the Revolution broke out in 1917 we had to obliterate the pictures of the tsar and his family by scribbling over them with lead pencils—we were forbidden to have pictures of the monarchy. At that time two watchmen had to be hired for each end of the village because of thieves who especially liked our well-fed horses. One night our horses were stolen; next day my father went to the police. The constable in charge—this must have been in Barvenkovo since there were no police in our village—asked my father: “How much will you give me? If you pay, you’ll get your horses back.” Since we were deep in preparations to emigrate to Canada, my father let the matter drop and absorbed the loss.

I clearly remember the day I was playing in the garden with my friends when a stranger came up to us and asked if my father was home. I ran into the house and called father. The man asked him whether he remembered him, but father shook his head. “You were quite young when I worked for you as a servant at the *chutor*,” the man said. “I heard that you are planning to move to Canada and have come to guard your safety until you leave.” My father accepted with tears in his eyes.

The medical examiner assigned to Grigorievka for the emigrés was Dr. Drury. The villagers held a meeting to decide where the doctor was to be billeted, but there was dead silence when volunteers were called for. When father came home he said Dr. Drury would live with us. We had a large house and often kept people who had nowhere to stay for weeks on end. Mother became greatly agitated: “I can’t cook English meals,” she said. “We’ll ask ‘dee Lehra Dicksche’,” said father. Mrs. Dyck, the widow of our teacher who was murdered in the fall of 1921, with her seven children lived right next to us in the *Nebenhaus* on the Neufeld farm. She was delighted to oblige. She had a wide recipe list and, above all, for her services her children would be fed from the Friesen kitchen during the time the doctor resided there, plus some remuneration—a good offer indeed.

So Dr. Drury lived in our *Groote Stow* and Sonja and Ella Dyck came over and admired his luggage. Dr. Drury had lightly closed the suitcase

and we couldn't resist lifting the top to see what kind of clothes he had. When I told them the garments lying on top were pyjamas, the girls and I wondered why foreigners did such strange things—we took off our clothes for the night, the English apparently put some on. We were careful not to get caught in this forbidden visit by my many brothers because we knew they would immediately report us—*kloage*, we called it in Low German.

And then we were ready to make the big move! We travelled to Moscow by train, through the Red Gate at Zebezh and on to Riga, Latvia. There we boarded a ship to cross the turbulent North Sea and landed in England where we were transported to Atlantic Park, Southampton. We underwent another thorough medical examination, with the result that several of our family members were detained due to trachoma. Father immediately decided that we would all remain in Atlantic Park for a month in the hope that treatment would enable us all to proceed to Canada together. I was fifteen at the time. When the month was over an interpreter told father that two of my sisters, Sonja (8) and Mary (4), would have to stay a little longer. If my age was changed to 16, I would be permitted to be in charge of two minors. Our parents regretfully accepted this offer, hoping for improvement before the next ship departed for Canada in fourteen days. None of us had any idea that it would take a year and three months for the children's eyes to heal. At last we were able to travel to Canada. We had left home in October 1925 and on January 27, 1927 arrived in Headingley where my parents had settled on a farm not far from the homes of Hans Braun and Heinrich Braun. They stayed there just over a year before moving to McCauley near the



Gerhard & Justina (Martens) Friesen family, from left (back): Sonja, David, Peter, George, Nick, Henry, Arthur, Mary; (front): Edward, Katja, Mother Justina, Father Gerhard, Helen, Elizabeth.

Saskatchewan border. It must have been difficult to live so far away from relatives and friends in Headingley which at that time still had street car service from Winnipeg. My mother died on January 17, 1945; my father on October 15, 1966.

I married Peter Giesbrecht, who died after only eight years of marriage, leaving me with five children. It was hard to raise a family of this size by myself during the post-Depression years, but with hard work and optimism we came through somehow. All the children turned out well and are the delight of my later years. I now have the good fortune of living in a senior citizens apartment close to my church where I can enjoy the company of several of my cousins and friends from my early youth.

A Letter from Atlantic Park

Following is a letter which I wrote during the year it took for Sonja and Mary's eyes to heal from trachoma.

Sunday, September 19, 1926
Atlantic Park, Southampton, England

Dear Lena, so far, far away!!

Let me wish you the best of health and well-being in your new homeland. Until now we too, thank God, have been able to enjoy good health. You, dear Lena, have not forgotten me. I always thought you would be having such good times there that you wouldn't have time to think of us. Yesterday I received your letter which is so precious to me. Many thanks. At first I thought the letter was from my parents, but then I looked again and it was from you. How happy I am that someone is still thinking of us although we are in the Park. May the dear God soon make it possible for us to get out of here.

On the eighth of October it will be a year that we've had to stay here, a long time which has required much patience. At long last my turn has come and at least I was able to send one sister to our parents—how happy I am that she could go. I think she must have arrived at home in Canada the day before yesterday. I had an excellent opportunity to send her along with David Martens [her mother's brother] from Einlage. They came here and had Melita Braun [a cousin] with them. The child, aged five, has passed through Atlantic Park and is on the way to her parents now. How happy Brauns will be when they can take her in their arms again at last. And our parents will also be so glad that my little sister, Mariechen, is home, and yet they will be sad because we could not all come home together. But it is the Lord's will. Surely our release will come some time; we feel that the end of our stay cannot be too far away, the eyes must surely be healed soon. Some people have been sent here from Lager Lechfeld in Germany; it is said they are here to get their eyes

cured. Some people are here—eighteen in all—who emigrated in 1923 and still are not accepted for Canada; their eyes are not completely cured. We saw Dr. Drury again recently. Of the people with diseased eyes who have been here for two months or several weeks, many have been able to leave, but of our old group who have been here so long not one has passed the test. If at least one of us were able to leave, we would have hope again, but not one, absolutely not one, has been released. Those who did pass are to depart for Canada next week, and many others will take their places. I hate to see these scenes. When our parents left for Canada, we were detained ostensibly for one week only until the next ship was leaving. How unhappy we were when our parents and other siblings boarded the ocean-steamer and we had to remain, standing disconsolately on the pier below. But we still hope and believe that we have spent the longest part of our time here by now. It is such a little thing for the Lord to heal our eyes when he wills it and the time of our release has come. That is our solace when times are difficult. When a minister who was emigrating passed through here, he told us: When the hours, the time, is right, help breaks forth with strength and might . . . and the hour will strike for us also when the time is right. We must always hope for the best; the worst will come by itself.

You ask in your letter how we spend the time. We don't have much to do here. Things like laundry, mending and darning stockings provide daily tasks. When little Mariechen was here, I had more work. I felt terrible when she was put into the hospital for a while. She spent four months there and had to undergo an operation. At present, several children have been hospitalized again, either measles or chicken pox cases. Usually the children are kept there for a week. The day before yesterday there was a funeral of a child who had died in the hospital. I didn't go. It is very sad. The father is sitting in the garden behind the castle—he is so sad because his wife is also in the hospital. She could not attend the funeral, nor could she see her child because it died of a contagious disease: measles. I'm so glad that Mariechen recovered from her illness. If nothing unusual happened on the journey across the Atlantic, she will likely be at home by now and will be talking incessantly about her life here and what went on in her four months of hospitalization.

Meanwhile, nearly all the people from Grigorievka have passed through our camp. Only one old man was detained: Onkel Redekop, with Lena, and Anna Sawatzky. And the day before yesterday Onkel Redekop was declared free to continue on his journey to Canada so he too will leave next week. The old man is so very happy. How happy we will be when we are finally declared fit to go! Then, what a happy, happy meeting we shall have with our loved ones—it will be indescribable. How glad we would be if we could go home for Christmas! But I don't think we'll be able to leave before then. All we

talk about is home and ask: "When will we be able to go?" And our parents ask again and again: "When will we see you home at last?" We must give it time and we will get home.

For a while I saw a football game through the window; I love to watch the game. We often play our guitars and sing together to while the time away; we really enjoy this music-making. You asked in your letter whether I kept our guitar with me. Yes I did just that. We German-speaking young people have seven guitars altogether. It's such a good feeling to play together.

I imagine you all have to work hard over there and we know nothing of what is going on. Our parents are also having a very hard time, yet I can do nothing to help them. I wrote them earlier today and hope there will be a letter from them tomorrow. Do you still have the friend with whom you spent so much time? I have found three friends here. We girls spend all our time together and consider ourselves a family. We also share a room. We have become so close that it would be difficult for us if one of us should be allowed to leave before the rest.

Lena, is short hair considered very stylish? Do you always get your hair cut? I haven't cut mine so far, but Suse Braun [a cousin] writes that I should get it cut as soon as I get to Canada. I don't know if I will.

I have provided you with a great deal of reading—such a long letter, you'll find it too much. Do you often get letters from our old *Heimat* (homeland)? I must write some, since I haven't answered the letters I received a long time ago. They have answered every one of my letters but I am too lazy to write. The first thing I will write them is an apology. Are there some other acquaintances in the village where you live [Gruenthal]?

Well, I must close this letter. Loving thoughts and kisses from your loving friend.

Katja Friesen

P.S. Please greet your mama and siblings warmly and also any acquaintances that may be there.

Ade, ade! Auf wiedersehen! (Goodbye, goodbye, until we meet again.)

Chapter 11

HEINRICH AND JACOB FROESE FAMILIES

Elfie Krahn

Heinrich A. Froese (d. 1920)

Heinrich was the eleventh child born to Aron and Aganetha Froese. He was a twin to Jacob and had a prominent humpback. Heinrich is remembered as a very kind, gentle person, “quiet and easy-going,” say his grandchildren. He became a wealthy farmer in Russia with several hired servants. The family recalls that their home was built partially below ground level and that the Froese family had numerous fruit trees. Heinrich died in 1920 in Grigorievka, probably of tuberculosis.

Sara Unger, wife of Heinrich A., was born on August 17, 1859 in Niederchortitza, Russia, to Jacob and Helen (Klassen) Unger, the fourth of eleven children. Nothing is known of her younger life although it is believed her parents homesteaded. She and Heinrich Froese married in 1881.

In 1926 Sara, along with her daughter, Sara, son-in-law Wilhelm Buhler, and other relatives, emigrated from Russia to Winkler, Manitoba. She left Russia quite wealthy and lived the rest of her life at the homes of her children, mainly with her daughter Sara and family. For a time she shared a room with her granddaughter Ellie so she had little privacy



Aron & Aganetha Froese family: (front left): Aron & Aganetha Froese; their children, from left (back): Peter A. Froeses, Heinrich A. Froeses, Jacob A. Froeses; (front right): David Froeses.



The Grigorievka residence of Heinrich Froese, a typical house-barn complex.

during the latter years. Ellie was seventeen years old when her grandmother died. During Sara's last days, her daughters Sara, Aganetha and Katharina sat with her day and night. Sara probably did not help much with the farm work; she would not have been expected to. However, her grandchildren remember her doing handwork such as knitting.

Sara's life goal was perfection in herself which she never felt she achieved. However, it is said one never saw her with one hair out of place. Her clothing always fit perfectly. She is remembered as having a sense of humour and a lot of pride. She passed away in 1945 at her daughter Sara's house.



Sara (Unger) Froese and family, from left (back): John Sawatzky, Wilhelm Buhler, Abram, Peter, Isaak Schellenberg; (front): Susanna Sawatzky, Sara Buhler, Mother Sara, Sara Froese, Anna Froese, Katharina Schellenberg.

Peter Heinrich Froese (Mar. 14, 1887–Dec. 14, 1970)

married Sept. 26, 1913 to Anna Baerg (Dec. 26, 1892–Feb. 20, 1985)

Memoirs by a daughter

My father was born to Heinrich and Sara Froese in Neurosengart, Russia. At the age of two, his parents with approximately twenty other families established the village of Grigorievka. This is where he received his schooling and farmed with his father and brothers. There he met my mother, Anna Baerg. They were married on September 26, 1913 by her father, Rev. Jacob W. Baerg who, with his wife and family, moved to Grigorievka in 1901. Grandfather Baerg was a minister there until 1926 when they came to Canada.

Those days married children lived at the home of their parents and helped work the land. My parents also lived a few years with a widow Funk in Petrovka when her children were young. They moved back to Grigorievka and built a house in what was called the Third Row, where they lived until they emigrated to Canada in the fall of 1925. The war and revolution years had taken a toll so with heartbreak and fear of the unknown, leaving behind family and all they had worked for, they set sail with faith in God to start over in Canada.

They spent one-and-a-half years in the Winkler, Manitoba, area, then rented a farm together with the W. P. Buhlers, dad's sister and family, at Boissevain, Manitoba. The following year they rented a farm on their own—one-and-a-half miles north of Boissevain—where they farmed until the spring of 1936. Those were hard years, learning a new language, surviving crop failures and enduring sickness. In the spring of 1936 they moved to a farm north of Ninga, Manitoba, where they stayed until 1952. In fall they retired to the town of Boissevain where they spent the rest of their days.

All six of their children were born in the village of Grigorievka. They were a very close happy family. Dad nearly died of typhoid fever but a miracle brought him back. Their second child, a daughter, Sara, was born premature and died. Then years later in 1926 their fifth child, a daughter, Anna, had measles and pneumonia and died. After their move to north of Boissevain in 1928, things settled down until mother had to be taken to Brandon for gall bladder surgery. She was there for two months and dad had to learn to bake bread and take care of other household duties. Of course, I who was only four years old tagged along wherever he went.

In the years 1931–1932 our grandparents Baerg came to live with us. Grandma was such a joy; she was a very quiet lady. Grandpa was very enterprising. In fact, he would go to the “nuisance grounds,” known now as the “dump,” and come home with all sorts of goods. He brought home a Model T Ford, frames and tins of all kinds. Eventually they built a



Peter & Anna (Baerg) Froese with family in 1963 at their 50th wedding anniversary.

blacksmith shop where he spent hours making lead buttons, cookie cutters, doll dishes, plus sharpening plough shears and mending harnesses. The shop was built so sturdily that it stood until 1993—sixty-two years later.

In 1938, dad and mother celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary on the farm at Ninga. Since they lived far away from our home church at Whitewater, a small group had services in homes. Rev. A. G. Neufeld, a neighbour, was minister and my father who loved music and singing was one of the *Vorsänger* (song leaders) in the church. When more Mennonite families moved into the area, a church in Ninga was rented. It served us well until 1962. At that time we amalgamated with the Boissevain Whitewater Church. In September of 1963 my parents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in the church.

There were sad times and good times and through it all there was their love and faith in God. Dad passed away December 14, 1970 at age 83. Mother lived alone in their home for fourteen more years. She passed away February 20, 1985. So closed the chapter of their lives, but we go on with them in our hearts till the end of our days.

David Froese (June 30, 1888–1960)

married Feb. 1, 1915 to Liesa Enns

David Froese was born on June 30, 1888 in Neurosengart, Russia and married Liesa Enns on February 1, 1915. He was a farmer by trade. David was listed as missing on one record and as “died in Russia in 1960” in another record. Liesa, known as “Lies,” practised as a midwife in Russia. She raised her granddaughter, Elizabeth, Sonja’s child. From 1945 to 1948 parcels were sent to Liesa and Sonja in Russia by the

families. Sonja's extended family paid her passage to come to Canada. Around 1966 Sonja paid the passage for her mother and daughter to join her. This family resided in Winnipeg where Sonja died of cancer in 1990. The descendants all live in Manitoba.

Aganetha Froese (Jan. 8, 1890–Apr. 23, 1987)

married June 20, 1910 to Jakob Braun (Sept. 8, 1888–Nov. 30, 1922)
remarried 1926 to John Pankratz (d. Aug. 21, 1961)

Aganetha was born in Grigorievka, Jakob Braun in Osterwick. They lived in Germany 1910–1912 while Jakob was studying as an engineer. Their daughter Neta was born there. After Jakob finished studying they returned to Russia where he worked as an engineer. Neta has happy childhood memories of the early years in Russia. She recalls enjoyable times with friends and family in the Russian village. Two specific memories are prominent: the first is all the fruit orchards in the village; the second, her fascination she with watching the marching bands in the villages. All that changed with the war and Revolution.

Following are excerpts from Neta's memoirs:

With World War I underway, things were very bad in 1916 when my sister Katherine was born; they were even worse when Helen was born in 1919. As the war ended, there was uncertainty as to who would attack next. Then came famine and typhoid fever. Many people died of hunger and fever. My father's job was also in jeopardy and his health was failing. He continued to work as an engineer as long as he was able. At the time of the Revolution our household was raided by bandits. They came to collect jewellery and other valuables. They wanted my father's wedding band, but he had lost it in the Dniepr River. The bandits did not believe him, so they threatened my mother. With father's persuasion mother finally gave up her wedding band to spare his life. I was wearing gold earrings at the time. Father told me to keep them hidden under a head covering so the bandits would not see them. The bandits had my parents each in separate rooms and we children were in a different room. They finally left with our valuables, but they had not found my earrings.

Father's failing health eventually forced him to give up his job. Mother carried on her work as a seamstress to support herself and her family. Father died in November 1922 in Grigorievka. He had asked me to be a support to mother and help with my sisters. Mother held me to this promise until her dying day. This changed my childhood years. My school days were not much fun. Mother took in sewing to make a living. I had to clean, shop, cook the meals and do the mending for us all. There was little money to spend, no time to play with friends or read a book unless it was school work.

Mother and her children emigrated to Canada on January 16, 1926

and initially lived in Winkler, Manitoba. She worked as a seamstress there for many years. My sisters and I attended school in Winkler where we started to learn the English language. In Winkler mother met and married John Pankratz, a widower.

[Thus far Neta's memoirs]

There were no children from Aganetha's second marriage to John Pankratz. According to information received, the children of John Pankratz's first marriage, four sons and three daughters, all live in the United States. After Aganetha and John's marriage in 1926 they moved to Swift Current, Saskatchewan, where John was a carpenter. There was no church there so they met in family homes for services. After a year they moved to Moose Jaw until 1929, then moved to Drake, Saskatchewan. Initially they lived in town and then moved to a farm. Neta met her future husband, Henry Neufeld, at Drake. During these years John contacted the Board of Colonization in Rosthern in regards to the money that was owing for the family's fare to Canada. They learned that Aganetha's passage had been paid, but the three daughters' had not. In 1930 Neta left home to work in Saskatoon where she worked for ten dollars a week and sent the first five weeks of wages to her family to pay for the ship passage for herself and her two sisters. She kept the sixth week of wages for herself. This pattern continued until the entire debt was paid.

From Drake the family moved to Fork River near Winnipegosis, Manitoba. This move was very difficult. All their possessions were loaded onto wagons and the livestock was chased on foot from one destination to the next. From there the family moved to Brokenhead, Manitoba. This was another difficult move. Daughter Helen drove the other team. Aganetha and Katherine walked the entire distance chasing the livestock. Eventually they moved to a small acreage along the Red River to what is now St. Mary's Road in Winnipeg. They had a vegetable garden, chickens and cattle. They lived there for approximately thirteen years until the Red River flood in 1950 when they lost everything. John had gone outside to check the status of the flood and turned around and found the river coming up from behind the house. They did not have time to save any livestock or possessions. The government initiated evacuation orders and Aganetha was on the last bus that came out of the flood zone. She was taken to Portage la Prairie since she had not mentioned that she had a daughter in Winnipeg. John and Aganetha eventually lived with Aganetha's sister and husband, the Wilhelm Buhlers, for one month. Then they moved to Young Street in Winnipeg. After John's death in August 1961, Aganetha lived with her grandson Ernie for a period of

time. Eventually she moved to Arlington House where she lived until her death in 1987.

Abraham Froese (Oct. 12, 1891–Sept. 28, 1970)

married Sept. 13, 1920 to Sara Bartel (Mar. 26, 1891–Dec. 28, 1962)

Abraham, born on October 12, 1891 in Grigorievka, was raised on an affluent farm with his family and received an education as a bookkeeper. He worked in a store in Russia and, according to his sister, was considered to be the most educated sibling in the family. By today's standards he would have attained high school standing. He was baptized in the Mennonite faith on May 12, 1912 and married Sara Bartel on September 13, 1920. In their first years of marriage, daughters Sarah and Olga were born.

During World War I Abraham served in the medical corps. Due to the communist takeover, the Mennonites were leaving their homes for freedom in Canada. Abraham and his family left in 1925, but Sara broke her leg on the way and they had to return to her parental home. In April of 1926, Abraham, Sara, their daughters and their mother left Russia on the *S.S. Melita* from Latvia to Liverpool and arrived at Montreal, Quebec. From there they travelled by train to Winkler, Manitoba, where they were hired as farm hands on Frank Peters' farm. Their daughter, Ellie, was born in 1927. They remained in Winkler for about a year, then moved to New Barkfield, Manitoba, and bought a farm. They worked hard raising cattle, sheep, hogs, poultry, grain and fodder. Their daughter Katie was born in 1930.

In 1943 Abraham was ordained as a minister in Elim Church, Grunthal, where he served for twenty-five years. In 1950 Abraham and Sara retired to Grunthal where they raised chickens, sold eggs and had a big garden of strawberries. Both died in Steinbach, Sara in 1962, Abraham in 1970.

Helena Froese (Dec. 28, 1892–Oct. 15, 1915)

Helena was born in Grigorievka and died there at age 22. She suffered from typhoid fever. She was ill for seven weeks. The family had contacted her fiancé who was serving in the war during that time, but he was unable to get home to see her before she died. They had planned to marry after he returned from military service. He was killed during the war.

Jacob A. Froese

Lena Hoffman (granddaughter)

In 1890 Jacob Aron and Maria (Warkentin) Froese were newly married. They lived comfortably on their seventy-dessiatin farm in the village of Grigorievka. Jacob was a carpenter by trade. They lived through the reign of terror. In one instance, the bandits came in, put their second son against the wall and were going to shoot him when Grandmother intervened. She stood in front of her son and said, “Don’t shoot him, shoot me instead. He’s not ready to die.” Dumbfounded, the bandits left. Because of Maria’s health, the family was not able to emigrate in 1925–1926. But they sold their land and home and moved to Friedensfeld in 1928. Maria died that same year. Jacob and Maria Froese had nine children.

Maria Froese (1891–1984)

married to Gerhard Aron Wiebe

remarried 1928 to Abram Frank Sawatzky

Maria, the first born, married Gerhard Aron Wiebe. After service in the war, Gerhard returned home sick. He died after nine years of marriage. They had five children—one son, Aron, died after birth; Anna died two months after Maria’s husband Gerhard passed away. Life became difficult for Maria and food was scarce. Sometimes she hung the bread basket on the ceiling before she went to work. The hungry children would put a chair on the table to get a few slices of dry bread while mother was away. Her strong faith and trust in God always sustained her. Determination and God’s leading helped her in those troubled years to leave her homeland, family and friends for a new home in Canada, an unknown country. What a gigantic undertaking! In October 1925 she and her three children, Mary, Jacob and George, arrived at relatives near Altona, Manitoba. Her youngest son was allowed to stay with her while the older two had to go elsewhere.

In 1928 she married Abram Frank Sawatzky. He was a widower with one daughter, Katherine. Two more children, Lena and Abe, were born into this marriage. They moved to a farm where they continued to work hard to make ends meet. God as her fortress and the church her community allowed Maria to strive ahead. She organized a ladies’ sewing and Bible study group with the neighbours and in summer she led a Sunday school with the children for a few years. Because of her husband’s health, they moved to Lowe Farm in 1940 where life was considerably easier. After twenty-two years of her second marriage, she was widowed again in 1950. Their youngest son, Abe, died in 1991. In 1970, Maria



Children of Jacob & Maria (Warkentin) Froese: Jacob & Anna (Janzen) Froese, Maria (Froese) Sawatzky, Katharina (Froese) & Abram P. Bartel.

moved to Salem Home in Winkler where she enjoyed the Christian atmosphere and services. She left a legacy of strong faith and prayers when she died in 1984.

Jacob Froese (1892–1966)

married to Anna Janzen

Jacob Froese had attended Zentralschule, excelled in mathematics and served in the medical corps during the war until he contracted typhus. He and his wife Anna Janzen set out to emigrate to Canada via Riga in 1926. Because of Anna's eye problems, they had to go to Mexico for three months where a son was born. Later they went to Manitoba, then moved to Ontario where Jacob's sister, Aganetha, lived. Jacob's first interest was farming, but he was also an excellent carpenter, building homes, greenhouses and furniture. He was also a cobbler; he made as well as repaired shoes.

Jacob was a gentle, loving man with a keen sense of humour and provided well for his wife and family. He and Anna lived in harmony in Leamington until he died of a heart attack in 1966. Their children are: Anna and Nick Tiessen; Mary and John Tiessen; Jake and Irene Froese; Agnes Tiessen; Helen and John Bergen; Margaret and Ralph Tiessen; Katie Froese.

Aganetha Froese (1894–1983)

married 1921 to Gerhard Hamm (d. 1965)

Aganetha was born in 1894 in Grigorievka. She had three brothers and five sisters. In 1921 she married Gerhard Hamm and in 1927 they left Russia for Canada with their two children. One son, Walter, had

died. They settled in Ontario where Aganetha spent her life farming and raising a family of seven. She was a good seamstress and kept the family well clothed. She was a woman of courage. During the years of anarchy in Russia, she had kept at bay some soldiers who came into the family home to obtain her brother's gun. They began demolishing furniture and cutting the neatly piled bedding in the living room. "Do you think anyone would hide things in there? Why do you have to cut our bedding so that the feathers fly all over?" she boldly asked. They were so astounded that they left.

She liked travelling and visited her sisters in Manitoba at intervals. At the age of eighty, she flew to Palestine and talked about this tremendous experience for a long time. After her husband, Gerhard, died in 1965, Aganetha moved into town where she had three and a half years of excellent care in the Leamington Mennonite Home for the Aged. She died in 1983 after a short illness and was survived by their children: Ella and Walter Loucks; Mary and Paul Fast; George and Erica Hamm; Herman Hamm; Amy and John Dick; Edward and Betty Hamm.

Anna Froese (b. 1896)

married to Jacob Rempel

Anna (Froese) and Jacob Rempel had one son, Jacob. After her husband died Anna married Mr. Peters, a widower and teacher. He brought three children into this family and they had four more children. One day Peters left his wife Anna with the eight children and disappeared. What happened to Anna and her family is a mystery.

Katharina Froese (1898–1985)

married 1922 to Abram P. Bartel (1892–1960)

Katharina lived at home with her parents, Jacob and Maria Froese, her three brothers and five sisters, until she married Abram P. Bartel in September 1922.

Abram P. Bartel, son of Peter and Sara (Ens) Bartel, grew up in the village of Grigorievka. He worked on the family farm with his two brothers, Peter and David, and five sisters, Katherine, Sara, Helena, Margaret and Maria. During World War I, Abram was called into Red Cross Service at age twenty-two. While helping with the wounded, he encountered many difficult experiences. For instance, one time when he was carrying a wounded soldier on his back out of the danger zone, the soldier who was dying gripped his arms so tightly around Abram's neck that he was nearly choked to death.

Another incident that Abram often talked about was when he and a friend happened to be near a railway track. Unknown to them, this track

was broken. Just then a train came along, noticed the break and stopped in time. The train conductor with his men jumped out and immediately grabbed Abram and his friend and blamed them. A guard was ordered to watch over the two until the Russians would come back with ammunition and shoot them. But the guard continually dozed off. Abram pleaded with his friend, "Let's run," but the friend refused, claiming, "We are not guilty, therefore nothing can happen to us." However, Abram saw an opportunity to escape so he ran off into the woods alone. No one ever saw or heard of the friend again. One can only assume what happened. To the best of our knowledge, Abram served with the Red Cross until the end of World War I.

In September 1922, Abram married Katharina Froese. One daughter was born to them in Grigorievka in 1924. By then the political situation was already critical. There was much talk about moving to Canada. Many families had already emigrated. So the family followed in 1925, travelling on the *Montnairn*. They landed in St. John's on December 20, 1925, and ended up in Gretna, Manitoba. They were placed on the Guenther farm where they stayed for two years. Abram did the field work while Katharina helped with cooking and baking in the home. The Guenthers were a compassionate, loving, Christian family. The Bartels were accepted as part of their family and always referred to them as our "Canadian parents." This closeness carried on even after they went out on their own.

In 1927, Abram bought a farm in Pansy, Manitoba, where four more children were born: Mary, Abe, Peter and Sadie. The land was very stony with lots of bush. They raised mostly sheep and some cattle. Sheep shearing time was a memorable event. Katharina washed the wool till it was all white. After it was completely dry, she and the children would sit around a big tub of white wool, pull it apart and card it into small rectangles. The children always looked forward to helping Katharina with this work while she told them Bible stories about the love of Jesus.

During the 1930s, the Depression and farming difficulties descended on the family. In 1938 they left the farm and moved to Steinbach. Abram found employment as a sales clerk in Vogt Bros. General Store. He also worked for H.W. Reimer's General Store and C.T. Kroeker Texaco Oil as bookkeeper.

The Bartels were founding members of the Steinbach Mennonite Church. Abram was the treasurer and bookkeeper for about twenty years until ill health forced him to give it up. He died on February 3, 1960. Daughter Mary also predeceased her mother.

Katharina Bartel was a kind, loving, jovial individual. She continued to live in her home with her two youngest daughters until she died in

1985. She is survived by her children: Kay Birmingham; Abe and Betty Bartel; Pete and Leona Bartel; Sadie Bartel; Marge Bartel.

Heinrich Froese (1900–1994)

Heinrich Froese helped his older sisters and brothers emigrate. He too had sold his property with intentions of going to America when he was told in Moscow that emigrations were discontinued. Since Grigorievka ceased to be a Mennonite village in 1926, he and his wife, Mila, bought a house in Zagradovka. From 1929 to 1940 Heinrich served on the town council in different capacities, from secretary treasurer to president, but war was threatening. On August 12, 1941, sixty-eight men from the village were mobilized, including Heinrich, his brother Peter and brother-in-law Abram Derksen.

Heinrich and Mila had six children: Heinrich, who died in 1946; Mika died in the 1960s; Elsa and Andrew Schmidt now live in Espelkamp, Germany; Jacob died in 1954 in a train accident; Ira and Johann Wiebe also live in Espelkamp, Germany. Elvira died in infancy.

Heinrich Froese recorded the following in October 1990 at their home in Espelkamp, Germany:

There were 16- to 55-year-old men—all horses, wagons, everything was taken out of the village. The cattle were driven out while about seventy-five people were evacuated. We wanted to drive to Molotschna, but came to the Dniepr River. I tried to swim across, but the current was too strong so I waited until a barge came. We got to an island in the middle of the river at night and stayed there until morning. We were afraid that perhaps the Dniepr could rise and six metre-high waves could drown us. We heard bombing but didn't know what caused it. During daytime hours we went across the stream to register, but this was unnecessary, with no *Komat* here. They took twenty-five of our men to a big city and then sent them farther to distant places.

We were hired by a coal mine which had a mill and a bakery. Men had already left for the coal mine ten kilometres away when suddenly some officials came along and took twelve- to thirteen-year-old boys with them. When the men came back and met the officials, they were taken and the boys were sent home. Soon twenty-five more men were taken and sent to Krasnatarinsk with the others. There were now only seven men left. I escaped across the fence and was hired as a helper to look after horses. One day when I returned from doing an errand to get kerosene in Stalinov, I learned that all the rest of the men had been taken away. I alone was left.

Then we were all asked to evacuate. I waited to be put on a train with many others. When we were finally loaded, there were one-and-

a-half thousand in one train, mostly women and children. The men were gone. In a few days we were all infested with lice.

For weeks we travelled to the far north, then were put on a ship that took us to the Kogas area. There we were put to work on building a railway at Shidladovisk. The work was too hard for me, and I was dismissed. In turn, I worked as a carpenter, a blacksmith, a locksmith, and finally as a bookkeeper, which I enjoyed.

One day I got a letter from my son. He had been captured as a traitor and taken from Poland back to Russia where he remained in a concentration camp. Through correspondence with my sister-in-law in our village I got in touch with my son Henry and my wife Mila, who had been sent back to Kazakhstan from Poland. I had no knowledge of my family's whereabouts between 1941 and 1946.

[Thus far Heinrich Froese's memories]

After her husband was taken away, Mila was alone with five children. In 1943 they were sent to Poland until 1945. Then the Russians captured Poland and sent them to Kazakhstan. There she lived mostly on prayers. Mornings she went to work without bread; she took the bread home for the children. One of the daughters said they often went to fish in the nearby river and miraculously always caught enough fish to survive.

In 1945 Heinz, the oldest, was taken to the Trudarmee at age eighteen. When the Poles came at night he cried bitterly, but to no avail. He told us to keep praying for him—those were his last words. Mila thought she would lose her mind, not knowing whether her husband was still alive and now her oldest son, her only support, being taken from her too. In almost every letter her son wrote, “No sea without water, no forest without trees, no night can I sleep but I dream of you, dear mother.”

In 1945 Mila and her four children got their freedom and arrived in Kazakhstan. They brought word to Heinrich's brother, Peter Froese, and the family was reunited in 1946. Son Heinz wrote a letter saying he was glad they were all with papa and how much he would like to be with them. Two weeks later they received a letter from his friend that they had buried Heinz. In 1953 Heinrich's son Jacob went to work on the railroad where he was run over by a train on a bitterly cold night. Then Mila, his wife, and his daughter Mika, became ill and died.

Some time later Heinrich married Helene and they moved to Espelkamp, Germany. Helene died in 1993 and Heinrich in 1994 at age 94. The highlight of their later years perhaps was the visit to Heinrich's sisters and their families in Canada in 1978—a blessed reunion after many years of sorrow and grief.

Helena Froese (1902–1969)

Helena Froese was born in 1902 in the village of Grigorievka, where she lived with her family until 1928. Since most of the villagers sold their properties to the Russians and moved to America in 1925 and 1926, the Froese family also sold their land. However, their mother was not well so they were not allowed to leave the country. Then they moved to Friedensfeld where Helena and her brother Peter bought a house. That same year their mother, Maria (Mrs. Jacob) Froese, died.

In 1943 they were evacuated and transported to Germany where Helena was employed as a caretaker in a school. In October 1944 she and her sister Margaret with her four children got their German citizenship papers.

In 1945 they were transferred to a village about twenty-five miles from Brandenburg near Berlin. Helena worked on a farm, but in October they were captured by the Russians and taken to a camp from where they were sent to Glassov, Ushevsk, in Siberia. There she worked in a railway brigade; in 1949 she was sent to work in a forest. That same year her sister Margaret was exiled for five years, so Helena looked after the four young children until 1954.

In 1956 they got their papers and their freedom. With her sister and family Helena moved to Krasnotvinsk. In May 1967 she came to Leamington, Ontario, but in July of the same year she moved to her sister Maria's home in Lowe Farm. She lived with her sister for two years until she died in August 1969.

Margaret Froese (b. 1907)

married to Abram Derksen (d. 1942)

Margaret and Abram Derksen had four children: Heinrich, Grete, Diedrich and Jacob. Jacob died in 1996 in Cologne, Germany. Margaret's husband was taken in August 1941 when the group of men were removed from the village. In February 1942 they received word that he had died. Then in the fall of 1949, because she had taken some potatoes for a soup for her family, Margaret was sent away for five years. The children were young so her sister Helena looked after them.

In 1954 Margaret came home. She had suffered very much. When she and her family came to visit her brother, he didn't recognize her. He stood and looked at her until Margaret's son, Heinrich, told them that this was their mother. Then he cried because she looked so bent, old and worried. In the 1970s they all moved to Germany, one family at a time. Now they are living quite comfortably and are very thankful for the miraculous way God has led and kept them.

Peter Froese (b. 1910)

Peter, the youngest of the Jacob Froese family, grew up in Grigorievka. In 1928 they sold the family home and moved to Friedensfeld. He shared the new home with his sister, Helena. In 1934 Peter married Maria. They had five children: Jacob, Peter, Tina, Heina and Hans.

Peter was a storekeeper and a minister. He and Maria celebrated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in December 1959. His brother and his wife, sister, and their families were all able to attend. Heinrich Froese said his brother Peter suffered more than he did. In the 1960s Peter had surgery and died after the operation.

Their daughter Tina and son Peter and their families were able to come to Germany in the late 1980s. In 1990 mother Maria and her son Hans emigrated to Germany. By 1994 the other two sons, Jacob and Heinz, and their families also moved to Germany.

Chapter 12

BERNHARD AND HELENA KRAHN FAMILY

Susan (Krahn) and Virgil Miller

Bernhard Krahn (Mar. 14, 1847–July 5, 1929)

married Feb. 14, 1870 to Helena Peters (Mar. 10, 1849–Jan.12, 1919)
remarried to Maria Martens (June 2, 1860–1948)

Bernhard Krahn, who was born on the family farm in Rosenthal, Chortitza, married Helena Peters on February 14, 1870. For five years after their marriage they lived in Georgsthal with Helena's parents. In 1889–1890 the new settlement of Grigorievka was founded in the district of Isium between the stations of Gavrilovka and Barvenkovo south of Kharkov. This was some distance east of Chortitza, Molotschna and Georgsthal. As the original villages expanded, there was a need for land, so approximately forty families moved to this new settlement. They were mostly from the Fuerstenland section of the Chortitza colony. Bernhard was one of the first settlers, coming last from Rosenbach in Fuerstenland where he had lived for a while.

Bernhard Krahn and the forty other families had farms on the main street of Grigorievka. The farmland was distributed around the village and on average consisted of about 190 acres. On the *Hof* (yard) was the main farm building in which the house and barn were built together in the fashion that was brought from Holland to West Prussia and from there to Russia. On the typical west side of the farmyard was the yard for the cattle with a narrow path leading to the street. From there the cows were taken to an outside pasture. On the other side was the place where grain was brought and threshed, in older times with a threshing stone. In this area were also granaries for wheat and sheds for farm equipment. In front of the house and farmyard near the street fruit trees were planted with only a narrow path from the house to the street.

Bernhard Krahn's wife died on January 12, 1919. After her death he married Maria Martens who was born June 2, 1860. They emigrated to Canada in the 1920s and lived at Reinland, Manitoba. Bernhard died July 5, 1929 and is buried in Reinland, Manitoba; Maria died in 1948.

Bernhard Krahn had eight children who were born in Fuerstenland and three who were born in Grigorievka. Four children died in infancy. The children were:

1. Katharina (Aug. 8, 1871–Feb. 4, 1872)



Bernhard & Helena (Peters) Krahn with the youngest sons, Johann (sitting) and Peter.

2. Nikolai (b. Feb. 27, 1873) married Margaretha Kruger. He was a farmer in Grigorievka (formerly his father's farm, inherited by the oldest son). He stayed in the village after his brother Cornelius emigrated to Canada. Cornelius had been elected as a minister in the congregation, but when he left for Canada, Nikolai served the church until nearly all the Mennonites had left the village. His son Abram emigrated to Canada and lived in British Columbia. He married Anna Neufeld. The rest of this family were all exiled to Siberia.

3. Katharina (Apr. 7, 1875– July 3, 1877), also named Katharina as was the custom when a child of the same name died in infancy. Her parents had moved from Georgsthal to Rosenbach on March 14, 1875.



Margaretha (Kruger) & Nikolai Krahn and family.

4. Katharina (b. Oct. 2, 1877)
married 1898 to Johann Rempel (1877–1938)
5. Bernhard (Jan. 1, 1880–Dec. 21, 1922)
m. Jan. 22, 1908 to Katrina Bartel (Aug. 16, 1887–Mar. 15, 1942)
6. Jakob B. Krahn (June 11, 1881–1938)
married Jan. 16, 1903 to Elizabeth Neufeld (d. 1973)
7. Cornelius B. Krahn (Feb. 16, 1883–Jan. 24, 1975)
married Sept. 12, 1910 to Maria Neufeld (Sept. 15, 1891–July 11, 1969)
8. Peter (Oct. 16, 1885–Feb. 9, 1887)
9. Another Peter (Dec. 9, 1890–Oct. 28, 1892)
10. Johann B. Krahn (Jan. 11, 1894–Jan. 4, 1920)
married Sept. 16, 1918 to Sara Froese (July 8, 1894–1965)
11. Peter B. Krahn (May 10, 1896–1964)
married June 28, 1919 to Justina Peters (b. Sept. 30, 1898)



The six sons of Bernhard & Helena Krahn, from left: Johann, Nikolai, Bernhard, Cornelius, Jakob, Peter.

Katharina Krahn (b. Oct. 2, 1877)

married to Johann Rempel (1877–1938)

Katharina Krahn married Johann Rempel, a Mennonite Brethren minister. In 1905 Johann moved his family from southern Russia to farm in the newly settled Orenburg district. In 1910 the Mennonite Brethren Church at Klubnikovo elected him as pastor. When the collectivization of farmlands began in 1929 and religion became noticeably more restricted, he decided to emigrate to Canada and went to Moscow to procure emigration papers. However, in 1930 he was arrested and,

together with his son Johann, exiled for a three-year period to Archangelsk on the White Sea. In the same year he was transferred to a camp in the northeastern area of European Russia.

After four years Johann was released and returned home, but shortly thereafter the family resettled at Einlage in southern Russia. He was arrested the second time on a charge of high treason. However, after seven months of detention pending investigation, he was released.

When Johann's second wife, Katharina Hiebert, died he married the widow, Maria Klassen. On July 20, 1938 he was arrested for the third time. Since then there has been no trace of him. Fellow prisoners have reported that he endured very severe circumstances while living in confinement. It is quite safe to assume that he died in prison in 1938.

Johann Rempel had two children: Hans who married Ingeborg Schultz—they retired to Kiel, Germany; and Lena who married Peter W. Martens—they lived in Saskatchewan.

Hans Rempel (1909–1990), son of Johann and Katharina, was born January 27, 1909 in the village of Rodnichinoie in the Orenburg district. His father was a well-known minister (see A.A. Toews, *Mennonitische Märtyrer*, vol. 1 [1949]: 160–164). In 1930 Hans and his father were both arrested and exiled to Archangelsk on the White Sea in the Arctic Ocean. Hans lived with Russians in logging barracks outside the city and served this group as a translator. A sailor from a foreign ship persuaded Hans to stow aboard and escape from Russia. The ship took him first to England and then to Germany. There he earned his doctorate in philoso-



Katharina (Krahn) & Johann Rempel family, from left (back): Katharina, Lena, Anna; (front): Mother Katharina with Bernhard, Elisabeth, Father Johann, Hans.

phy, theology and history. He studied at St. Crischona near Basel and in Berlin.

On December 13, 1941 Hans married Ingeborg Schultz. During World War II he served in the German army, at first in France with the cavalry, then in Ukraine with the occupying forces. He served as liaison officer, translator and administrator in the Chortitza colony. After the war Hans entered the state church system and worked as a pastor in the Evangelische (Lutheran) Church in Kiel until retirement. He helped organize a Mennonite church in Kiel and served this congregation. Hans was a whole person (“ein ganzer Mensch”); whatever he undertook he did thoroughly. He wrote extensively. Just before his death, he completed his autobiography, “Eigen war mein Weg” (unpublished). A first book, *Deutsche Bauernleistung am Schwarzen Meer* was published in 1940. He died on October 9, 1990.

Bernhard B. Krahn (Jan. 1, 1880–Dec. 21, 1922)

married Jan. 22, 1908 to Katrina Bartel (Aug. 16, 1887–Mar. 15, 1942)

Elsa Martens

Bernhard B. Krahn was born January 1, 1880. In 1914 or 1915, when he was doing alternative service in forestry (*Forstei*), he had a serious accident from which he did not recover. He returned home a sick man but had acquired a new skill: doing fancy woodwork, making small furniture, fancy jewellery boxes, spice boxes and clothes brushes. In the year of famine he made many coffins. While he was in the *Forstei*, his wife tried to run the farm with hired help, but it didn't work out well. So Grandpa Bartel helped sell the farm to some Shellenbergs and moved his family on to the place in a smaller house on his yard (*Nebenhaus*). While mother had to milk the cow and work in the garden and the oldest four children were in school, I (Elsa) looked after the youngest two. She had instructed us to hide if strangers came to the house. But nothing ever happened, so one time when my aunt came from next door, I had to try out my hiding place. I was scolded and often reminded of my wrong doing.

Father died on December 21, 1922. Now mother was a widow which meant raising seven children by herself. The communist regime had been established; the land all belonged to the country and there were limits on personal property. At this point God's Word was mother's only reason for living and it too was now forbidden. Grandpa Bartel planned for her to emigrate to America. Some of her Krahn in-laws had left earlier. Mother left a very simple list of dates when this all came about: leaving Grigorievka on September 18, 1925; arriving in Winnipeg on October 19; and the next day, October 20, going on to Arnaud on a very cold



Katharina & Bernhard Krahn, Sr., (seated, centre) with Katrina (Mrs. Bernhard B.) Krahn (to their right) and Cornelius B. Krahn families. From left (back): Cornelius B. Krahn, Abram B., Ben C., Lena B., Maria C., Tina B., Sara B., Cornelius C.; (centre, left): Marie (Mrs. Cornelius B.) Krahn with Fred C.; (front): Margarete B., Neta C., Ben B., George C., Elsa B.

night. On November 8, 1925, Uncle Cornelius Krahn came to take us to Reinland. We stayed there until April 6, 1927, when Grandpa Peter Bartel came from Russia and moved us to New Barkfield. On February 7, 1930 we moved to Grunthal.

It was very cold when we arrived in Canada. From the train station in Arnaud to the John Sawatsky farm we had to sit on the floor of a box wagon which was used for hauling grain and had no springs. It had rained and the deep ruts on the road were frozen hard. This was our new country? The Sawatsky children had the measles, so of course we got them right away too. Their house had only two rooms so the oldest four children had to go to neighbours to help in the house or on the farm in exchange for their food and a place to sleep. For everyone to be sent to a different house was a traumatic experience for the twins since they never had been separated, even for a night—they had slept in one bed, ate out of one bowl and sat side by side in school.

In 1932 mother married Abram Driedger, a widower with six children. She had six children from her first marriage and one from her second. She died in 1942.

Children of Bernhard and Katrina (Bartel) Krahn

Abram Krahn (Oct. 26, 1908–Apr. 24, 1978)

married Oct. 31, 1937 to Nettie Peters (b. Jan. 10, 1913)

Children of Abram and Nettie Krahn:

1. Susan Katharine (b. Sept. 23, 1938)
2. Elsie Margaret (b. June 30, 1941)
3. Hildegard Helene b. Feb. 13, 1943)
4. Agnes Irene (b. Sept. 10, 1945)
5. Elfrieda (b. June 11, 1947)

Abram was the oldest son of Bernhard and Katrina (Bartel) Krahn; he was born in Grigorievka, Russia. In October 1925 at age seventeen, Abram, together with his mother, sisters and brother emigrated to Canada. His mother bought the first farm in Pansy and relied on Abram for all the heavy work. They later purchased a farm in Grunthal where Abram remained. On October 31, 1937 he married Neta Peters who was born in Arkadak, Russia, to Isbrand and Susanna (Dueck) Peters. Neta emigrated to Canada together with her parents, children and grandmother in August 1925. They lived in Eichenfeld and Morris. She worked as a maid in Winnipeg for six years. Together Abram and Neta farmed in the Grunthal area for forty years. They were active in church and community work, helping whenever possible. Abram also sang in a men's group in church for many years. Together they were fortunate to celebrate anniversaries and raise five wonderful girls. They also enjoyed some tours and travel. Abram died April 24, 1978.

Lena Krahn (b. Dec. 16, 1909)

married 1932 to John Driedger (b. Sept 21. 1908)

Children of Lena and John Driedger

1. Lena (b. Jan.3. 1934)
2. Albert (b. Jan. 18, 1936)
3. John J. (b. Mar. 10, 1938)
4. Eleanor (b. Dec. 10, 1940)
5. Johanna (b. May 9, 1943)
6. Alfred (b. Mar. 9. 1946)
7. Victor (b. Feb 22, 1954)

Lena was born in Grigorievka and came to Canada with her family in October 1925. She worked in Winnipeg doing house work. She could not always come home and therefore gathered at the *Mädchenheim* (girls' home). Many girls working in the city met there for companionship and to console each other. Lena married John Driedger, eldest son of her step-father Abram Driedger.

John was born in 1908 in Schoenfeld. He came to Canada in July 1924. John's family had little money while he still lived at home and had to find ways to earn enough to pay for the taxes. At one point John took a team of horses on to Highway 52 and, from the Kleefeld corner one mile toward Steinbach, he worked for a whole week dragging dirt with a scoop. He drove a box wagon to the job site in which he had feed for the horses and food for himself; this is also where he slept. The horses were watered at a farm with an artesian well. When this stretch of road was finished, they started on Highway 59. In fall John again had to work but this time with four horses hitched to a Fresno. Now one man drove the horses, another controlled the big scoop.

Lena and John were married in 1932 in Grunthal on Mother Krahn's farm. For the first year they lived with Abram Driedger, John's father, on the farm; then they moved into their own home where their oldest six children were born. John farmed together with his dad until July 1, 1946 when he purchased the farm. Victor, the youngest, was born there.

Lena spent a lot of time alone: John was Sunday school teacher and in 1939 was elected as choir director. He attended many courses, also sang in many *Sängerfests*. For many years he also was a song leader for the congregation. Lena had a big garden with a lot of flowers which she loved. God blessed the Driedgers with seven children and, after they all were married, Lena felt very lonely until the grandchildren arrived and came for holidays. John bought a boat and all spent memorable times together at their cabin at Moose Lake. The grandsons loved to go fishing with their Opa.

In John and Lena's later years they had opportunity to go on several wonderful trips. Their first tour with Ältester Lohrenz as leader will remain unforgettable. They flew from Holland to Nairobi, then to Egypt, Jerusalem and Rome—three wonderful weeks. The Passion Play in Oberammergau made a strong and reverent impression on them.

Sara Krahn (b. Aug. 3, 1911)

married January 1952 to Jake Derksen

Children of Sara and Jake Derksen:

1. Rudy M. (b. Apr 7, 1940)
2. Mary Lou (b. July 1, 1943)
3. Linda (b. April 8, 1946)

Growing up, Sara, together with her sisters, worked in the city doing housework. When all her sisters were married, she decided to work in the sewing factory. During the weekends she usually came to Grunthal and was a loving aunt to all her nieces and nephews, sometimes bringing a

small dress, shirt or sweater for a family member. When her mother became ill, Sara came home to attend and help her until she died. In church Sara taught Sunday school and sang in the choir for many years. Later she moved back to the city where she lived at Rev. and Mrs. John Enns's.

In 1951 Sara met Jake Derksen, a widower with three small children, from Leamington, Ontario—he was a cousin to Neta Derksen, Sara's good friend. He courted Sara and they decided to marry in the last week of January 1952. Jake and Sara asked friends from Canadian Mennonite Bible College to sing and play at their wedding which was to take place in Grunthal. The day of the wedding it was twenty-three degrees below with blowing snow but, despite the cold, everyone arrived to help celebrate. Their text emphasized how the Lord guided the Israelites by day and night. Jake and Sara agreed to take this message into their married life, to always remember when they were down. They went home to Leamington by bus, with friends and relatives supplying them with lunches and best wishes.

After they arrived Sara was introduced to her new family. Both were soon put to work as Sunday school teachers. After four years they were voted in as deacons for the church, and were installed on April 29, 1956. They served for twenty-five years at which time they were presented with a plaque in appreciation for their service. In 1984, Sara and Jake moved into the town of Leamington and eventually retired there. Sara volunteered many hours of her time to quilting and working in the local thrift shop; Jake helped in the workshop and took his turn reading devotions in the *Altenheim* (Seniors' Home). He also is part of a musical group that plays and sings regularly in the *Altenheim* and at other church gatherings. They had a good life together until Sara died. Jake continues to live at the same place and keeps active and involved.

Tina Krahn (b. Aug. 3, 1911)

married 1935 to Jacob Neufeld

Children of Tina and Jake Neufeld:

1. Jake (b. Dec. 13, 1936)
2. Werner (b. April 9, 1940)
3. John (b. Sept. 23, 1942)

I and my identical twin, Sara, were born on August 3, 1911 in Grigorievka. When we were little girls we spent a lot of time at our grandparents. Both Oma and Opa Krahn and Oma and Opa Bartel lived in our village. We went there a lot because our father worked in the *Forstei*, a military bush camp, making lumber. Opa Krahn's house had



Members of the extended Krahn family, from left (back): Freya Rempel, Linie (Krahn) Friesen, Ingeborg Rempel, Nettie (Mrs. Abram) Krahn, Ingomar Rempel; (front): John & Lena (Krahn) Driedger, Justina (Mrs. Peter B.) Krahn, Hans Rempel, Tina (Krahn) & Jacob Neufeld.

a large walnut tree in the front yard. He had snips with long handles to harvest the nuts in fall. We would gather the nuts and place them on top of the brick oven in Oma's kitchen where they would roast until Christmas. This is one of my fondest childhood memories.

We lived in Grigorievka until just after my fourteenth birthday when our family departed for Canada. When the decision was made to emigrate, everyone was required to go for a medical examination. Both Sara and I were diagnosed with trachoma, a dreaded eye disease which prevented many from leaving. For six months we were taken to a doctor in Petrovka by horse and buggy for eye treatments. Finally on September 18, 1925 we departed with no medical problems.

For the next ten years I worked as a maid in Winnipeg in winter and on the family farm in summer. In 1935 I married Jacob Neufeld who was working at the Grunthal Co-op store. It was very difficult, especially during the Depression. By then he was store manager and was responsible for giving credit and collecting accounts which most people could not pay. He hated that part of the job and, in 1946, we traded our house and car for a small farm. The farm was in poor shape and the first two winters Jacob worked in the bush making lumber. First we built a new house; the second year we built a new barn. It was hard work but the farm was a good place to raise our three boys. We lived on the farm from 1947 until 1978 when we retired and moved to Grunthal.

Both of us have been very active in the Elim Mennonite Church there. Jacob served on the board and was a *Vorsänger* for many years. I contributed through the Maria Martha *Verein* (ladies' group) where I am

still a member and served as president in 1966. For the past fifteen years, I also have been an active volunteer in the thrift shop. The church and its activities have been at the centre of our social life since we were married. My large family and our church “family” have allowed us to enjoy a complete and fulfilling life in Grunthal.

Elsa Krahn (b. Sept. 8, 1918)

married 1941 to Jacob A. Martens (1915–Aug. 2, 1992)

Children of Elsa and Jacob Martens:

1. Ernst Bernhard (b. Oct. 20, 1942)
2. Wilhelm Alvin (b. Mar. 4, 1944)
3. James Ronald (b. Mar. 13, 1947)
4. Katharine Linda Louise (b. Mar. 28, 1949)
5. Sara Marlene Margaret (b. Mar. 28, 1949)

I was born September 8, 1918 in the village of Grigorievka. My father, Bernhard Krahn, died when I was only four years old. In 1925 my widowed mother Katharina (Bartel) Krahn emigrated to Canada with seven children. We lived in Reinland, where I started school, which I continued in Pansy and then in Grunthal. When I started school, I had never heard an English word. Mom had taught me the German alphabet. I could write and read some German, and also do some basic arithmetic, but now another language? When we came to Barkfield I even learned some Ukrainian, which mom knew very well and made her feel more at home.

During Christmas 1932, my mother married Abram Driedger, who was a widower with six children. We three youngest children—sister Margaret, brother Ben, and I—went with her to live on the Driedger farm,. When I finished grade eight, I went to work in Winnipeg as a housemaid for five years. That’s where I earned my degree in housekeeping and cooking. I was baptized in the Elim Church on May 29, 1939. In 1941 I married Jacob A. Martens.

Jacob A. Martens tells his own story:

My family emigrated to Canada in September 1926; our destination was Arnaud, Manitoba. My parents took a farm three miles west of Kleefeld and a few years later moved to another farm in the Grunthal area. In summer I worked as a farm labourer, and in winter helped at home with chores and cut wood. In 1935 I began as a clerk in the Co-op store. In 1940 I started the Grunthal Egg Candling business which I sold in 1948. Then I started a General Store where we stayed until October 1969 when we sold the store and moved to Steinbach. We started printing in 1970 and, after our son Jim had completed his graphic arts course, built a new print shop on Main Street in Stein-

bach. I incorporated as 4M Co. Ltd. with all three sons and myself as shareholders. I retired in 1980.

Elsa was and is a homemaker and helped me with my various businesses. I was baptized in the Elim Church in 1937. At present we are both active in the Steinbach Mennonite Church.
[Thus far Jacob A. Martens story]

Margretchen Krahn (Nov. 17, 1919–Oct. 27, 1940)

Margaret (Gretchen) Krahn was born on November 17, 1919 in the village of Grigorievka. When she was quite young she suffered from rickets, “die englische Krankheit.” She also was badly burned on one side while trying to put straw into the bake oven that also supplied our central heating. (The straw was carried into the kitchen in a big bucket. It was burned a little bundle at a time until all the bricks were warm. What a temptation for young children to play with fire.) Margaret started school in New Barkfield and continued in Grunthal. At age fourteen she was allowed to quit school because the teacher thought she was a slow learner and would do well at housekeeping and homemaking. In summer young girls would go to sewing club and learn mending and sewing which Margaret was good at and enjoyed very much. She was also a great baby-sitter—she loved little children, especially her nieces and nephews. Margaret was a considerate and very sincere person.

In the fall of 1940 she became sick and, when mother saw the seriousness of her illness, she was taken to Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. There she was diagnosed as having typhoid fever, and our house was quarantined for five weeks. We all had inoculations and were strictly observed by Dr. Whetter. Groceries were left outside the door, and nobody was allowed to leave the yard except to talk on the phone. We were not allowed to sell milk or cream or eggs. For young people this was an inexplicable punishment. On October 27, just twenty-one days before her twenty-first birthday, Margaret died. It was a very traumatic experience for the whole family. The immediate family followed the coffin to the cemetery in the morning and the congregation celebrated the funeral in the afternoon without any of us present. Margaret leaves individual memories for each of us.—*Elsa Martens*

Bernhard Krahn (Apr. 10, 1921–Mar. 19, 1988)

married Sept 11, 1954 to Marie Martens (b. Dec. 1, 1931)

Children of Bernhard and Marie Krahn:

1. Leslie Albert (b. Nov. 4, 1955)
2. Robert Lawrence (b. June 15, 1959)

Ben was born in Russia and emigrated to Canada with his mother,

five sisters and one brother in 1925. They settled in Grunthal, Manitoba where Ben grew up and got his education. He married Marie, daughter of George and Maria Martens on September 11, 1954. They made their home in Winnipeg where Ben was very well known in the automobile industry. Marie was employed at the Bay for many years. They have two sons. Ben passed away on March 19, 1988.

Jakob B. Krahn (June 11, 1881–1938)

married 1903 to Elizabeth Neufeld (d. 1973)

Jakob B. and Elizabeth (Neufeld) Krahn emigrated to British Columbia where their descendants are still living. During World War I, Jakob served in the medical corps as an alternative to military service. They had eight children: Jacob married Agnes Braun, no children; Elisabeth married Ben Langeman, no children; Helen married Eric Meister, three children; Peter married Debra Bridget, one child; Susan married Raymond Petersen, two children. Only Peter and Susan survive.

Cornelius B. Krahn (Feb. 16, 1883–Jan. 24, 1975)

married Sept. 12, 1910 to Maria Neufeld (Sept. 15, 1890–July 11, 1969)

Cornelius B. Krahn was born in 1883 in a farm home in Rosenbach. In 1889 when he was six years old, the family moved to Grigorievka where his parents purchased a farm. After completing studies at the village school there, he took evening classes to further his skills in mathematics and the Russian language. Cornelius enjoyed singing in the youth choir in church. In 1904 he was baptized upon confession of his faith by Ältester Abram Unruh and became a member of the Mennonite Church. That same year he was called into military service; however, he took the stand of a conscientious objector and served as a forest worker for four years. After three years of service, the government had an amnesty determined by lot and Cornelius, instead of serving a fourth year, went to Simferopol to learn bookkeeping. He then returned to the farm because his older brothers had left home and his younger brothers were in school.

On September 12, 1910 he married Maria Neufeld. When World War I broke out in 1914, he was again enlisted and sent to Novgorod where he served in the medical corps. He left his wife and three children at home, spending three-and-a-half years in the service.

At an early age, Cornelius felt the call of the Master. In May 1920, he was chosen to become a minister of the Gospel. In 1924, his family with many others emigrated to Canada, making their first home in Rosenort near Gretna. In 1925 he purchased a farm in the village of Reinland

which had been sold by Old Colony Mennonites who left for Mexico. Again he felt the call to serve his Master and in the fall of 1925 was ordained as minister in the Blumenort Mennonite Church by Ältester Johann P. Klassen. He took his duties as minister very seriously until he retired in Winkler when their oldest son Bernhard took over the family farm. Cornelius preached the Word whenever and wherever he was asked, travelling by horse and buggy, sleigh and later by car.

Children of Cornelius and Maria Krahn

Bernhard C. Krahn (b. June 22, 1911)

married July 1, 1934 to Helen Paetkau

Children of Helen and Ben Krahn:

1. Helen (b. Oct. 17, 1935)
2. Victor (b. Dec. 1, 1941)
3. Johanna (b. Feb. 8, 1952)
4. Frieda (b. Mar. 8, 1957)

Bernhard (Ben) C. Krahn, eldest son of Cornelius B. and Maria Krahn, was born June 22, 1911. Ben was 13 years old when he, with five other siblings, emigrated to Canada with his parents. He was unable to continue his education in Canada. He married Helen (Elias) Paetkau on July 1, 1934 in the Blumenorter church in Reinland. Rev. Peter Rempel performed the wedding ceremony.

Ben enjoyed the trucking business. He delivered farm fuel for B.A. Oil in Altona, and trucked grain and other farm products to the United States and Winnipeg. In 1952 Ben bought some land and started farming with his father. He later bought his father's land. In 1971 Ben finally retired from farming and moved to Winkler. For the next ten years he worked for Triple E, transporting supplies and driving motor homes to various places in North America. He delivered approximately 130 motor homes, taking Helen with him to some of the more interesting places.

Helen (Paetkau) Krahn came to Canada in 1923 when she was eleven years old. Her mother died when she was three weeks old; her father died three years later. Helen was adopted by the David D. Paetkaus as a baby and lived with them until her marriage to Ben in 1934. She got her early education in Russia and completed some schooling in Reinland. For many years Helen operated the Reinland Post Office which was located in her parents' general store. She also worked part time in the Winkler Hospital.

Maria Krahn (Aug. 27, 1912–Dec. 1978)

married 1932 to Abram C. Penner (d. 1978)

Children of Maria and Abram Penner:

1. Theodore Cornelius (b. Feb. 22, 1933)
2. Werner Albert (b. Mar 17, 1934)
3. Victor George (b. Sept. 27, 1944)

Maria was born in the village of Grigorievka on August 27, 1912. She was twelve years old when she emigrated to Canada. She attended school in Russia and later in Canada. She, like many new immigrants that age, had difficulty learning the English language and was unable to attain her grade 8 standing. Maria was a very good cook and was a great help to her mother, raising the younger siblings and helping with the usual farm chores. Later, like many village girls, she went to Winnipeg to do domestic housework. These jobs were usually temporary because most farm girls were needed on the farm in summer.

In 1932 Maria married Abram Penner and shortly thereafter they moved to Winkler. Her husband was employed as a sales clerk by Nitikman, Sirluck & Safeer, General Merchants in Winkler. He held this job a number of years but, when the opportunity arose, they purchased a general store in Arnaud, Manitoba. There they raised their three sons. Abram was very musical and enjoyed singing. He led the Arnaud church choir for many years.

After they sold their business they retired and moved to Winnipeg. Abram enjoyed doing volunteer work, especially delivering meals-on-wheels. He did this until Maria suffered paralysis due to three brain tumours. The last one left her comatose for over a year. Abram passed away a few months before Maria's death in December 1978.

Cornelius (Neil) Krahn (b. Sept. 27, 1914)

married Aug. 10, 1946 to Marianne Driedger (d. Jan. 5, 1989)

Children of Neil and Marianne Krahn:

1. Shirley Rose (b. June 2, 1948)
2. Robert James (July 26, 1949)

Cornelius, born on September 27, 1914 in Russia, was 10 years old when he came to Canada. He attended school in Reinland for four years and for the next six years worked on the family farm. At age 20, Neil left the farm and found employment in Ontario. He worked in gold mines, orchards and tobacco fields for the next two years. He continued working in Ontario during the summers and, for five years, at a pulp camp in Manitoba during the winters. In 1942 Neil moved to Flin Flon and worked in the mines for Hudson Bay Mining & Smelting Co. The next year he left to serve in the Royal Canadian Engineers during World War II and was stationed in England and Holland.

Soon after his return from the war Neil married Marianne Driedger on August 10, 1946 in a Mennonite Brethren church in Winnipeg. Shortly after, they moved to Flin Flon, Manitoba. Neil again worked for Hudson Bay Mining & Smelting until he retired in 1972. During their years in Flin Flon, Marianne worked at the Public Library. In 1973 they relocated to Kelowna, where for the next five years Neil worked for Allied Van Lines. On January 5, 1989, Marianne passed away to be with her Lord. Neil continues to reside in Kelowna. He is a dedicated fisherman and is actively involved in the Kelowna Alliance Church. His faithfulness, kindness and generosity are a testimony to his deep faith in God. He is much loved and cherished by his family and all those who know him.

Aganetha Krahn (May 17, 1918–Nov. 1977)

married 1938 to John Penner (d. Dec. 24, 1979)

Children of Neta and John Penner:

1. Evelyn (b. July 11, 1939)
2. Fred (b. Apr. 27, 1941)
3. Richard Irvan (b. Jan. 15, 1946)

Aganetha (Neta), born on May 17, 1918, was six years old when she arrived with her family in Canada. She went to school in Reinland and finished grade 8, which was the maximum grade taught in the village schools. The opportunity to further her education was not possible because during the Depression years nobody could afford to send their children to Winkler or other towns where high school courses were available. Neta was very athletic. She participated in many sports when she was a youngster. She was popular as a pitcher on the boys' baseball team. Neta, like her older sister Mary, was a good cook and helper for her mother doing farm chores. She often used to say she did as much field work on the farm as her older brothers. She, like her sister, also went to Winnipeg as a domestic in the winter.

In Winnipeg she met John Penner and they were married in 1938. John worked for City Meat & Sausage at the time and, after a few years, they decided to start their own business: a butcher shop in Morris. However, this venture was not successful and they returned to Winnipeg where John again worked for City Meat & Sausage. In 1948 the Penners moved to Morden where John and his brother, Ike, bought the butcher shop called Morden Meat and Sausage. There the children grew up, got their education and spent the best years of their life.

Neta and John loved playing golf. Neta also enjoyed curling and playing bridge. In 1969 they retired, sold their butcher shop and moved to Winnipeg. Their Winnipeg stay was short, moving to Kelowna, B.C.



Cornelius B. & Maria (Neufeld) Krahn family, from left (back): Abram Penner, Albert Penner, Cornelius, MaryAnne (Driedger) Krahn, Katie (Penner) Krahn, Fred, John Penner, Bernhard; (front): Mary (Krahn) Penner, Anne (Krahn) Penner, Mother Maria, Peter, Father Cornelius B., Nettie (Krahn) Penner, Helen (Paetkau) Krahn.

where they resided until Neta passed away in November 1977. John died on December 24, 1979.

George C. Krahn (Dec. 1, 1920; killed in action June 12, 1944)

George grew up in Reinland, Manitoba, a typical farm boy, with seven of his siblings. He completed elementary school there, took Grades nine, ten and eleven in Winkler and Grade twelve at Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna. After graduating from high school until he joined the Air Force on September 10, 1941, he worked as a clerk for his brother-in-law, A. C. Penner, who was a general merchant in Arnaud. George trained with the RCAF in Brandon, Macdonald, Saskatoon, Virden and got his Pilots' Wings in Dauphin. He also trained in Charlottetown, P.E.I. and Victoria, B.C. He was posted overseas in the spring of 1943.

In England George was a member of the Swordfish Squadron. This squadron specialized in night operations against the enemy's light naval forces, particularly E- and R-boats in the English Channel and the southern part of the North Sea. The E-boat was a high-speed motor-torpedo boat used by the enemy for attacks on coastal shipping; the R-boat was a small motor boat similar to the E-boat but slower and used for minesweeping and defensive escort of the E-boats as well as shipping. It carried anti-aircraft armament but no torpedoes.

The Swordfish Squadron commenced its operational career as a Hampden torpedo-bomber unit in the spring of 1942 and changed over

to Wellingtons (Wimpies) and Albacores in October 1943. Night after night the Wimpies, including Pilot Officer (PO) Krahn and his crew of six which cooperated with naval forces, patrolled over the North Sea on the watch for enemy convoys and E-boats, while the Albacores maintained a lookout for shipping boats attempting to steal through the Straits of Dover during the hours of darkness. Many attacks were made on targets ranging from merchant vessels and destroyers to fleets of little motor boats. Sometimes specific results—a direct hit, explosions or fires—could be observed, but more frequently the darkness of the night and the violent evasion action necessary to avoid the intense flak barrages made it impossible for the crews to determine the outcome of their bomb attacks. PO Krahn's experienced crew participated in many of these offensive activities successfully. On the night of June 12, 1944, they had sighted and attacked a large group of E-boats in the neighbourhood of Ostend and presumably, the Wimpy was a victim of the intense flak concentration. His and two of his crew members' bodies were recovered by the Dutch Red Cross July 13, 1944 on the shore near the village of Zoutelande. PO George C. Krahn was buried on July 14, 1944, in the graveyard called "DeNoorderbegraafplaats" in the town of Vlissingen (Flushing). [The activities of the Swordfish Squadron were obtained from a book entitled, *The R.C.A.F. Overseas: The Fifth Year*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1945).]

In 1972 the Government of Manitoba honoured its provincial fallen comrades that were killed in the Second World War by naming a Manitoba lake after them. Krahn Lake is situated west of Churchill close to the Saskatchewan border, 58:52'N 100:06'W.

Anna Krahn (b. Mar. 23, 1923)

married 1943 to Albert Penner

Children of Anne and Albert Penner:

1. Dorothy (b. Dec. 20, 1943)
2. Jennifer (b. May 31, 1946)
3. Alison (b. Dec. 5, 1954)
4. Raymond (b. Oct. 9, 1957)

Anna (Anne), born on March 23, 1923, was a baby when she came to Canada with her parents. She, like her sister Neta, got her education in Reinland. She was two years older than Fred, her brother, and they were good friends growing up. He would not tattle on her if she didn't tattle on him. As she got older and her sisters had left after marriage, Anne did her share of farm chores, helping her mother with the cooking, cleaning and doing laundry for the family.

She started courting Albert Penner as a teenager and was devastated when he was conscripted during World War II. Later she followed him to British Columbia where they were married in 1943. Albert was transferred back to Winnipeg where he worked at the RCAF base as a machinist until his discharge. After the war, Albert was employed by London Life Insurance Company. He retired in 1980 after serving as an agent for 30 years. Anne worked part time for a while but, after their family was grown up, she enjoyed twenty some years working as a sales person for Peoples' Jewellers.

Friedrich (Fred) Krahn (b. June 23, 1925)

married 1950 to Katie Penner

Children of Fred and Kay Penner:

1. Kenneth George (b. May 3, 1951)
2. Diana Jeanne (b. Feb. 6, 1954)
3. Lavinia Joyce (b. Feb. 9, 1957)

On June 23, 1925, Fred was born in Rosenort (now called Rosetown), a village near Gretna. His parents had recently arrived in Canada. A year later his family moved to the village of Reinland where he grew up and finished school. In 1942–1943 he attended the MCI in Gretna. Fred was unable to further his education for the remainder of the war years because his father needed his help on the farm. After the war, Fred attended Success Commercial College in Winnipeg and graduated as an executive secretary. He worked for the City of Winnipeg Public Parks Board for one year, five years at Dominion Bronze & Iron as secretary, one year at Canadian Cannery, Morden, as accountant and 34 years as an auditor for Revenue Canada, Income Tax Division in Winnipeg. Fred has been a member at Pine Ridge Golf and Country Club for over 25 years and enjoys golfing with his brother Peter and his other buddies.

Kay, Fred's wife, daughter of Gerhard and Tina Penner, was born in the village of Altona. When she was a youngster her parents moved to Winkler where she grew up and went to school. She worked for the Winkler Co-op for seven years before she married Fred in 1950. In Winnipeg she worked part time for the T. Eaton Company. She attends the Bethel Mennonite Church and used to sing in church choirs. For many years she also taught Sunday school at the St. Vital United Church on St. Mary's Road.

Peter Krahn (b. Aug. 26, 1930)

married Oct. 14, 1951 to Katherine Sawatzky

Peter was born on August 26, 1930 in the village of Reinland, the baby in the family. He had pneumonia when he was small and had to

learn to walk all over again. He got his education in Reinland and worked for his father on the farm till he married Katherine Sawatzky on October 14, 1951. In 1952 Peter and Katherine moved to Winnipeg where he worked, first for a furnace company, then for a number of years for the T. Eaton Company. Peter retired in 1991 after being employed for more than 20 years as sales representative for western Canada with CAMCO.

Katherine was born in Blumenort, a village west of Gretna, where she got her elementary education. She completed high school at the MCI in Gretna. Katherine worked for the Royal Bank of Canada as cashier and later as cashier supervisor. She retired after more than 20 years of service. Katherine and Peter have no children.

Johann Bernhard Krahn (1894–Jan. 4, 1920)

married Sept. 16, 1918 to Sara Froese (d. 1965)

Johann married Sara Froese on September 16, 1918. Sara was the daughter of Heinrich and Sara (Unger) Froese, their ninth child, also of the same village. She spent her childhood in the village where she was born and completed her elementary education.

Johann enlisted as an officer in the Red Cross medical corps during the Revolution. Unfortunately he died of typhoid fever at the front. He is believed to have been buried at Rostov, Russia, somewhere in the war zone. His wife Sara was never able to see him or speak to him during the time of his illness and for a long time grieved deeply for him. Sara was pregnant at the time and their son John was born on April 22, 1920 in



Johann B. & Sara (Froese) Krahn at their wedding in 1918.

Grigorievka—John is the only biological child of this marriage. Sara and her son lived with her parents-in-law, the Bernhard Krahn's until her remarriage on November 14, 1920 to Wilhelm Buhler (see Chapter 8: Wilhelm Peter Buhler).

No other information on Johann Krahn is available. Sara's grief at the loss of her first husband was very evident. She had this distant look in her eyes when his name was mentioned or when her grandchildren asked her about him.

John Krahn (1920–Mar. 30, 1988)

married Oct. 17, 1942 to Katherina Enns

This biography was written by John in February 1988, a month before his death on March 30; he was buried in the Killarney cemetery on April 4, 1988.

My parents, John and Sara Krahn, were married in 1918 in Grigorievka. Father passed away on January 4, 1920 in Rostov while in service as an officer in the Red Cross medical corps. On April 22, 1920 I was born, and lived with mother at Grandpa Krahn's house until November when Mother married Wilhelm Buhler. His occupation was a storekeeper. I can remember Grandma Froese's yard in the village with the fruit trees and the horse-driven threshing machine. In 1926, my parents and Grandma Froese with the children left for Winkler, Manitoba. There dad initially worked in a store and then on a farm. Mother kept us alive by feeding us boiled oatmeal, day after day.

In the spring of 1926, my parents, Grandma Froese and Uncle Peter Froese and family purchased a farm west of Boissevain where we lived for twelve years. Grandma Froese lived with us until her death in May 1945 at Lena. She is remembered as a kind and loving person with a sense of humour, a lot of pride and as a snappy dresser.

I received seven years of schooling in a country school named Caranton. This was during the "Dirty Thirties." For lunch we ate bread and butter. The knee pants I wore until I was fifteen were made of poor material. Father bought his first car, a Model T, in 1932. Then, for five years, grasshoppers, poor prices and little rain made it impossible to keep the car running, and it just rotted away. In 1937, dad bought his second car, a 1928 Chevrolet, the first vehicle I learned to drive. At sixteen years of age, I earned my spending money by selling mushrooms in town and by cutting wood in the reserve for two dollars a day. My youth and church activities took place at various farm homes and I enjoyed these get-togethers greatly. I accepted Jesus as my Saviour and Heavenly Father over my life and was baptized May 12, 1940 by G. G. Neufeld of Whitewater. By 1938, father sold the farm and rented one north of Ninga.



John & Katherina (Enns) Krahn with their four children in 1967 at their silver wedding anniversary.

When the owner sold it, father bought seven quarters of land south of Lena.

In 1940, I met Katherina Enns and we were married on October 17, 1942 at the parents' farm. We bought three quarters of land from the seven father had bought previously. On this land was a building, 16 feet by 22 feet, converted into a house, as well as two granaries and a shed. Two years later we purchased a barn which was moved with the help of the neighbours' tractor. We started farming with three head of cattle, one horse and a few pigs and chickens. We drove horse and buggy for two years and saved money for a tractor and machinery. In 1949, we sold our herd of forty-two head of cattle and paid for the farm. One year later, we bought a herd of Registered Hereford cattle, which has served us for thirty-two years. Our cattle have sold throughout Canada, the United States and Japan.

In 1961, our parents retired and made their home in Killarney. We bought father's remaining four quarters of land and by 1969 purchased six more. In 1971 we sold four quarters to our son, Bernard, after his marriage; in 1981 we sold the four quarters of the home farm to our son, Harry, after his marriage. Although in 1980 we moved to Killarney to enjoy our new home, I still farm with the boys.

My interests and pastimes include reading cattle digests and historical books; I have a special interest in barns. I also played violin in an instrumental group in the community for a number of years during the 1950s. My community involvement included eight years as a director of

Manitoba Pool Elevators, three years as director of the Manitoba Exhibition, one term as chairman of the Killarney Agriculture Society, two terms as school trustee, and was on the building committee for the second Lena Church.

We have been blessed with two daughters and two sons, all of whom are married and have children.

Recollections by daughter Elfrieda

My earliest recollection of life on the farm is a small three-room house with an entrance attached to the kitchen. The house consisted of my parents' bedroom, a living room (which doubled as the daughters' bedroom) and, of course, a kitchen. In summer the stove was moved to the small back entrance. Our farmyard was surrounded by a lot of water so it was home to many snakes. They liked to bask in the sun at the south side of the house or even crawled under the wood stove in the back entrance. I guess this is one reason my sister has such a phobia about snakes to this very day. Yet, my mother tells stories of how my sister used to go to play on the old decayed manure pile which was surrounded by snakes.

I must give both my parents credit for their interest in music and reading that instilled a similar interest in us children. We had a phonograph set up on a table in the living room, and I recall spending hours sitting and listening to records while my sister was away at school. Our parents had entered a record club for special children's records. Later they also bought us a membership in a book club and took us to town for piano lessons every week. For many that was considered a luxury, but for our parents it was considered an important exposure.

I suspect the musical talent and special interest have been inherited from the Krahn family. My father played violin, mandolin and mouth organ. In my teenage years he and I spent a lot of time making music together. I played piano and dad played violin or mandolin. He was not the greatest singer; my mother has the strong alto voice in the family. It was during these early years that my father played in a community instrumental group. The group would take turns visiting different members' homes for rehearsals. They played for the pure enjoyment of music. When the day came for the sessions at our house—this was in the 1950s after we had moved into our new home—the table was moved out of our dining room into the hall and my sister and I sat on it or underneath it and watched and listened to them play. Mother was usually busy getting coffee and dainties ready.

Education was also stressed in our household. Dad's strong tutoring skills came to the fore in mathematics and Mom's in High German

lessons. I recall many gruelling hours at the dining room table on winter nights learning High German while mom sat beside me or my sister mending the family garments. In fact, we learned our German so well that at times we discovered that some of our German grammar was better than the teacher's—but in those days one did not dispute a teacher's decision.

Dad was very involved with his cattle and cattle shows. In winter there were many animals to feed and in summer it was time to make hay. This was prior to the time of all the automation, so a lot of heavy physical work was involved. We always worked together as a family. When haying and harvesting were completed, dad was sent to town to buy wieners and buns so that we could have a wiener roast to celebrate. In the earlier years of the cattle shows, my sister and I helped wash the cattle, curled their hair and even helped show cattle at the exhibitions. This was always a very busy season. The bonus was that we visited a lot of places in the province, but as a result of this involvement as a family, we did not have a lot of free time.

We children will always remember dad for his strong work ethic and love for his family and fellow man. Honesty was always of utmost importance regardless of the price one might have to pay. He will be remembered by others for his firm belief in God which he shared with his family and friends, also for his great sense of humour and the love he had for children and young people.

Dad was accepted by Grandpa Buhler as his own son when he married Grandma as a widow. Dad carried the name Buhler from the time of Grandma's marriage; this made it easier for emigration to Canada. He kept the name Buhler until after his own marriage and the birth of his daughters. At that point, in mutual agreement with his parents, he reverted to Krahn since he had never legally had his name changed to Buhler. Dad told us that he could not have asked for a better father. In our family and the Wilhelm Buhler family we never heard the words stepfather or half-brother used—we were all accepted as equals.

Peter B. Krahn (1896–1964)

married June 28, 1919 to Justina Peters (b. 1898)

Susan (Krahn) Miller (daughter)

Peter was the youngest son, the third Peter, born to Bernhard and Helena Krahn. His father was one of the original forty-one settlers who founded Grigorievka. He had come from the Fuerstenland section of the Chortitza colony. Unlike his brothers who were basically interested in farming, Peter aspired to getting a higher education. He attended the

Zentralschule in Chortitza, and became a teacher in a village near Grigorievka. He enjoyed teaching but soon tired of the boarding-out he was required to do, going from home to home for meals. He wanted a home of his own, and knew just the girl he wished to share it with him: Justina Peters, daughter of Gerhard and Susanna (Reimer) Peters who had a store in the village.

But Grandfather Peters had other ideas. No Chortitza son-in-law for him! His attitude was typical of the time. The Chortitza colony had been founded first, mostly by the landless and dispossessed of the Prussian Mennonite community. They tended to be conservative and traditional and, at least initially, less supportive of higher education. The Molotschna group consisted of more progressive Mennonites who followed later, and who felt somewhat superior to the original group.

“My father was very opposed to dad—even threatened him off with a gun,” mother told me. Soon he came up with a Molotschna suitor for mother, even a teacher. Mother dutifully made *Vesper* for him, then slipped out to join dad for a walk. “We spent much of our time together walking. We had peace outdoors,” she said. Eventually Grandfather relented. Peter and Justina were married in June 1919 and went off to Peterhof, thirty miles from Grigorievka, to dad’s school.

“We had six children during our first nine years of marriage. I took my sewing machine along from home and continued sewing for my sisters and brothers, as well as for our own children,” mother told us. A Russian midwife had to come from another village ten miles away to assist at the births. Mother stayed in bed ten days with each child born in Russia—that was the custom. The midwife stayed a week to make sure all was well.

The first child arrived in 1920 and was named Peter after dad. The young family went home to Grigorievka for Christmas by horse and sleigh. On the way back they had the baby snugly wrapped, lying on warm bricks, only to discover to their horror that he had suffocated. “I was too young,” mother said with great sadness when I got her to talk about the incident. “It was very hard.” Linie was born in 1921, and in 1923 another son, Johann, died of brain fever as an infant. Mother mentioned visiting the two small graves in a remote corner of the school garden where she would go walking with Linie.

Eventually Peter and Justina returned to Grigorievka to teach. By this time many of the settlers, including Grandfather Peters, were prepared to emigrate. But when his second daughter, Agatha, was turned down for health reasons, he decided instead to move back to Molotschna to the village of Friedensruh with Agatha, Jacob and Lena, his three remaining children. Sara had married Wilhelm Loewen. They emigrated to Canada

in 1926 and settled in Springstein, Manitoba. Gerhard had married Maria Hildebrand, but died young at age twenty-eight.

Peter Krahn carried on in Grigorievka, first as a teacher, then as an accountant. He would not teach communist ideology as required by the state. He was sent to Moscow on behalf of the village to request permission for the remaining Mennonite settlers to emigrate as a group (ninety passports), but this was refused. Persisting on his own behalf, he obtained medical clearance for his family in 1926, and passports and visas in the fall of 1928. These were for Peter, Justina, and their by now four daughters: Linie, Herta, Susan and Frieda, the latter just a few weeks old. By the time they left, only three Mennonite families remained. Grigorievka as a Mennonite settlement was no more. Those who couldn't emigrate had returned to the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies in hopes of greater security.

Although Grigorievka was spared the notorious raids of robber bands, there had been serious incidents. One village teacher, Dietrich Dyck, was murdered while on his way to buy flour. Grandfather Peters, upon answering a knock at the door, was taken out, stripped to his underwear at gunpoint, and robbed of clothes, money and other possessions. As fear spread, farms were sold hurriedly to Russian buyers. "And so my father also sold to the Russians," mother said. She regarded it as regrettable.

Before emigrating the painful leave-taking had to be endured. Peter and Justina took their four girls to visit Grandfather Peters in Friedensruh and said good-bye to all their loved ones. Would they ever see each other again in this life? Grandfather was to spend his remaining years at Friedensruh, where he had bought a house left by people moving to Canada. He died there on March 19, 1939. I remember a letter in a black-edged envelope arriving at our house with the news of his death, and mother silently weeping as she remembered him. Then a break in communications occurred during which mother lost contact with her sisters for some sixteen years. When finally she heard from them again they were living in Kazakhstan after a forced evacuation from Molotschna.

But back to Grigorievka in the fall of 1928: Returning from their farewell visit, Peter and Justina prepared for their departure to Canada. Their Russian neighbours were sad to see them go. "They liked dad and trusted him," mother said. An auction sale was followed by a farewell supper which their neighbours put on, with lots of drinking, Russian style. Mother was very nervous about the late hour. Gavrillovka Station was seven miles distant, with dark passages to drive through, but ten armed men on horseback escorted their straw-covered open wagon and got them to the station safely. Four or five Russians helped them get

settled in the train, then kissed them good-bye with tears running down their cheeks. It was an emotional and ironic farewell. We were fleeing communism, yet the warm-hearted Russian peasants were mourning our departure, not rejoicing or jeering.

The travel route for our family was by train to Moscow and Riga, Latvia. At the border between Russia and Latvia was a wide arched gateway where the train slowed down to let an exchange of crew take place. With mixed feelings of relief and sadness my parents watched their homeland recede in the distance. “We were bathed and deloused—a good thing,” said mother, “because Russia was plagued with lice. We boarded the ship *Baltara* to cross the Baltic and North Seas to Southampton, a three-day journey over rough water, causing general seasickness. After a layover of several days in Southampton, we transferred to the *Empress of Scotland* for the eight-day crossing to Quebec.” Mother told us many times how helpful the attendants were with us children, and how they especially loved looking after the baby, now nearly a month old. According to the records (or family lore?), her passage cost \$11. We were sponsored by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, which advanced our fare on reasonable and lenient repayment terms.

From Quebec to Winnipeg took another two days by train. We were advised to stock up on food, so we bought bread and sardines to supplement a seemingly endless supply of roasted brown buns from Russia. Our friends, the Warkentins, met us at the CPR station in Winnipeg. We spent a week with them—that must have been quite a houseful. One day they took us to the T. Eaton store to ride from floor to floor and admire the merchandise. Mother and dad were able to visit Willie and Sara Loewen who were working for an English farmer. In England they had seen another relative, mother’s cousin Peter Doerksen, whose eyes were being treated for trachoma before he could proceed to Canada.

Back to mother’s voice as I share excerpts from her memoirs, written on the occasion of our fiftieth year in Canada. “Our final destination was Gretna. Mr. Abram Janzen met us at the station and took us to their home for dinner. David Walls from Edenthal came over as well. In the afternoon Mr. Janzen drove us to Reinland to dad’s brother and family, the Cornelius Krahns. We stayed with them for three weeks. How we enjoyed Aunt Mary’s meals.”

But now the uncertain future had to be faced. Dad had thoughts of becoming a farmer, but Uncle Cornelius advised him to retrain himself for teaching. “Stick to what you know,” was his counsel. The going rate for teachers was \$110 a month, at that time a living wage. The MCI in Gretna had set up a special fund to assist immigrant teachers with their

reeducation, but unfortunately the fund was depleted. The next best recourse was Winkler, where high school tuition was \$50 a year. So our parents rented one room in the back of a shop and moved in with their family. Dad took three years to get his high school diploma, and another year at Normal School in Brandon to become a certified teacher.

When friends of ours moved to Ontario, they sold their small two-room house to us for \$700 (probably on credit—mother also mentioned a \$6 monthly rent to me once). At least now there was breathing space, but how were we to live? “O, wie fingen wir aber auch in Winkler so sehr arm an” (How poor we were when we started), said mother. A Jewish merchant, Mr. Sirluck, was willing to sell us the necessities on credit. Friends and relatives, especially from Reinland, brought gifts of meat, lard and flour. Dad worked for farmers in summer and could pay off the store debt yearly, as well as buy coal for the next winter. Second-hand furniture, bedding brought from Russia, a borrowed table and apple crates to sit on—it sounds rather like extended camping. Mother washed clothes for two families for twenty cents an hour and earned enough to buy a hundred-pound bag of flour each month for bread. When dad went to Brandon, she rented the upstairs room to a Thiessen couple who were attending Bible School. As for clothes, mother was ingenious in remaking donated ones. In the midst of all this a son was born. Brother George arrived in 1932, the first Canadian citizen in the family. “We were so thankful to be here, to live in peace, with no need to lock the doors at night,” said mother, though she continued to lock them.

Dad’s first position was in Reinland. With the Depression looming, he was offered only \$45 a month plus teacherage and free fuel. There were sixty pupils and all elementary grades. It was a divided community of earlier as well as more recent Russian Mennonite immigrants, with friction between the two. This was at a time when the Old Colonists were leaving for Mexico. Dad experienced much opposition and resigned after only one year. Mother told me that one parent cursed him, but then his children brought him flowers.

Moving a family was an arduous task. My parents were to go through this repeatedly. Dad’s next school was Edenthal, where we stayed for seven years. Henry was born there in 1933, and Ernie joined the family as a latecomer in 1940. Mother’s last child was her first to be born in a hospital. This was the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. We had a contract with the hospital and its doctors for many years, culminating with brother Henry’s working there as an assistant during Medical School. Though sixty miles away, it provided protection for us until National Health Care was instituted in Canada.

The Edenthal years were happy ones. The teacherage had only two



Peter B. & Justina (Peters) Krahn family in 1943, from left (back): Lina, Frieda, Herta, Susan; (front): George, Mother Justina, Ernest, Father Peter B., Henry.

rooms, but dad was given materials to add a bedroom in the attic. He did this at several other teacherages later. Mother taught us girls to help in the house at an early age. She suffered from recurring bouts of rheumatism and indigestion, but in spite of it ran the household with a firm hand.

All her married life mother lacked money to spend as she chose. She was fairly resourceful in finding ways to earn a little here and there. We drank skim milk, while the cream was shipped to bring weekly cream cheques from our one cow. She traded chickens for apples, and vanilla and liniment for honey. Dad's beekeeping business was really his idea for additional income, but she pitched in wholeheartedly to help the honey cheques materialize. Even when mother was a widow, receiving an adequate pension, she still had that urge to "earn" money. She did beautiful crocheting and knitting which she sold at craft shops. No doubt she has some of her ancestors' merchant genes in her blood.

I personally associate the Edenthal years with my elementary education. It wasn't easy having one's father as teacher. We felt he was stricter with us than with the rest of the class, but we did well, and his careful impartiality helped avoid any labels of favouritism among the schoolchildren. Then we moved on to Burwalde, Rosenort, Altberghal, Bergfeld (Thames), Sommerfeld and finally Reichenbach, spending from one to six years at each place. It is impossible to go into detail about each one—this story would get too long. It was the typical country school-teacher's life in southern Manitoba between the years 1930–1960.

Our parents wanted their children to attend the MCI, a private Mennonite high school that emphasized academics, Christian faith and

the German language. All seven of us spent from one to three years there in spite of the hardships of paying for tuition, room and board. As the older girls finished and became teachers, they were able to help with the younger children. In the meantime, the CPR company was patiently waiting for our *Reiseschuld* (travel debt) to be repaid, and was beginning to exert pressure on the Russian Mennonites as a group to take care of the matter once and for all. The day came when the debt was finally paid off amidst great rejoicing.

We didn't get an automobile for transportation until some fifteen years after coming to Canada. How did we get around? Dad rode a bicycle and sometimes got rides with neighbours, or walked. The rest of us mostly walked. Occasionally we borrowed a horse and buggy to go blueberry or chokecherry picking. For the Peters' family reunions (mother's relatives, most of whom lived east of the Red River) we hired a car and driver—a great luxury, not affordable often. During the early years it was hard to get to church. Our parents had joined the Berghaler Church which had congregations in Halbstadt and Edenburg, about two-and-a-half miles in either direction, but none in Edenthal. Dad taught Sunday school in the same classroom to the same children he instructed during the week. For communion services he and mother probably were able to go to church with neighbours. When at last we got our first car (used, of course), dad came driving up triumphantly, was distracted by our expectant faces and promptly ran it off the road. How we teased him about that incident. We all learned to drive except mother who never gained enough confidence to do so.

One by one the children left home. After twenty years of teaching in southern Manitoba, dad's health was beginning to fail. He had only a few years left to retirement, but was unable to finish. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, which gradually disabled him. In 1958 he resigned from his position in mid-year at the request of the trustees. To ease the situation, I was approached by them to finish the school year for him. This allowed my parents to continue living in the teacherage until June.

With the family's assistance, they bought a small home in Winkler and retired there where their Canadian odyssey had begun. They particularly appreciated the indoor plumbing of their first bathroom and living near old friends. The Cornelius Krahn from Reinland had also retired there, another bonus. It was rather far to church, however, and dad had given up driving. After four years they agreed to relocate in Altona. "There was a lot available close to church, also close to Linie and Ted's," said mother, "so we had Ed Stoesz build us a new house which I planned—she always had definite ideas and preferences—and we moved in December 1962."

In the fall of 1964 dad died at the age of sixty-eight. Toward the last he had become bedridden, but mother was able to care for him at home most of the time. All the children came for the funeral, including Herta from Ghana, Africa, where her husband, Victor Thiessen, was teaching at the time. Dad was buried in the Altona cemetery.

Mother was alone now. Her own health, at times so precarious when the children were younger, had improved dramatically in middle age. She felt God had given her new strength when she needed to look after dad. She kept on living at her house, but began to travel extensively, especially to visit her scattered family. She had never learned adequate English, since dad had insisted on speaking German in the home in order for us children not to lose it. Now she showed great resolve in pursuing English. She would take the bus to Winnipeg for Saturday classes and do her workbook lessons during the week. When she spent a semester with us in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1965, she took an evening ESL course at the university. She particularly wished to be able to communicate with her daughters-in-law and grandchildren. We were all proud of her.

She always lived frugally and saved part of her pension for bus and train travel. Money gifts and plane tickets from the children enabled her to go farther. In 1967 she attended the Mennonite World Conference in Holland. She also revisited Russia, including a side-trip to Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, where she was joyfully reunited with sisters Agatha and Lena after forty years of separation. Another tour took her to the Holy Land and on to Saudi Arabia to visit family. We were constantly amazed at her vitality and adventurous spirit.

One very sad occasion in her life and ours was the death in 1976 of our sister Herta of cancer in Abbotsford, B.C. The extended family had gathered there for a silver wedding celebration two years earlier; now they returned for her funeral. Mother wished so much that she could have died in her child's place.

At age eighty-three she gave up her house and yard in Altona and moved to a retirement home. After considering various options she got an apartment on the tenth floor of Lions Place, facing Portage Avenue in downtown Winnipeg. Why the big city? She liked to be in the midst of life and activity, she said. She stayed for eleven years—"unter den Englichen," as she put it—keeping on with her travel habits. When cataracts clouded her vision and her stamina finally wore down she was persuaded to return to Altona to a unit of Ebenezer Home, but not until she had both cataracts removed. A few months later she suffered a stroke and was transferred to the nursing wing of Ebenezer Home. For her 95th birthday she received the joyful news that her last remaining sister, Lena and family, had been able to emigrate from Kazakhstan to Freudenstadt,

Germany, in September 1993. It was too late for either of the sisters to travel. Lena died in 1995.

Children of Peter B. and Justina (Peters) Krahn

Linie Krahn (b. 1921)

married Sept. 23, 1945 to Ted Friesen

Lina (Linie), the oldest sister, taught for five years. Besides being a homemaker, she has been active in the church and in community affairs. She has served as co-ordinator of the Altona Public Library and as president of the Altona Women's Institute. She is also a past president of the Manitoba Mennonite Women's Organization.

Ted's family is in the printing and stationery business, known as D.W. Friesen & Sons. It has evolved into one of the largest of its kind, with sales offices across Canada, and employs 560 people. Ted has served on a number of boards including the executive of Mennonite Central Committee Canada, 1964–1977 and secretary of Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba, 1964–1973. He has served on the boards of both the provincial and Canadian Mennonite historical societies, having served as president of the national society since 1982. He has also been on the board of the Eden Mental Health Foundation. Both Lina and Ted have been active in their home church, Altona Mennonite Church, in various capacities including chairman and deacons.

Ted and Linie have three sons. Eric, the eldest, attended high school in Altona and graduated from Conrad Grebel College at the University of Waterloo in 1967. There he met Susan Peters, his wife. Eric started work with Radio Station CFAM in Altona, then went on to work for a private station in St. Catharines and from there to Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in Ottawa. He served the CBC there, in Winnipeg and in Toronto as a broadcaster. Then he became an executive with CBC Radio. In 1984 he received a call to become executive vice-president of American Public Radio with offices in St. Paul, Minnesota, then executive producer with Minnesota Public Radio. In 1997 he went back to CBC Radio as host of the morning and evening shows. Susan is a native of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Susan is an artist and has had numerous exhibits of her work. They have one son and two daughters.

Paul, second son of Ted and Linie, was born August 8, 1948 in Altona. He attended both elementary and junior high schools in Altona. He also took instruction at Skills Unlimited in Winnipeg. He has worked as a press operator and in other capacities in the printing and stationery trade at the family firm. In 1988 he joined a partnership in owning and operating Cottonwood Golf Club. He has also owned Broosters, a food catering business. At present he is considering a resort place in western

Canada. Paul and Maggie were married March 18, 1989. She is the daughter of Robert and Teresa McLaren of Rivers, Manitoba. Maggie is a school teacher in Ste. Anne, Manitoba. Paul enjoys the cabin at Moose Lake and the activities connected with it. He is a golfer, an outdoorsman and enjoys travelling.

Tim, third son of Ted and Linie, was born September 17, 1955 in Altona where he attended elementary and high school. From there he took a year of Arts at the University of Manitoba. He has worked in various capacities in the stationery department of D. W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., the family firm. Since 1985 he managed the retail department. At present he is working with Pandora Books, specializing in mail order sales. In 1976 Tim married Pamela Wiebe, daughter of the late Henry and Lillian Wiebe of Altona. They have three children, Matthew John, Elizabeth Anne and Joanna Catherine. Both Tim and Pam are active in community and church (Altona United) affairs. They enjoy golf. Pam plays the cello and Tim the piano. The children are active in music, the girls in ballet and Matthew in hockey and baseball.

Herta Krahn (b. Oct. 3, 1924–1976)

married 1949 to Victor Thiessen

Peter and Justina Krahn's second daughter, Herta, was born on October 3, 1924 in Grigorievka. She attended the Mennonite Collegiate Institute and Teacher's College and taught in southern Manitoba. In 1949 Herta married Victor Thiessen. The first years of married life were spent in Gretna where Victor taught at the MCI. In 1954 they moved to Abbotsford B.C. where he taught at Mennonite Educational Institute (MEI). Their next years were spent overseas for two teaching assignments—Ghana, 1962–1965, and Trinidad, 1966–1968. They returned to Abbotsford in 1969. Herta passed away in 1976. Victor, who married Martha Bergen in 1979, is now retired. He and Martha are active in the Mennonite Brethren Church. They have five children. Daughter Erica is single and is a Registered Nurse. She has spent most of her adult life in service in Burkina Faso and Botswana.

Susan Krahn (b. 1926)

married July 17, 1959 to Virgil Miller

Susan, the third daughter, was born in Grigorievka in 1926. She attended MCI and graduated from Teachers' College and University of Manitoba in 1947. In 1966 she graduated with an MA from University of Michigan. She has taught in southern Manitoba; Eden Christian College, Virgil, Ontario; MEI, Clearbrook, B.C.; and Bluffton College in Ohio. Also, she has taught English as a Foreign Language in Turkey



The Peter B. Krahn family with Mother Justina in 1988, from left (top): Eric and Christian Friesen; (back): Tim Friesen, Ernest Krahn, Jeff Krahn, Fred Thiessen, Tom Klassen, George Krahn, Rudi Klassen; (centre): Henry C. and Catherine (Lorenz) Krahn; Alice (Nielson) Krahn, Pam (Wiebe) Friesen, Irene Thiessen; (front): Frieda (Krahn) Klassen, Ted Friesen, Mother Justina, Linie (Krahn) Friesen, Susan (Krahn) & Virgil Miller.

and Saudia Arabia. Susan has served as a Pax Matron in Germany and Austria. On July 17, 1959 she married Virgil Miller. They have spent most of their married life teaching overseas.

Virgil was born in Ohio. He graduated from Goshen College in 1948 with a BA in English and from University of Michigan in 1953 with an MA in English. Virgil has taught in public schools in Ohio and at Bluffton (Ohio) College. He was an English teacher in Tarsus American College in Turkey for three years and teacher of English as a Foreign Language at the University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran, Saudia Arabia, for fifteen years. Susan and Virgil are retired and live in Sarasota, Florida, where they are involved in the Mennonite church. They have three daughters, all married.

Frieda Krahn

married to Rudi Klassen

Frieda, the fourth daughter, was born in Grigorievka. She attended Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna and Teachers' College in Winnipeg and taught in Manitoba. Frieda married Dr. Rudi Klassen of Winnipeg; they moved to North Dakota where he practised medicine. In 1967 they spent a term of service overseas in Tunisia. Coming back, they moved to Rochester, Minnesota, where Rudi is an orthopaedic surgeon

at the Mayo Clinic. Frieda and Rudi have four sons, all married, and two grandchildren.

George Krahn

married Sept. 18, 1954 to Helen Derksen
remarried Oct. 21, 1977 to Diane Kearns

George was born in Winkler, Manitoba. He attended MCI and Teachers' College and taught in southern Manitoba and in Winnipeg. His last teaching assignment was as principal of Sturgeon Creek Regional Secondary School. He was also superintendent in the St. James Assiniboia School Division. On September 18, 1954 he married Helen Derksen. His second marriage was to Diane Kearns on October 21, 1977. He has three children. At present, George is a financial planner with Ransom Lawton Financial Planning Services in Winnipeg.

Henry Krahn

married to Cathy Lorenz

Henry was born in Manitoba, attended MCI and graduated from University of Manitoba with his medical degree. He spent eleven years in general practice in North Dakota. He then went on to postgraduate studies in radiology at University of Nebraska. Since 1972 he has been working as a radiologist in Springfield, Missouri. Henry married Cathy Lorenz. They have four children, all married.

Ernest Krahn

married 1964 to Alice Nielson

Ernest was born in Manitoba. He attended MCI and the University of Manitoba where he obtained his degree as an accountant. The first years he was employed with the firm of Sill, Streuber, Fiske & Co. He now has his own accountancy firm in partnership with J. Friesen; the firm is known as Krahn & Friesen. In 1964 Ernest married Alice Nielson. Alice came to Canada with her brother and parents in July 1951 from Denmark. She is owner and manager of Dimensions Retail Clothing Store in Morden. Ernest and Alice are active in Christ Lutheran Church in Morden. They have three children, two of whom are married, and three grandchildren.

Chapter 13

ABRAM AND ANNA KROEGER FAMILY

Elisabeth Peters

Abram Kroeger (1844–1907) married Anna Sawatzky

Abram Kroeger was one of the founders of the village of Grigorievka. He, together with Gerhard Redekopp, was given the mandate to purchase the land for their village from General Cherbachov. Kroeger came from Georgsthal and Redekopp from Michelsburg, both in Fuerstenland. He had a dynamic personality, and sometimes was quite forceful in his opinions while planning this new village. It is said that he had the notion that no one from Molotschna was to be allowed to acquire property in the new settlement. This may have been said in a good-natured jocular manner, since the Old Colony and the Molotschna Mennonites frequently carried on verbal feuds, never taken very seriously, which spiced up their tranquil lifestyle. Thus those from the Old Colony (*Altkolonier*), who were proud of their beautiful majestic Dniepr River, teased the people from Molotschna because they lacked a large river, saying the Molotschnaers took their baths in their summer fallow fields. As it turned out, in spite of Mr. Kroeger, a sizeable part of the Grigorievka people were wealthy Molotschna Mennonites.

Abram Kroeger was also the first church minister in Grigorievka. Many older people still remembered this ardent man of the cloth interrupting his lengthy sermons to wake up members of the congregation that had dozed off on a hot Sunday by calling out their names in a loud voice. In his everyday life, he was a good farmer with special talents for machinery repairs and practical knowledge. He was also an excellent, well-known *Trajchtmooaka* (chiropractor), a gift which some of his sons inherited.

Abram Kroeger married Anna Sawatzky. They had seven children: Maria married Gerhard Loewen; Abram married Aron Wiebe's daughter; Jakob married Barbara Redekopp; Margarete married Nikolas Krahn; Katharina was wed to a man by the name of Friesen; Agatha married Franz Schellenberg, son of the *Schulze* Franz Schellenberg; Anna married a man by the name of Wiens.

Abram and Anna Kroeger both died in Grigorievka and were buried in the village cemetery in a plot marked by a wrought-iron fence and shaded by two tall Lombardy poplars.



Anna (Sawatzky) & Abram Kroeger (1844–1907)

Abram Kroeger II

Abram, son of Abram and Anna Kroeger, with his wife, a daughter of the prominent Aron Wiebe family, emigrated to Canada. They moved to rural Ste. Anne, Manitoba, a French town east of the Red River, where he had a farm. He had inherited his father's chiropractic abilities and worked miracles fusing broken bones and torn muscles of his many patients. Allegedly he never asked for a fee, although his farm activities must have suffered some neglect and his family certainly needed the money for the bare necessities of life.

Jakob Kroeger I

Jakob I, another son, was involved in the milling industry as well, but apparently lived in Georgsthal, where Abram, Sr., had resided before he moved to Grigorievka. Jakob married Barbara Redekopp, and they had eight children: Abram, Maria, Hans (Johann, who died at the age of eight), Anna, Jakob II, Peter, Heinrich (Heinz) and Helene (Lena). While employed in the flour mill, Jakob I suffered a serious accident when he was in his thirties; he was caught in a drive belt. His chest was severely crushed, but miraculously he survived. The community sent him to the Crimea to recuperate, but in the late fall of 1910 he succumbed to tuberculosis and died, leaving his family in dire financial straits.

After the death of Jakob I, the community felt his wife could not possibly cope financially in her difficult situation, and their sons, Jakob II and Peter, were placed in foster homes in Grigorievka, Peter in the Nikolas Krahn home—Mrs. Krahn was a sister to Jakob I—and Jakob in the Jakob Wiens' family, who treated him as though he was their own

child. Their guardian (*Vormund*) was Franz Schellenberg, the *Schulze*, who was related to the Kroegers through marriage.

In order to reunite the family, the widow of Jakob I married a widower by the name of Martens who promised to treat her children as his own. But after Martens and his many children moved into the Kroeger home, he refused to allow the boys back into the house. Their mother survived the hardships and misery of her second marriage and died in the early 1930s.

Abram Kroeger III

Little is known of Abram III, eldest son of Jakob Kroeger I, except that his wife Maria and their two married daughters, Agnes and Mary, lived in St. Catharines, Ontario. The mother, Maria, died some twelve years ago.

Maria Kroeger

Information on Maria, one of the older children of Jakob I is even scantier, although one daughter lived in Leamington, Ontario for some time, and the other, Katja Knapp (related through marriage), visited relatives in Manitoba in the early 1960s.

Jakob Krueger (Kroeger) II

married 1924 to Katja Dyck

Jakob II was born in 1898 in Georgsthal and was raised by J. Wienses in Grigorievka. He was drafted into the Russian army in which he served as a medical corpsman (*Sanitatsdienst*). His division got as far as Romania but after a short while they were forced to retreat. While on furlough at home he was forcibly inducted into the Red Army from which he deserted at the first opportunity. He worked in a flour mill in Zhabuniov, a Russian town about 30 kilometres from Grigorievka, where he met Katja Dyck, daughter of teacher Dietrich Dyck, whom he married in 1924.

In 1925 their son, Jakob III, was born. When he was six weeks old, the couple together with Katja's widowed mother, Katarina Dyck, and her six unmarried children, emigrated to Canada and settled in Winkler, Manitoba. A year later they moved to Gretna, then to Altona, where Jakob opened a shoe and harness repair shop. Their second son, Henry, was born there. Jakob II died in 1969, Katja in 1988.

Jakob Kroeger III, eldest son of Jakob II and Katja, finished high school in Altona, then enrolled in teachers' college and later at the University of Manitoba. In 1957 he was employed by the Norwood School Division of Winnipeg, taught English at the Collegiate, and

finally became superintendent of the division. He was forced to retire due to ill health, but worked for another year to restock the Collegiate library which had been destroyed by fire. The library was named the Jakob Krueger Library in his honour. In 1961 Jakob III had married Irene Lubosch, a teacher and musician. The marriage was blessed with seven children: Karl, Katherine, Karin, Krista, Paul, Kurt and Carla.

Henry, the second son of Jakob and Katja, married Mary Klassen, an authority on ornithology and an accomplished artist. Henry became a businessman, operating a men's clothing and shoe store in Altona for some years. They have five children: Richard, Henry, Ingrid (Pokrant), Marlene (Neufeld) and Robert.

Peter Kroeger

married Olga Savenkova

Peter, another son of Jakob I and Barbara Kroeger, married Olga Savenkova, a descendant of an aristocratic Russian family. Her mother is reported to have been a lady-in-waiting to Tsarina Alexandra. Peter and Olga also emigrated to Manitoba in the depth of the Depression with their two young children, George and Dmitri (Richard) and lived in Winkler before moving to Winnipeg. Like his brother Jakob, Peter took up shoemaking. The family then moved to Toronto where he became a successful industrialist involved with flashlight manufacturing. Two more children were born in Canada, Alex and Waldemar.

After Peter died of a heart ailment, Richard established several successful businesses, as did Alex and Wally. George, who preceded his parents in death, had been married and left one son, Arnold. After the death of her husband on whom she doted all her life, Olga travelled a great deal, although she was severely restrained by ill health. However, she was able to visit her sister Asja, who was a nun in Jerusalem. Olga died in Toronto and is buried beside Peter.

Heinrich (Heinz) Kroeger (1906–1934)

married 1931 to Lisa Niebuhr (d. 1985)

Heinrich, the youngest son of Jakob I, married Lisa Niebuhr, sister to Lena's husband, on July 12, 1931 in New York, Russia. He was a bookkeeper for the Niebuhr factories. Heinz was born in 1906 and died of tuberculosis on March 30, 1934 in Einlage at the J.J. Niebuhr home. There were no children from this marriage, but in 1939 Lisa married Isaac Klassen. The Klassens came to Canada in 1948 and settled on a farm in southern Ontario. They had five children. Lisa died August 25, 1985 in Virgil, Ontario.

Lena (Kroeger) Niebuhr (1910–1932)

married 1928 to Jakob J. Niebuhr (d. 1937)

Lena, the youngest child, was born in 1910. She married Jakob J. Niebuhr in December 1928 in Karlovka. After being exiled to Kamchatka, he was executed in 1937. After an incredibly difficult life while her husband was in exile, Lena died on March 1, 1932 in Einlage in the Niebuhr home. Lena left behind one daughter, Bertha (Vera later on, likely for safety reasons), born October 12, 1929. One of the older children of the Jakob I family, Anna Kroeger, did not marry until late in life and adopted little three-year-old Vera, her niece. In 1943, “Tante Anna” and Vera escaped to Hamburg, Germany, but in 1945 were sent back to the USSR—both sentenced to ten years hard labour in Siberia. After they had served their time, they moved to Orel. Anna Kroeger died on July 12, 1982, leaving behind her Russian husband of a few years. Vera worked shifts in two construction jobs to keep her family in food, and claims their Tante Anna frequently gave up her food for the children—for Vera, Anna was an angel. Vera married Vladimir Filimonova and had a son, Alexander, and a daughter.

Note: Some details on this family may be inaccurate since the descendants of Abram Kroeger have suffered turbulent lives. This chapter is based on information from Rita Romsa, Winnipeg; several tapes by the late Katja Krueger (wife of Jakob II); and excerpts of correspondence between Jakob Krueger III and his cousins.

Chapter 14

FRANZ AND AGANETHA LOEWEN FAMILY

Henry Loewen

Franz Loewen (March 18, 1850–March 16, 1922)

married to Anna Giesbrecht (d. December 1886)

remarried 1889 to Aganetha Goertzen (July 18, 1862–1941)

Franz Loewen was born in 1850 in the village of Blumenort in the Nepluievka colony, Ukraine. He married Anna Giesbrecht and they moved to the village of Grigorievka. Nine children were born to this marriage: Agatha, Helena, Agatha, Anna, Cornelius, Maria, Sarah, Katrina and Katrina. Anna died in 1886. Following Anna's death, Franz Loewen married Aganetha Goertzen in 1889. The parents with three of their children emigrated to Canada in 1925.

Children of Franz & Aganetha Loewen:

1. Franz Loewen (b. January 10, 1890) He disappeared during the Revolution.
2. Heinrich Loewen (b. March 8, 1882)
married to Susanna Aaron (May 22, 1894–June 8, 1982)
Four children were born to this marriage: Heinrich, Franz, Susanna



Aganetha (Goertzen) (1861–1941) & Franz Loewen (1850–1922).

(or Sophie) and Jacob. Father Heinrich, a teacher, was sent to prison where he died. Susanna, with her children, was exiled to Siberia. They came to Germany on April 25, 1976. Jacob's son, Igor Levine, wife Elena and daughter Eugenia emigrated to Canada in 1998.

3. Gerhard Franz Loewen (July 5, 1894–November 14, 1985) married to Elizabeth Huebert (August 2, 1895–December 10, 1987) Eleven children were born to this family: Maria, Aganetha, Elizabeth, Justina, Katharina, Maria, Agatha, Anna, Helena, George and Sarah.
4. Isaac Franz Loewen (November 15, 1896–January 1989) married 1921 to Maria Buhler (October 5, 1897–December 1983) Their seven children were: Agnes, Isaac, Frank, William, George, Mary and Henry (see chapter 8).
5. Aganetha Loewen (May 7, 1899–December 9, 1968) married Henry Sawatzky (November 29, 1890–August 23, 1958) This marriage was blessed with six children: Aganetha (Nettie), Henry, George, Herman, Frank and Frieda.
6. Justina Loewen (b. September 17, 1901) married to Peter Hubert (b. June 28, 1902) They had one child, Agnes.
7. Susanna Loewen (b. September 22, 1907)



Maria (Buhler) & Isaac Loewen (back row in front of window) with their Buhler siblings, from left (back): Frank & Mary Buhler, Isaac & Elizabeth Buhler, Bernhard Buhler, Maria & Isaac Loewen, Anna & William Buhler, Peter & Helena Enns, Mother Maria Buhler, Katy & Henry Pauls.

The Voyage to Canada in 1925
Nettie (Loewen) Guenther

We were given a room for five: our mother and dad (Gerhard and Elizabeth Loewen), I (Aganetha), Elizabeth and Justina. Our belongings were few: bedding, a few dishes, mostly essentials to get by for a little while. The farewells were very sad for our parents. Since we were very young, I wondered what would happen next. There was singing as we left. I remember much sadness, especially from mother. It was hard to leave relatives and our grandmother too.

The first part of our trip was on a train. One word I remember everyone mentioning was "Riga." The sight of a city, very new to a youngster, was awesome. The boat voyage is still clearly in my memory. As kids we weren't affected, but so many grown-ups were seasick. My sister and I had a chance to go investigating; I don't know how we managed to get on deck. Then we had a good look at the ocean through a port hole on the side of the ship. We were soon found by the men in uniform and brought back to our parents.

Thinking back to Russia, I remember when we lived a short distance from Grandma Loewen. Once my sister and I were on our way to go see her when mother found out we were gone. She came looking for us, very worried. She carried a huge rope. It looked dangerous. She said, "If you ever try to do this again I will tie you up with this rope." We never tried it again.

In London we were checked by a doctor and were all accepted to go ahead. From Halifax we boarded a train bound for Montreal; from there we went on to Winnipeg and Winkler. We stayed with relatives for the first summer. Then we moved to a farm about three miles from Winkler. Our friends gave us so much help; we will always be thankful to them. Finally we had a house again and a reason to be happy, even though we were very poor. Since we had no dolls we used pieces of wood and pretended they were dolls. Dad heated the house with wood.

Chapter 15

GERHARD & AGANETHA NEUFELD FAMILY

Wanda (Neufeld) Neufeld

Gerhard Jacovlewich Neufeld (Sept. 5, 1866–May 1, 1920)

married 1890 to Aganetha Pauls (Aug. 14, 1867–Feb. 16, 1952)

Gerhard Neufeld was born on September 5, 1866 in Niederchortitza. In 1890 he married Aganetha Pauls of Kronsweide. They had a family of five daughters and nine sons—two died in infancy. Gerhard was part owner of a flour mill and a sunflower-oil factory. He was also was an ordained minister in the church. Gerhard had a gentle, friendly nature and he enjoyed his large family. Aganetha was blessed with a terrific sense of humour and endless patience. This might be one reason that her exuberant brood made sure there was never a dull moment in the Neufeld household. The whole dozen children had inherited their mother's optimism and love of life. The boys played numerous musical instruments, ranging from the balalaika to the harmonica, and everyone sang. A Neufeld get-together was always a musical event. Gerhard died of typhoid fever on May 1, 1920 at the age of 54.

In August 1924 Aganetha came to Canada with all but two of her children, Kornelius and Abram, who were unable to leave during the 1920s. After that, emigration from Russia was impossible. Kornelius died there and Abram and his family came to Canada via Germany after World War II.

Aganetha spent her years in Canada living alternately with most of her children in the different locations. Henry, who worked at the Canadian Pacific Railway, was able to get free three-month travel passes for his mother. Very often her visit to a particular child's home coincided with the birth of a new grandchild, and she was always a welcome and willing helper in the household. Besides being of assistance in tangible ways, she was an eternal optimist and could find something to smile or laugh about in situations which might depress anyone else. Having her around invariably made it a jollier home. She died on February 16, 1952 while living at her daughter Maria Krahn's home in Reinland, Manitoba. She was buried at Brookside Cemetery in Winnipeg.

Maria Neufeld (Sept. 15, 1890–1969)

married Sept. 12, 1919 to Cornelius B. Krahn (1883–1975)

Cornelius was an ordained minister in the Blumenort Church. They lived in Reinland, Manitoba with their eight children (see chapter 12).



Gerhard & Aganetha (Pauls) Neufeld family, from left (back): Jakob, Maria, Gerhard, Kornelius; (centre): Peter, Heinrich, Mother Aganetha with Helena, Tina, Father Gerhard with Franz, Abram, Peter; (front): Aganetha, Anna.

Jakob Neufeld (Feb. 11, 1892–1953)

married to Njuta

Jakob and Njuta had three daughters and one son. Their home was in Winnipeg until the late 1940s when they moved to B. C. where both died: Jakob in 1953 in Vancouver, Njuta some years later. In both locations they ran rooming houses while Njuta worked as an accomplished seamstress at home and Jakob did a variety of jobs, mostly in the carpentry and building trades.

Kornelius Neufeld (June 8, 1893–1935)

married to Helena Wiebe (d. 1994)

Kornelius and Helena had four children. He died in 1935 of kidney cancer in Varvarovka, Ukraine, at age forty-two. Helena died in Russia in 1994. All their children except one remained in Ukraine. Son Peter and his wife Elsa with their sons Waldemar and Peter came to Canada and moved to Vancouver, later retiring in Clearbrook. The children in Russia are seeking permission to emigrate to Germany.

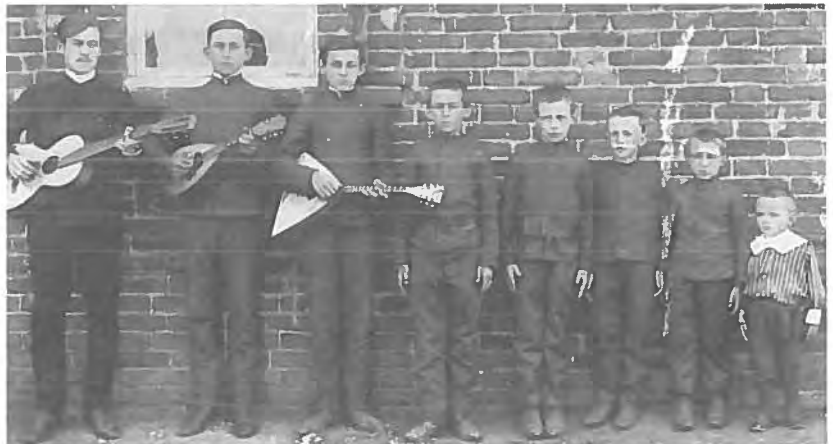
Gerhard Neufeld (July 31, 1894–Nov. 14, 1979)

married Apr. 23, 1923 to Malwina Wiebe (b. June 24, 1900)

On the last day of July in 1894, a son was born to Gerhard and Aganetha (Pauls) Neufeld in the village of Grigorievka, Ukraine. The child was named after his father. When little Gerhard was almost ready to start school, Cornelius and Anna (Dyck) Wiebe became parents on June 24, 1900 of their first little daughter, Malwina, in distant Einlage. Malwina was born on June 24, 1900 and over the next twelve years was followed by three sisters. The four little girls grew up in a happy home that was shared with both grandmothers. Father Wiebe operated a general store and supplied his customers with everything from kerosene lamps to yard goods and household needs, as well as grocery products of all kinds.

Time passed and both children grew up in happy homes, went to school and church and became *Jugend* (youth). Life in the Mennonite villages was good. But then, in 1914, the country was suddenly in the midst of World War I followed by a bloody revolution. Hordes of “Makhnovzi” swept through the area, pillaging, plundering and murdering, in some cases sparing no one and wiping out entire villages. With the upheaval came a country-wide famine during which thousands starved to death. Gerhard, like most young Mennonite men of the time, served in the *Forstei* (forestry service) as an alternative to military service. Malwina was once invited to a wedding in Grigorievka. There young Gerhard noticed the lively and pretty miss with the big brown eyes. Shortly after she returned to Einlage, he followed; and on April 23, 1923, they were united in holy matrimony.

From 1922 on, many Mennonites packed up their few remaining possessions and left Russia to make their new homes in Canada. Gerhard



The eight sons of Gerhard & Aganetha Neufeld, from left: Jakob, Cornelius, Gerhard, Heinrich, Peter, Abram, Johann, Franz.

and Malwina, with baby George now six months old, were taken in by Reverend and Mrs. J. Loeppky of Rosenfeld, Manitoba. In December 1924 they joined Mother Neufeld and her single children for a short time on a large farm near Arnaud where, on July 24, 1925 George's little sister, Wanda, was born. The desire to be on their own took the family briefly to Winnipeg, then on to a farm at Nesbitt, where all the neighbours were kind-hearted Scottish people. However, this was depression time and crop failures and poor prices again forced the young family, with baby Harry, who had arrived on January 31, 1929, to move on. This time their destination was a little Ukrainian village in southeastern Manitoba.

Gardenton had a flour mill that had stood vacant for years. Three families of Malwina's cousins bought it and were busy grinding wheat into flour for the people in the area and turning out feed for their livestock. There Gerhard found employment and received the standard wage for 1932: \$15 per month. The children attended Purple Bank School. Gerhard and Malwina bought two-and-one-half acres of land across the Roseau River from the mill. Together they built their home of two-by-fours braced with lengths of poplar trees chinked with local clay mixed with straw and water. The little house had four rooms and, after a few years, Gerhard was able to buy siding to cover the outside clay plaster walls and eventually finish a small attic room. Malwina white-washed the inside walls, hung bright cotton curtains and made a cosy, friendly little home into which, on October 29, 1936, baby Agnes arrived. She became the delight of her older brothers and her sister. Gerhard supplemented his income during slack times at the mill by doing construction work. He built homes in Stuartburn and Friedensfeld and, together with a neighbour, built the Gardenton one-room high school for which the men were paid \$50 each. During the war, the mill ran day and night, grinding wheat into flour that was packed into 140-pound packages for shipment to Europe.

Over the years Gerhard's wages had risen, so in 1942 it was possible to send George and Wanda to the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna for Grade 12. George, who celebrated his nineteenth birthday in February 1943, got his call to serve in the armed forces. But, after appearing before a judge, he was assigned to alternative service as a conscientious objector in the Selkirk Mental Hospital. He worked there as an orderly for two-and-one-half years until the war ended; he was paid \$15 monthly, with the rest of his earned wages automatically going to the Canadian Red Cross.

While in Gretna Wanda had met a young man from Lena. On July 7, 1946, she and Frank Neufeld were married in the Ukrainian National

Home in Gardenton. Along with relatives and friends of the two Neufeld families, the whole population of Gardenton attended this “Mennonite” event. Frank and Wanda have four daughters. Frank was a school teacher and later an Inspector of Schools for the Province of Manitoba.

In the late 1940s, business at the mill had fallen off drastically and it was finally sold to two Ontario men who operated it for several more years. In 1949 Gerhard and Malwina sold their little home and moved to North Kildonan with Harry and Agnes. George was already teaching in the Prairie Rose area. A small one-room store with living quarters at the back was available, so the Neufeld’s began a new career as owners of Oakland Grocery. They also became very involved with activities at the North Kildonan Mennonite Church. During the next year, 1950, they lived through the flooding of the Red River when nearly the whole city was evacuated except for the able-bodied men, including Gerhard and Harry, who stayed on to help the Armed Forces fight the water.

In 1951 the growing North Kildonan congregation bought a piece of land on Roch Street between Devon and Cheriton, and began to build a new church there. Gerhard bought and renovated the old church building at 256 Devon Avenue and moved his business into the larger facility when the congregation moved to Roch Street. He had made very comfortable living quarters in the back half of the building.

In June 1952 Harry married Hildi Neufeld, a pretty young woman he had met at choir practice and youth. Only a week later George was wed to Bertha Plett, a smiling Prairie Rose girl. George taught school at Landmark and Steinbach until his retirement, after which he became active in real estate and in municipal government. They have three sons and one daughter. Harry and Hildi’s marriage ended tragically on June 17, 1969, when she died of cancer. Harry was a single parent to his three children until September 11, 1971 when he married Susan Hiebert. For a time Harry was a partner in an elevator company, and for the last twenty years has operated a machine shop, also in partnership.

Gerhard’s business grew, so he added a warehouse to his store. In the meantime, Agnes had become a capable, self-assured young lady, and in 1958 became the wife of Jake Derksen, and later the mother of three sons. Jake died in October 1987. Agnes has an office position in a plumbing business.

Gerhard and Malwina were alone again but carried on with their work. When the large grocery stores and supermarkets came to North Kildonan, the small corner stores were without customers. In 1969, when he was seventy-five years old, Gerhard sold his stock to Peters Supermarket. What used to be the “store” became the Neufeld’s recreation room.

Gerhard was one of the first board members of the Mennonite



Aganetha Neufeld (second row, fifth from right) with her family in 1947.

Educational Institute, later renamed Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, and Malwina joined the Women's Auxiliary. She was active in this organization for thirty-five years and, at age ninety, still took her turn working at the thrift shop on a regular basis. She also began to sew wool-filled comforters on order. In 1983 she had made more than 2,000 of them.

Gerhard and Malwina always regarded their grandchildren as a special blessing and many of them remember with pleasure the fishing trips to Lockport or to East Selkirk with Grandpa and Grandma.

Over the years Gerhard had had a number of medical problems and operations and in 1976 his heart was given the help of a pacemaker. Several good years followed, but in 1979 he developed cancer and needed cobalt treatments. He died in his home on November 14, 1979. Malwina continued to live in her home until age ninety-two. At the time she was still active in the church and at the Westgate Thrift Shop. She continued to sew countless quilts for others as she could lay her hands on wool and yard goods. Any monies realized from the sale of the quilts she gave to the Thrift Shop. She also continued to go on bus tours in Canada and the United States and particularly enjoyed the day tours and many concerts and events in which her children and grandchildren were involved.

When she sold her house on Devon in 1992, she took up residence in Bethania Haus at 1060 Kimberly Avenue. She enjoys life, is involved in the happenings at Bethania Haus and loves to call the family together. She is very proud of her children and fourteen grandchildren. She is a happy woman! She's always ready to go for a ride, especially if that

might end with a stop for her favourite food at one of many restaurants or at an ice-cream stand on a warm summer evening. Her door is always open to family and friends. She loves to visit and at 96 is happy to be able to do so many things. She still enjoys crocheting and knitting afghans and slippers.

Heinrich Neufeld (Feb. 13, 1897–Dec. 27, 1966)

married to Helena Neufeld (d. 1993)

Heinrich and Helena had one daughter, Melita, who was handicapped. Heinrich worked at the CPR shops making railway cars until his retirement. He died of a stroke on December 27, 1966. Helena and daughter Melita moved to Bethania Haus, where Melita died in 1989 of cancer. Helena also died of cancer in 1993.

Abram Neufeld (died at birth Dec. 29, 1898)

Peter Neufeld (Dec. 29, 1898–Jan. 21, 1981)

married to Gertrude Fast

Peter, Abram's twin, and Gertrude had two sons and three daughters. After farming briefly in Manitoba, they moved to St. Catharines, Ontario. Peter died on January 21, 1981 and Gertrude some years later. Their children all live in Ontario.

Abram Neufeld (July 26, 1901–May 20, 1972)

married to Anna Mischkim

Abram remained in Russia and married Anna Mischkim. They had one son, Alexander. During the war they got to West Germany, then in 1947 emigrated to Canada, settling in Winnipeg. Abram worked in a flour mill until his retirement. He died of a heart attack on May 20, 1972. Anna died several years later. Alex married Ella Borst whom he had met in Germany. They have one son Henry; all still live in Winnipeg.

Johann Neufeld (b. Oct. 28, 1902)

married to Anna Froese

Johann and Anna had three sons and one daughter. They lived in Rosenfeld for a number of years, then moved to Winnipeg where Johann worked for Monarch Machinery. Anna and daughter Susie have passed away. Johann is currently residing at Bethania Haus and enjoying life. He travels to visit his sons in British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia.

Aganeta Neufeld (b. Mar. 20, 1904)

married to Heinrich Wiebe

Aganeta and Heinrich had one son and three daughters. They lived at

Winnipeg Beach where Heinrich worked at the midway that was operated there at the time. Later they moved to Winnipeg where Heinrich lived alone until his death. Three of their children live in Winnipeg, the others at Winnipeg Beach.

Anna Neufeld (b. Aug. 5, 1905)

married to Jakob Fast

Anna and Jakob lived in the Wheatley area in Ontario. After Jakob died, Anna was alone for a number of years, then married William Buhler of Steinbach. They lived there for a few years and then moved to Leamington. William died, and Anna lived in a seniors' apartment for a number of years, often travelling with her children. Now she is resident in a care facility and is in poor health.

Franz Neufeld (b. Jan. 24, 1907)

married to Maria Wiens (d. 1995)

Franz and Maria had one son and one daughter. For many years they operated a rooming house while Franz cut firewood for the wood stoves used then. He had a gas-powered saw which he moved from home to home where people wanted cordwood cut to stove-length pieces. He later painted and papered houses until his retirement. Maria died in 1995 while they were living in an apartment. Nine months later he moved to Bethania Personal Care Home where he lives at present.

Katarina Neufeld (Apr. 24, 1908–Sept. 22, 1989)

married to Peter Wiebe (d. Feb. 20, 1994)

Katrina and Peter were married in Arnaud, Manitoba; they had three sons and three daughters. They farmed in Arnaud until 1951 when they moved to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, where they operated a grocery store and service station. Peter also sold real estate for a time. They retired to St. Catharines and lived comfortably in their home. In 1989 they moved into a condominium where Katarina died of a stroke on September 22, 1989. Peter died of heart failure on February 20, 1994, just two days after being moved to Pleasant Manor in Virgil, Ontario. Two of their children live in British Columbia, the others in Ontario.

Helena (Jan. 20, 1910–1911)

Chapter 16

JACOB AND MARIA PAULS FAMILY

The Jacob and Maria Pauls family was one of the original families in the village of Grigorievka, coming there from Georgsthal in Fuerstenland. Jacob, born August 13, 1848 was generally known to be serious and sober in his disposition, but also had the reputation of being “the loud Pauls,” who spoke both with volume and intensity. For example, about 1918 it was believed that some of the Russian farmhands were purposely burning some straw fields and straw piles. Becoming greatly upset, he walked down the street and shouted, “The next time another straw pile is lit, I will personally burn your whole village.” Not exactly a pacifist response, but that was the end of straw burning.

Jacob married Maria Dueck who was born April 17, 1849. Jacob and Maria had seven children. Jacob died February 9, 1919, Maria February 1, 1927. Stories of the descendants of two sons, Jacob J. and Heinrich J., are included below.

Jacob J. and Maria (Unger) Pauls

Peter Pauls

Jacob J. Pauls (1880–1954)

married November 30, 1900 to Maria Unger (1880–1968)

Jacob, fourth son of Jacob and Maria (Dueck) Pauls, and Maria Unger were both born in Grigorievka. They had a family of eight children (one of which died in infancy). They emigrated to Canada in 1926.

Jacob M. Pauls (1903–1961)

married January 31, 1926 to Maria Funk (1905–1997)

Memories of Grigorievka, 1910–1926

Maria (Funk) Pauls

When I was twelve years old I worked as a hired girl during harvest time. I and my brother Henry, who was two years younger, would get up early in the morning and go to work for two neighbours who had combined their threshing operations. They needed a boy to ride one of the horses that was used to pull the threshing stone over the grain. I had to carry the threshed grain away in pails or cut open the sheaves or even accompany the men out to the fields where I helped to build the load so that the sheaves would stay firmly in place. During my “noon break” the

lady would say, “Na, Mariechen, why don’t you wash the children’s hands before we eat?” After dinner, before I was allowed to leave the house, I was asked to dry the cutlery or pick up the fruit that had fallen on the ground in the garden. As far as I can recall my wages at the time consisted of some wheat to make flour.

Catechism was not part of the school curriculum, a custom followed by the Old Colony Mennonites. In our village catechism was part of the *Jugendunterricht* (youth instruction) as special preparation for baptism and marriage. Young people in these classes had to have sponsors who would recommend them to the congregation and vouch for their readiness to be admitted to full membership. I went to our minister whom I knew very well—he and his wife often came to our house before my father died because my father was also a minister. When I paid him a visit on this occasion, he said, “If only you could have taken catechism instruction from your father!” I was eighteen years old at this time and my father died when I was nine.

Social life in the village was very simple. It wasn’t necessary to leave the village. We had what was called a club or youth group. By this time most families had remodelled their homes so that there was room in the *Grossestube* (parlour) for the young people to gather and play games—elders would conveniently go visiting and leave their homes open to the young folk on such occasions. The young people were left unchaperoned—our parents could trust us.

In spring, as soon as the weather permitted outdoor activities, we went on outings from school, marching through the village two by two, sometimes to the railway or just to the open fields to gather flowers. I have only happy memories of my school days. All this changed with the war. So many young men were conscripted that there was a shortage of teachers.

The customs governing courtship and marriage were quite different from those in our present day society. Engagements were celebrated by the giving of rings, and invitations to weddings were sent out much as they are here. However, major social events like funerals or weddings required the cooperation of the entire community. Food like butter and milk was donated to the family involved. Some of the women would even gather at the home where the buns and pastry dough would be prepared, and then delivered to various homes to be baked. There was no bakery in the village.

Weddings were usually in summer in one of the barns (*Scheunen*). The walls of the barn were draped with the heavy canvases used to cover grain wagons. The men would remove the half-doors of the barn and replace them with storm windows to let in more light. The wedding table

and chairs were placed in front of this makeshift window. Benches and tables were also brought there from the school. Various people supplied dishes and utensils. Our wedding took place in winter in the house. The *Grossstube* was made over into a dining room on this occasion. The older ladies sat in the *Eckstube* (corner room). A sermon was always part of the wedding celebration; often two or even three ministers were present. One of the ministers at our wedding, Rev. Unruh, came from the neighbouring village, Petrovka. The wedding took place in the afternoon. The evening was reserved for playing games and dancing. Even my mother danced like a young girl. In our time we danced what were called polkas. We didn't go on a honeymoon; that was not a custom in our village. Newlyweds usually moved in with the groom's parents so that the bride would learn to cook the foods her husband was accustomed to eating.

I still have vivid memories of my father's funeral. (My mother also died in Russia, but after we had emigrated to Canada.) For some time my father had been manager of the ill-fated flour mill in the village and the stress of that job certainly took its toll. When he became seriously ill we had to move to another place, away from the *Mühlhof* (mill site). The mill was in debt when my father became manager and he was expected to remedy the situation. But he was the wrong man for the job—far too trusting and too kindhearted. He worked at this job approximately four years and was frequently away from home. When he became ill Grandpa and Grandma Funk from Osterwick in the Old Colony came to help us. They even bought us a new house. That was in May. My father died that same year on August 16 on his sick-bed in the *Grossstube*. I remember that he called each of the children to him, one at a time. He took my hand and spoke lovingly to me—I was still a very young child. He told me to always obey mother. He also said that he was confident that we would always be in God's care.

My father's body lay in our house until the day of the funeral; we didn't have an undertaker in the village. Father was laid out in the *Kleinstube* (small room). A lady who was experienced in such matters came to our house to wash and prepare the body. The coffin was built in the village. It was painted black and lined with wood shavings. A layer of sand was put into it, then a sheet or cloth. He was laid down on this; then ice was packed around him. He lay like this for two days; the funeral was on the third day. Baked goods, milk and cream, butter and sugar were freely donated by friends and neighbours on this occasion.

The day my father died, August 16, 1914, we received word that all the young men were to assemble on the schoolyard with their best horses. News of the outbreak of war came as a bolt out of the blue. Even though

the papers had been filled with such rumours for some time we didn't think it would happen. After all, the royal families of the warring countries were related.

The war caused a great deal of suffering. Whenever the fighting came too close, we had to evacuate our village. When the gunfire causes the ground under your feet to shake, you go willingly. We couldn't take much with us on such occasions; when we returned many of our possessions would be gone. Once the soldiers found the jam in our cellar and they sampled it liberally with some spoons that were handy. In one house they had set up a field hospital and straw was littered all over the *Grossestube*. These were actually German soldiers who were trying to prevent the Russians from taking over our village. They dug trenches near our village from which they repelled the invaders. I remember seeing a huge crater in our village street that was left when a shell exploded. In one of the battles near our village, forty German soldiers lost their lives. These soldiers were buried by their German compatriots in a mass grave in our village cemetery. This burial site was enclosed with an iron fence and identified by means of an impressive plaque. The German troops were stationed near our village for an entire summer. We regarded them as our protectors; they helped with threshing and, even though they had their own field kitchen facilities, they took their meals with the villagers whenever possible.

When the Revolution broke out there was much misery and suffering. Bands of outlaws raided and plundered the villages. Our village escaped the worst of the pillaging and bloodshed because it was surrounded by poorer Russian settlements. After the Revolution the new government took land away from landowners and divided it among those who were landless. This was the first step toward later collectivization when most of our land was taken from us. The little we had left could hardly be farmed as most of the horses had long ago been taken, first by soldiers during the war and later by bandits. We traded one of our horses for a cow. This meant we had to hitch these two incompatible animals together to pull the plough. We were suddenly much poorer than we had been. Our lives were also made more difficult by the constant government demands that we give up most of the little that our remaining land could produce. At times we worried that they wouldn't even leave us enough grain for seed.

In 1921 we experienced a crop failure, and there was also an outbreak of typhus. That was the saddest year of my life. The livestock had no pasture and many animals died of starvation. My two younger brothers and my brother-in-law, who was staying with us, became sick and my mother and older sister (Mrs. P.J. Sawatzky) had to take care of them day

and night. Before my younger brothers were fully recovered my mother fell ill. My older brother Peter had to take care of the farm and help my sister with her husband. That left me to tend mother and the boys. I was only sixteen. Mother was delirious for a period of two weeks and called for me constantly. Thank God, our mother recovered. Later she said that the illnesses had been sent by God to preserve us. We had so little to eat at the time that, in her opinion, we might not have survived if we had not been sick. It is true that many patients ate too much during their convalescence and died as a result.

In those years beggars came to our house almost every day, Germans as well as Russians. One of these beggars was a pregnant woman, a certain Mrs. Hiebert. When she heard that most of the members of our family were ill, she asked if she could take up lodgings in our barn. She was joined by her husband who was helping with the threshing. (I was reminded of Joseph and Mary). Not long after, this woman gave birth to a baby boy, a sickly child who died soon after he was born. My sister dressed the child and we placed it in a little box. After a simple ceremony we gave it a decent burial.

After the Revolution there were long periods of time when we had no money. Prices at this time rose rapidly and what money we had was practically worthless. When Tsar Nicholas was removed from power his money was also useless. There was a lot of paper money, but you needed almost a bagful to buy anything. Many people were millionaires but were starving nevertheless. People resorted to barter rather than cash transactions. When conditions improved somewhat, everyone talked about emigrating. However, to leave house and home and cross the ocean was something we didn't like to talk about. When the government began to conscript the young men, Germans as well as Russians, in spite of the fact that there was no war, we found it easier to think of leaving. My fiancé (Yasch—Jacob M. Pauls) and my brother Peter were among many from our village who had to report to the commandant in a nearby town. Every Monday morning, early, they had to march to the orders of the drill sergeant. One morning they decided to resist and there was a terrible row. Finally they were all thrown into prison and ordered to appear before a magistrate. This judge ordered some of them to do alternate service. My brother Peter was assigned kitchen duty. Others were allowed to go home for a time.

As conditions worsened there was more talk of emigration. Many were selling their land. My fiancé's parents were among those who decided to sell their land at this time and Yasch immediately began the task of securing the necessary papers for them. At that time he was still in military service and not yet free to apply for emigration himself. On

January 31, 1926 Yasch and I were married; it was a double wedding with my brother Peter and Agatha (Sawatzky) Funk.

My mother and my brothers wanted to leave too. Mother sold her land in the summer of 1926 but had to wait until after the harvest to receive payment—we had left by that time. When she and my younger brothers travelled to Moscow to secure their passports they were turned back. Mother then bought a little house in the German settlement, Zagradovka. She sold this property again when it appeared that there would be another opportunity to leave the country, but this attempt also failed. She died of cancer in 1929.

My brother Peter was conscripted again and spent some time with a crew that was building a railway. This was very hard manual labour. He was eventually released from this work because of ill health and given an office job. We received much of this information later from Peter's wife Agatha when she finally emigrated to Canada after World War II. Unfortunately Peter did not recover his health and died of tuberculosis. His superiors wanted to give him a military funeral but Agatha refused. A Christian life deserves something better than a communist funeral, she insisted. Peter was only thirty years old. Agatha survived those difficult years but during World War II she suffered even more—but that's another story.

In 1937 my youngest brother, Hans, was taken away and never heard from again. He was a young married man without children, a teacher by profession. My brother Hein and his wife finally came to Canada in 1977. I hadn't seen him in over fifty years. Some of their children are still in Russia. Hein was a minister but was never permitted to preach openly. After he came to Canada he recorded his experiences in the Soviet Union on audio-tape.

Migration to Canada: First Experiences in the New Land

My husband was very involved in making the preparations for migration to Canada. First he had to secure the necessary papers for his parents and his younger siblings. When the government announced that those born in 1903 who had been discharged or exempted from military service were also eligible to emigrate, my husband's father urged him to spare no expense and to make every effort to get ready to leave with them. To do this he had to travel to Ekaterinoslav and Kharkov. He managed to get all the papers certified except the one that would have given him explicit permission to cross the border. Rather than risk further delay he decided to leave without this document, but we were all very worried about it until we were out of Russia. His mother's passport included the names of all the unmarried children: Henry, Peter, Tina,

Liese and Heintje. Henry (H.H. Pauls) and Peter were fifteen, Tina thirteen; Liese and Heintje were even younger.

Saturday, August 7, 1926, was our last night in the village. We left the next day, Sunday afternoon. That day we were all invited to Yasch's paternal grandparents for borscht dinner. I remember Tante Margaret saying, "It will be a long time before you taste food like this again!" Apple *mousse* was also served at this meal.

Threshing had not yet been completed when we left. My mother had also sold her land but had not yet received the money, and so she could not give me the funds for the voyage. (The Russian who had bought the farm promised to pay after completion of the harvest. Collectivization had not yet begun under the post-revolutionary communist regime.) And so my father-in-law loaned us \$200 to pay my travel costs.

We were delayed at the first railway stop, Barvenkovo, and had to sit outdoors with our baggage all night, guarding it. That was not a good night. Finally, Monday afternoon, we continued our journey. In spite of this we didn't have second thoughts about our decision to emigrate. Our extended family stayed together throughout the journey. We were one of many such families.

Our next delay was in Moscow. There we were billeted in a large building where we had to put up with insects and other inconveniences. We visited the Moscow zoo and took a bus tour of the city. It didn't even cost that much. We also saw the tomb of Lenin. We were there for a number of days. On Saturday my parents-in-law went to a market and bought meat, either beef or mutton, for soup. (Borscht was usually made with mutton.) So we had borscht again for Sunday dinner. We had taken a baked, smoked ham with us and roasted buns (anything else would have quickly spoiled), but we had to buy additional food along the way. We had also taken a bag of apples, but they didn't last long. When travelling like this children are bored and they eat because there is little else to do. Naturally we were all homesick, especially on Sundays. We had a number of ministers travelling with us and we worshipped regularly on the way, and later on the ship as well.

There were other stops before we boarded our first ship. Each time we had to bathe and then present ourselves for examination by a doctor. We had been checked by a Canadian doctor, a Dr. Drury, even before we left our village. The longest stop was Moscow. Another major stop was Southampton, England. I remember passing by Wilhelmshafen. A long trip like that can be very tiring. On a small Baltic steamer we all managed to avoid seasickness because the waters were usually calm. However, on the big ocean liner it was different—I didn't spend much time on its upper deck. The ship would climb one wave and then plunge through the

second one. It made my stomach turn. Yasch, on the other hand, was up and around most of the time.

As we travelled by train through Quebec and northern Ontario, Father Pauls, Yasch's father, shook his head sadly and wondered at one point: "How are we going to make our living here?" Nothing but stones and trees. But when we arrived in Winkler the land looked much more promising. We had spent only one night in Winnipeg in a big building, I'm not sure where exactly. I remember that Teacher Martens and Abram Unger came to greet us. These men had emigrated a year or two earlier. They had to converse with us through barred gates or wickets. They couldn't mingle with us; we were immigrants who were still in transit. We were treated like a flock of sheep.

Our voyage and some of our first experiences in Canada are described in a diary Yasch kept during that time:

Diary of J. M. Pauls (1903–1961): August 13–October 20, 1926

Friday, August 13

In Moscow. Sunday, August 8, we saw our home, our village, Grigorievka, for the last time. It was the place where I had been born, where I had been baptized and where I recently had been married. Saying farewell to our friends and relatives was extremely difficult, but saying farewell to our birthplace cost us a few tears as well. We had a safe, uneventful trip to Moscow. Arrived here on the eleventh and are now awaiting permission to continue our journey. Today we visited the Zoological Gardens where we saw animals which, until now, we had seen only in picture books.

Saturday, August 14

Bought our steamship tickets but there is no word yet as to when we will be on our way.

Sunday, August 15

Sunday, but how different from Sunday back home where we would get up early and immediately meditate on a morning prayer of thanksgiving. Later we would attend a beautiful church service. We attended church here, too, but throughout the service we could hear the rumble of city traffic. I couldn't help thinking of our village church where all we could hear from the outside was the sound of the wind in the fruit trees, a sound I will always associate with worship.

Monday, August 16

At last this long day has passed, but we are no nearer to our destination than we were yesterday. My dear wife and I have just returned from downtown Moscow where we visited the tomb of

Lenin, the leader of the 1917 Revolution. Every evening after 8 o'clock thousands of people are allowed to enter the tomb and view the body of this man.

Tuesday August 17

This afternoon I had to pay a visit to the shipping company to sign some documents. We are hopeful now that we will be leaving tomorrow.

Wednesday, August 18

It's evening. We are sitting in the railway station in Moscow, ready to depart. We are scheduled to leave for the border at 11:30 p. m. Were able to make the final arrangements with the shipping company and so, if we are spared serious illness, we should be on our way to America.

Thursday, August 19

I'm in a railway car now. Sometimes I lie down and sometimes I sit and look out the window. But, alas, this is nothing like the region from which we have just come. Nothing but forest and more forest—birch trees, fir and spruce, all intermixed. Such trees make for a beautiful landscape but there is no land here suitable for farming. One sees no wheat at all, only a little rye, oats and barley. The soil is red in colour and very stony. We hadn't heard much that was good about this land in the north. However, we are nearing the border and we'll soon see what the land is like in a foreign country. The first foreign country we pass through is Latvia. The time is now 3:30 p. m.

Friday, August 20

At last I can report that we have crossed the border (without mishap) and that we have reached foreign soil, although we are still only in Latvia. This morning at 6 o'clock we arrived in Riga. Buses were waiting to take us to our lodgings where we were served breakfast. After breakfast we were all required to bathe. I was glad for this opportunity to clean up; it seems that one gets dirtier on a trip like this than one does when working at home. During the day I visited many of the stores in town. Most merchandise, especially leather goods, is cheaper here than in Russia.

[*Editor's note:* There is nothing in the diary about the anxious moments the family experienced when they crossed the border into Latvia. The author did not have all the necessary papers but was not turned back. See the comments of Maria (Funk)Pauls above.]

Saturday, August 21

We've moved into different living quarters again in preparation for a stay of several days. A German couple from Volhynia is sharing our room. During their four-week stay here one of their children died, but

now they are ready to continue their journey together with us. Well, we'll see what happens tomorrow. Today Mary was required to wash her hair with a special solution.

Sunday, August 22

Oh, how I dislike these Sundays in foreign countries. How beautiful our Sundays were back home. We would get up early, get ready, and then go to church. In the afternoons we had time to rest up from the week's work. And here? No comparison. First thing on Sunday mornings we all have to take baths. It's not so bad for the men, but those poor women. How those people go through their hair. You'd think we Mennonites were the dirtiest people in the world.

Monday, August 23

Another day spent wrestling with emigration problems. If only we could be on our way once more. I spent some time in town today buying all kinds of things. But, even though most things are quite cheap here, there is never enough money. I bought my wife a coat (\$10), a hat (\$2) and a pair of sandals (\$1). For myself I bought a pair of boots (\$7), a leather coat with a fur collar (\$12.50) and a hat (\$1.75). The total cost was \$33.25. That will have to suffice because our money is all spent.

Tuesday, August 31

At last I have found time to take up my diary again. This is now our third day on the North Sea. The waves surround our ship with their monotonous murmuring song, night and day. We have had excellent weather so far, but who knows what it will be like when we reach the ocean. We hope to arrive in England tonight. We left Riga at 11 p. m. on August 27 and arrived the next morning at the harbour in Liebau (Liepaia). I must say that the railway cars in which we travelled this part of our journey were not to my liking. They were all right during the day but not at night. No one got any sleep because each compartment had only two small benches to accommodate the eight people assigned to it. And so we had a very uncomfortable ride. Well, it was only one night.

Upon our arrival at Liebau we were immediately transferred from train to ship. This was something entirely new for us. We had never even seen a ship before—except in Riga where we had seen some small steamboats—and here we were immediately asked to board one. We remained anchored in the harbour till evening; then it was out into the dark night and the wild, turbulent sea. As we were leaving the harbour the ship began to rock and sway. After a while, however, its movement became much smoother. The next morning we could see nothing but sky and water. Toward evening we caught sight of land again. All this was a new experience for us. The second night at sea we slept comfortably and peacefully. The next morning, August 30,

we entered the Copenhagen Channel. We sailed along this channel until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. There we saw sights the likes of which we had never seen before: beautiful farms and bridges, more picturesque than they are made to appear in paintings. That evening my eyes were sore from so much sight-seeing. People have been warning us about the restless North Sea, so we are all worried about seasickness. However, another day has passed and the North Sea is no rougher than the last one (Baltic Sea) we crossed. Every day we anticipate something new.

Wednesday, September 8

Exactly one month ago, the evening of August 8, we left our village thinking that a month later we would be settled in our new home. How mistaken we were. We are still on the high seas and will be for at least three more days. My little diary has had a long rest, but now I have taken it up once again. On September 1 we arrived in London, England. A terrible thunderstorm broke over our heads just as we were disembarking. It was the kind of downpour we hadn't seen in a long time, even in Russia. We were immediately taken to the railway station by bus, together with all our baggage. But my goodness, I thought I had seen beautiful cities before. Yet here, for the first time, I beheld a truly grand metropolis. All the electric trolleys and buses were double deckers. And when we arrived at the station we found that it was two-storied as well, the trains entering and leaving on two levels. I found it most interesting to see many of the trains running without locomotives. They seemed to move along without engines.

As soon as we arrived we were loaded into one of these trains and off we went, as fast as lightning, out of London. Even so, it took half an hour just to get out of the city. On we went through valleys, over hills and through tunnels until, after half an hour, the train stopped and we were told to get off. Once again the buses were waiting to take us to our lodgings, not far away. The place we were taken to was called Atlantic Park. Again we were asked to take baths and then report to an English doctor. Fortunately, all of our family members were declared fit to go on. We didn't experience any long delays in England.

On Saturday, September 4, we were loaded into buses again and taken to a harbour where we boarded a big ocean liner. Even after we had boarded, three women were taken off by doctor's orders. That was a sad sight. Around noon our ship began to steam out of the harbour. What a ship this is compared to those little Baltic steamers—it's three to four times as big. Even so, we've been bobbing up and down like a nutshell on this ocean for three days now. Fortunately, the weather is somewhat calmer today so we can all stand upright again. Saturday, just before evening, we stopped at a French port where we picked up a few more passengers. Then we headed for



*J.M. Pauls (1903–1961), a sketch
by son Alvin*

the open sea. What an unpleasant experience this seasickness is. Those who suffer from it become so listless, so despondent, they want to die. But, thank God, most of that is behind us now. Tomorrow we hope to see land.

October 20, 1926

A great leap from September 8 to October 20, yet this period of time has seemed much longer to me than it actually was. A difficult time, but then all beginnings are difficult. We arrived in Quebec, Canada on Saturday, September 11. We were immediately taken from there by train to Winnipeg, a trip that took two days and two nights. In Winnipeg we spent one night in a hotel. The next morning, September 14, we travelled to Winkler.

I started work in Canada on September 15. Threshing was in full swing at Kroeker's farm. There I earned \$16 in 3½ days. I also worked 4½ days threshing for John Wiebe at Hochfeld. (I haven't been paid for this yet.) I earned a dollar working for J. Kroeker in Winkler. On October 15 I agreed to work on Gerhard Wiebe's farm near Morden, four miles from Winkler, for \$25 a month. My wife, Mariechen, earned \$3.50 doing laundry in Haskett.

[Thus far the diary of J.M. Pauls]

The Early Years in Canada

We came to Winkler because our relatives—Isaac Buhlers, John Warkentins and the Peter Ungers, Yasch's maternal grandparents—were

already in Haskett. In Winkler we were met by Mr. J. A. Kroeker. Mrs. Kroeker was Mother Pauls' first cousin. Mr. Kroeker must have made more than one trip to the station because we were a big family and would have filled the car more than once. That night we went to Haskett, to Isaac Buhlers and Warkentins, where we slept on the floor. We had our own bedding, but not beds, of course, and so we simply put our blankets down on straw. For our first breakfast in Haskett I think we had oatmeal porridge. I remember them telling us how good oatmeal was. In Russia we ate only barley porridge.

One of our first concerns was to become independent. Father Pauls (Jacob J.) immediately built a table. A big family like ours had to eat separately. Yasch's parents still had a little money. They went to the store, first thing, to buy groceries and other supplies. There were two stores in Haskett at the time. During those first weeks Yasch and his father went to work with a threshing gang. For whom they worked I'm not sure but the land belonged to the Kroekers. Peter Kroeker lived on the farm where they worked. They slept in the hayloft. We women and the children also became involved with harvesting sunflower seeds and potatoes on that farm. Father Pauls dug up the potatoes and Mother Pauls and I, Liese and Heintje, gathered them. Tina found work in Blumenfeld. Lena and Henry (H. H. Pauls) worked for the Peter Kroekers. When we arrived in Haskett on September 14 they had not yet had frost. But it must have been expected because the Kroekers had boxes full of green tomatoes individually wrapped in paper behind the stove.

The *Wirtschaften* (farms) in southern Manitoba were not so different from those in Russia, but we were surprised that there were no gardens. People talked only about wild fruit, wild cherries, wild plums and blueberries. We were accustomed to having big fruit orchards. The garden on the "stone farm" west of Morden was Father Pauls' attempt later to establish such an orchard.

By October we were at the Gerhard Wiebes. There Yasch was put to work doing the fall ploughing. His wages were \$25 per month. We were there only until Christmas. Because they had a hired female servant, they didn't need my help. Their daughter Tina attended Bible school. When Yasch and I went to Haskett to celebrate our first Christmas in Canada, the Wiebes let us use the sleigh and horse which the children used to drive to school. They also gave us a big fur coat (*Pels*) to keep me warm. They even sent along a cake and gifts. Yasch received a shirt and tie and I a nightgown. After Christmas we went to work for the Diedrich Wiebes, children of the Gerhard Wiebes.

At first we didn't attend church regularly. I remember that Yasch's father once walked to church in Reinland (from Haskett), but that didn't

turn out to be such a blessed experience. When he sat down beside one of the men, the man got up and seated himself elsewhere. This happened a second time. Father Pauls obviously felt totally rejected. Later, Isaac Buhler, much amused by the incident, explained what had probably prompted this rude behaviour—Father Pauls was wearing a necktie.

Our first more permanent home was west of Morden, a place that came to be known as the “stone farm.” We arrived there in November 1927. The house on this farm was constructed of stone and the land was also stony. We had everything on a big box-sleigh, everything we had accumulated since coming to Canada, including a chicken coop and 21 hens from Diedrich Wiebes where we had worked since January 1927. I think Yasch and his father had been at the stone farm once before, but I saw it then for the first time. The farm belonged to J. A. Kroeker; he sold it to us for \$9,000. I was so cold on that first trip to the stone farm I had to run behind the sleigh to keep from freezing. I remember I had felt boots with rubberized soles. Even though the Wiebes had given me a heavy fur coat, it was bitterly cold on such an open sleigh. When I finally got indoors I quickly took off my boots and put my feet in cold water. By this time of year there was snow on the ground.

Quite a few members of the Pauls clan came to live on this stone farm. Mother and Father Pauls, Yasch and I, Frank Buhlers and their daughter Lena, Uncle Peter and Uncle Henry (Heintje, later H. J.), Aunt Liese—Heintje and Liese had to wait till after New Year’s to begin school in Thornhill because by this time the students were already practising full-time for the Christmas concert. Heintje was born in 1917 and so he was only ten years old.

Heating the stone house in winter was difficult. We had a cook stove in the kitchen and a metal heater in the adjoining room. We used poplar wood of which there was a plentiful supply. There was no furnace in the basement and no cistern. I believe Mother Pauls had brought the cast iron cook stove from Haskett. Mother and Father Pauls had also bought bedsteads in Haskett from Old Colony Mennonites who were moving to Mexico—also other furniture like *Schlopbänken* (sleeping benches) and a *Ruhbänk* (wooden couch) with a back that could be removed.

We had heard about the wild plums and cherries in Canada but that first spring it was so wet there weren’t any. So I ordered six boxes of fruit from Eaton’s catalogue. (You could buy anything through the catalogue, even *Zilfleesch* or pig’s feet in wooden pails.) I also bought three dozen jars with snap-on lids and made crabapple jam. For the first time we began to feel a bit more secure and even somewhat independent. On one occasion Yasch and Uncle Frank Buhler cheered and threw their caps in the air; they were so happy they didn’t have to work for others anymore.

Frank Buhlers lived upstairs in the stone house and we moved into the “little house.” It stood behind the barn in the pasture. We moved into this *Hustje* just two weeks before Christmas. The men had insulated it from the inside with beaver board. Our nearest neighbours, the Bollenbachs and the Kendalls, were not Mennonite. However, the Bollenbachs, who were Lutheran, were very friendly and accommodating. They invited Yasch and me for dinner on New Year’s Day. Compared to us they were rich, but we continued to have a very good relationship with them. Mr. Kendall seemed rather arrogant; he seriously questioned whether such uneducated people could even survive in this country.

Church life was always important to our family. We had heard of a congregation in Morden that was made up of various Mennonite groups—some from the Mennonite Brethren. Bible school students, occasionally also one of the teachers, from Winkler came out to speak to this congregation on a fairly regular basis. Unfortunately, the local pastor’s sermons were sometimes less than inspiring. One Sunday Yasch and Uncle Frank Buhler decided they needed a change so they visited the Herold Church a few miles north of Morden. (This church had been founded by the Klassens and the Dalkes who had come to Manitoba from Oklahoma.) Guess who was the guest speaker that Sunday!

In 1931 Rev. Peter Epp from Altona came to Morden. He gathered those who were *Kirchlich* (later General Conference) and founded the Bergthaler congregation. We weren’t a very large group but that was the beginning. At first we worshipped together with the Mennonite Brethren in Alexander Hall on the second floor of a stone building on Main Street. The first Bergthaler Church building was erected in 1937; in 1938 we hosted the conference. Yasch was ordained as minister in 1933. He had never preached before he was elected as minister. The congregation was asked to nominate candidates who might be considered as capable. Some of course declined. Yasch qualified because he was Sunday school superintendent and choir director (*Gesangleiter*). (I can’t recall his first sermon.) When we still congregated with the MBs a certain Mr. Miller was the choir director. When he moved away Mr. Neufeld, brother of Inspector Neufeld, took over that job for a short time and my husband succeeded him. And that’s how Yasch first became involved in church work. By this time Frank Buhlers had moved to Haskett. Uncle Frank served as choir director there. He was also always willing to preach when asked.

I don’t remember much about my first visit to a doctor in Canada. We didn’t go to the doctor during my first pregnancy; we needed the doctor only for the delivery. That was Mr. Menzies, Dr. Bob Menzies’ grandfather. I didn’t know a word of English and he knew no German—a very



J.M. & Maria (Funk) Pauls family in 1951, from left (back): Peter, Tinie, John, Mary, Jake; (front): Mother Maria, Alvin, Harry, Father Jacob.

awkward situation. We weren't accustomed to seeing the doctor unless there was an emergency. Yasch's mother even expressed amazement that we were calling a male doctor in for my first delivery. Why couldn't we just call in old Mrs. Neufeld, she wondered. She had had eighteen children herself and so she obviously knew something about such matters. But Yasch didn't listen to her on that occasion. Well, I thought this was the way it was done here and I would simply have to conform. Jake, Tinie and Peter were all born on the "stone farm" in the little frame house known as the *Hustje*. Mary was born on the Keenas farm, one mile west; the three youngest were born in the hospital. Dr. Wiebe advised us to come to the Winkler Hospital. He was not licensed to practice in the Morden area.

In the fall of 1935 we moved to the Keenas farm where Mary was born on February 26, 1936. We rented this land from a Mr. Rabinovitsch, a Jewish merchant in Morden. We were determined to increase our cash flow: we hadn't yet made any payments on the stone farm, not even the interest charges on the mortgage. That year we sowed the fields in spring with great hopes for a bountiful crop, but as spring turned into summer the weather just became drier and hotter. There were some great displays of lightning but the storm clouds always seemed to pass us by. In July my husband had to leave the farm to attend Conference meetings. Just before he left he said, "If we haven't had rain by the time I get back, we'll have a crop failure." He was right. That year the wheat yielded three bushels per acre. Our landlord wasn't at all happy when he told us how much he had lost. Well, when the land doesn't produce, even the Emperor gets

nothing. Conditions were so bad we thought we wouldn't be able to pay our hired man. Then the government came to the aid of people like us by offering farmers five dollars per month for each employee. This made it possible for us to provide Jake Reimer with food and lodging. We also let him have the five dollars each month.

How were we ever going to pay the \$9000 debt on the farm? This was our constant concern. We had paid nothing but the original \$500 down payment. But Mr. Kroeker was very kind. He and his wife even came to visit us occasionally. And when Father Pauls, apologized once because we couldn't pay even the interest charges, Mr. Kroeker said, "Don't you have enough to eat? Don't you have enough work to keep you busy? Be content!"

Children of Jacob M. and Maria (Funk) Pauls

Jacob F., eldest son of Jacob M. and Maria (Funk) Pauls, was born August 14, 1928. He married Dorothy Sawatzky on October 5, 1952. Jake graduated from Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg and attended Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. He has taught at Elim Christian Education Centre in Altona and has served pastorates in Morden and Altona (Bergthaler) and in Winnipeg (Bethel Mennonite, 1977–1996). Jake has been active in the Conference of Mennonites in Canada since 1968, and has served as vice-president of Mennonite World Conference.

Tinie was born April 30, 1930. She married Eldon Sawatzky on July 17, 1952. Tinie and her husband are now retired and live in Boissevain, where they are active members of the Whitewater Mennonite Church. For many years they operated a large farm in the Boissevain area.

Peter was born December 14, 1933. He married Madeline Pries on July 25, 1957. He is a graduate of Manitoba Teachers College, the University of Manitoba and holds a Ph.D from the University of Wisconsin (Madison). From 1968 to 1996 he was professor of English Literature at the University of Winnipeg. Prior to his employment with the University of Winnipeg, Peter taught in several public schools in Altona and Winnipeg. He retired in 1996.

Mary was born February 21, 1936. She married John Giesbrecht on August 10, 1973. She is a graduate of Manitoba Teachers College and the University of Manitoba. Although she is now retired, Mary served for many years as an elementary school teacher in Morden. She also taught school for several years in Taiwan. Mary was widowed in 1989.

Harry was born December 19, 1938. He married Elizabeth Rogers on June 28, 1963. Harry is a graduate of Manitoba Teachers College and holds a Master of Arts degree from the University of Manitoba. Harry

taught school for several years in Altona before moving to Winnipeg where he has spent most of his career teaching English in the St. James School Division.

John was born December 14, 1940. He married Norma Enns on June 5, 1965. John spent most of his adult life in banking and held responsible positions with the Bank of Montreal in Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Vancouver and Toronto. Following early retirement, he took a position with Mennonite Central Committee and is now serving with that organization in Akron, Pennsylvania.

Alvin, the youngest, was born September 18, 1942. He married Judy Bergen on August 29, 1965. Alvin graduated from the University of Manitoba with a degree in Fine Arts. He is also a graduate of Manitoba Teachers College and spent a number of years teaching in public schools. Endowed with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, Alvin decided early on in his career to establish his own business and now owns and operates "The Sounding Stone" which specializes in his handcrafted ceramic pottery.

Heinrich J. and Helena (Unger) Pauls

Jake I. Pauls

Heinrich J. Pauls (1882–Oct. 6, 1918)

married 1903 to Helena Unger (May 2, 1882–Sept. 23, 1918)

Heinrich was a son of Jacob and Maria (Dueck) Pauls. Both Heinrich and Helen moved to Grigorievka in 1889 with their parents. They were part of the younger generation who witnessed the birth of a village. They grew up there and married in 1903. For the first thirteen years of marriage they lived with Heinrich's parents, Jacob and Maria (Dueck) Pauls, where five children were born to them: Helena, Maria, Henry, Margreta and Jacob. This was a challenging situation in which to raise a family, with parents and relatives watching and criticizing. Helen, the daughter-in-law, was carefully observed in what she did and what she purchased. Hence there were times when Heinrich and Helen would make purchases and pass them through the window in order to avoid going through the main part of the house where they would possibly receive negative comments.

In 1916 Heinrich and Helen purchased their own farming operation and moved into their own home. This was to be a short sojourn, as Helen was already ill with tuberculosis at the time of their move. Her health gradually deteriorated, leaving more and more of the household responsibilities to her daughters, Helena and Maria. During gooseberry picking time she requested that she be carried to the garden so she could at least be outside and watch her children pick. At this occasion she

offered to tell a Bible story. Heinrich, a six-year-old, wanted to hear the story of one of his heroes, David or Joseph, whereas his older sisters wanted the story of Mary and Martha. Memory fails as to which story was actually told, possibly both.

During Helen's illness she again became pregnant and gave birth to Katharine, who died within a month on September 13, 1918. It was becoming apparent that Helen's death was also close at hand. On September 23, 1918, Maria (Unger) Pauls, Helen's sister, came to visit her. While she was approaching their house she saw a streak of light. She commented to her son Peter, "There goes Helen, up to heaven." When she stepped into the house, indeed her sister was gone. Immediately after Helen's burial, Heinrich became ill with the flu and died within ten days of his wife's death. Heinrich and Helen Pauls were both buried at the age of thirty-six.

This left the five children orphaned, who were then assigned to different uncles and aunts: Helena the oldest (13) and Jacob the youngest (3) were adopted by their grandparents, Peter and Helen (Nickel) Unger, who would have time to care for the youngest; Maria (11) was adopted by Uncle George and Aunt Anna (Unger) Klassen, because they had a large young family and could use some extra help; Henry (7) was adopted by Jacob and Maria (Unger) Pauls who, although they had a growing family, agreed to take a child if need be; and Margreta (5) was adopted by her single Aunt Margreta Pauls, who immediately claimed her because she was her namesake. Helena, the oldest of the orphaned children, contracted tuberculosis and died December 3, 1919.

The death of parents and two siblings within 15 months radically changed the lives of the remaining four siblings as they adapted to their new homes. All of this happened during the concluding years of World War I as German and Russian troops alternately came and left the village.

Henry H. Pauls (b. Nov. 22, 1910)

married June 10, 1934 to Katie Buhler (b. July 19, 1912)

The day after his father's funeral, with both parents buried within ten days, Henry recalls packing a small suitcase and walking down the village street to his adopted home: his Uncle Jacob, his dad's brother, and Aunt Maria, his mother's sister. There Henry was warmly received by uncle, aunt and cousins into the home where he grew into adulthood. Henry also recalls the farm auction soon after the death of his parents. He had frequently ridden their black horse and begged that he could keep it. However, the uncles controlled the whole estate and insisted that everything be sold at the auction. Hence, the seven-year-old experienced a further loss.

After emigrating to Canada, it became of utmost importance for Jacob and Maria (Unger) Pauls to become financially established. Jacob Kroeker from Winkler was a significant person in accomplishing this, having both a big heart and some needed capital to lend to various families upon their arrival in Canada. Hence, Jacob and Maria were able to purchase a farm three miles northwest of Morden. Everyone, including the children, had to assume responsibilities either at home or find employment to make ends meet. In the following years Henry found farm-related employment, including seasonal work in western Manitoba during harvest; one year, from February to November, he worked on a farm along the Red River; then back to the Abram Kroeker farm where he worked prior to marriage.

A growing interest for Henry during these years was Katie Buhler, whose mother (a widow) and family also emigrated from Grigorievka in February 1927, settling three miles southwest of Winkler. This family was no stranger to the Pauls family, having lived across the street from them in Grigorievka. With fondness he recalls being asked to walk Katie home across the street at night when she had come to visit his younger sisters and how she joined his family in their Saturday night catechism. Their friendship was rooted in their childhood and teenage experience on and off the street in Grigorievka. It was only a matter of time and opportunity that fanned their friendship into romance. The opportunities came as older siblings on each side married, Frank and Mary (Pauls) Buhler, as well as other family friendships and social interactions. Another building block in their relationship happened in 1928 when both of them realized their need for God and committed their lives to Jesus during an evangelistic service in Winkler. This gave them a common shepherd to direct their journey.

Henry and Katie were married on June 10, 1934 by Rev. Heinrich Born in the Morden United Church, which they rented for a dollar. It was a dry spring, but before the wedding festivities were over many of the guests got soaked by a heavy, yet welcome rain. Gifts included a horse, a cow, a small pig with a red bow, a hen with twelve chicks and other miscellaneous useful items. These were their common goods, along with a \$50 purchase of household furnishings at a store in Winnipeg. Full of joy, courage and hope they faced their future together.

Their first home was a small house at the Abram A. Kroeker farm, six miles southeast of Winkler, where Henry was once again employed year round. Their wages for the first year were \$300, two cows, one pig, some hens and feed. These were good years together. Their family grew as John (April 8, 1935) and Helen (June 18, 1937) were born there. Although the Kroeker farm was a good place to work, their dream was

to own their own farm. Hence in 1939, for \$1,400 they purchased a 160-acre farm nine miles southwest of Steinbach, Manitoba, within the Caruthers School District. The land was rocky with considerable bush and mostly poor buildings, but it was affordable and gave them a start on their own. The farming operation may have been ragged, but they were delighted to be their own boss. They worked hard at establishing that farm, building a new barn and hog barn within the next several years. Their family continued to grow as Jake (August 29, 1940) and Edwin (April 18, 1943) were born. In addition, Betty was born and died September 4, 1945, leaving them to mourn the loss. At this time the family particularly appreciated the Wilhelm and Anna (Funk) Buhler family as relatives and neighbours, along with the members of a small Mennonite Brethren Church in the area.

During these years more and more of the farms in the area were purchased by folks of Russian descent, prompting some of the Mennonite families to relocate. Thus, in spring of 1946, Henry and Katie Pauls decided to sell their place and purchase a run-down, 240-acre farm, three-and-a-half miles southeast of Morden in the Valleyfield School District. Immediately following seeding, everyone, including Grandma Buhler who had been living with them since 1941, moved into the empty granary. They began building a new 24-foot by 28-foot, one-and-a-half storey house. In the years that followed every building got replaced and others added, along with hundreds of trees to complement the original seven. Truly this was the farm that Henry and Katie had dreamed of. It was also the place where the greater part of the family was raised as Henry (November 30, 1946), Ben (January 25, 1949) and Joyce (November 27, 1954) were added to the dining table and to family life.

The Morden Bergthaler Mennonite Church quickly became a central part of their life. The family participated in almost every service—rain, snow or sunshine. For years Henry taught Sunday school and Katie participated in the Ladies' Group. In 1954 Henry was elected as deacon, a call which both Henry and Katie accepted. This affected the family in that it required them to participate in numerous meetings, both locally and in the larger conference. It was not uncommon for Henry to stop the tractor and attend an all-day Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) meeting. Hence the children were called upon to help carry the extra work load, be that daily chores or field work. But not only in their absence were the children asked to do things; the parents spent many hours working and teaching the children the basic household and farm tasks, thus giving them a tremendous resource for life.

Furthermore, they were diligent in conveying their faith in and commitment to Jesus, whom they worshipped and followed. Prayer,

scripture reading and singing were regular occurrences. They wanted their faith to be part of their lives and those of their children. The fruit of their faith challenged them in 1958 when son John shared that he desired to go to India for three years with MCC as a “Pax Man.” This required a letting go and committing him to God. Over the years their children followed careers and callings which took them out of province: to India; to Newton, Kansas; to High Level, Alberta; to Asuncion, Paraguay; and to Ontario. This required grace to say farewell, but also provided the opportunity to visit each of these places to both see and affirm the work of their children.

Although the farm was a great place to grow up, one by one each son and daughter felt called to pursue other careers and callings. This reality was especially evident when son Ben left for college in 1968, leaving Henry alone with the harvest in an exceptionally wet year. The personal struggle of that fall resulted in the decision to sell the farm. In April 1969 the farmyard displayed all the equipment, cattle and more, as people gathered on a muddy ground to bid at their auction. Twenty-three years of nurturing that farm and the farm nurturing them had come to an end.

Children of Henry and Katie Pauls

John C. and Mary (Schrag) Pauls. Following several short term jobs, graduating from Elim Bible School and studying mechanical engineering, John decided to do a three-year voluntary service assignment in India. There he met Mary Schrag from Kansas, who was serving as a missionary nurse. They married December 1, 1961 and together continued for fifteen more years to serve the church in India, John as mission mechanic and engineer and Mary as nurse and teacher, under the Commission on Overseas Mission (COM) of the General Conference Mennonite Church. In 1976, they moved to Morden where John worked with Farm King. Then in 1980 they accepted another invitation from COM to Zaire, where they served another three years. In 1983 they returned to Winnipeg where John accepted an engineering job with Farm King-Buhler, the owner of which is his cousin John Buhler.

Helen (Pauls) and Herman Kuhl married in 1960 and have demonstrated the greatest stability of all the Pauls family, having lived in Rosenfeld, Manitoba all their married life. Herman taught school for 36 years, mostly in Rosenfeld and Altona, until retirement in 1995. Helen devoted much of her time raising four children and later managed the W.C. Miller Collegiate cafeteria in Altona. In addition, they are active members in their congregation, and in 1979 were asked to pastor the Rosenfeld church which they are currently doing.



Henry H. & Katie Pauls family in 1994 at their 60th wedding anniversary, from left (back): Ben, Floyd Pauls, Edwin, Barry Suderman, Myron Pauls, Jake, Virgil Pauls, Hank, Marc Pauls, Don Kuhl, Glen Kuhl; (second from back): Ruth Pauls, Joyce (Pauls) Suderman, Mary Pauls, Irene Pauls, Joyce Pauls, Duane Pauls, Herman Kuhl, Deb Kuhl with daughter Nicole, Janice Kuhl; (third from back): Pat Pauls with daughter Lori, John, Mother Katie, Father Henry H., Helen (Pauls) Kuhl with granddaughters Amanda and Teri, Vivian Kuhl, Rowena Kuhl; (front): Brittany Kuhl, Allison Pauls, Alisa Suderman, Tessa Suderman, Tanya Suderman, Emily Suderman, Stephanie Kuhl, Matthew Pauls, Christopher Kuhl.

Jake and Irene (Rempel) Pauls. Upon completing Teachers' College, Jake taught grade school for two years in Ilford and near Mather, Manitoba. Meanwhile, Irene completed her nurses' training. After their marriage on August 22, 1964, Irene worked at Deer Lodge Hospital while Jake completed his studies at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. In 1966 they became the first directors at Camp Koinonia and of youth ministry in the Manitoba Conference. In 1968 they moved to Newton, Kansas, where Jake studied and became director of youth ministry for the General Conference Mennonite Church. In 1973 they were instrumental in starting New Creation Fellowship; in 1974 they devoted their time to building that church, which included part-time construction. In 1981 Jake and Irene moved back to Winnipeg with the mission of starting the Grain of Wheat Church Community. In 1987 Jake became involved with Habitat for Humanity in Manitoba and gradually with Habitat for Humanity Canada. In 1993 they moved to Waterloo, Ontario. In summer of 1995 they became involved in their third church planting, the River of Life Fellowship in Kitchener.

Edwin and Ruth (Enns) Pauls. Upon marriage on June 7, 1970, they worked on the Victor Falk farm near Crystal City, Manitoba. In 1972 they moved to Steinbach where Ed worked in the boat factory and later with Barkman Plumbing. He has also been employed with various farmers.

Henry and Joyce (Rachul) Pauls. Upon their marriage on May 30, 1970, they moved to High Level, Alberta. Hank worked for the Department of Transportation in flight services and later as aircraft maintenance engineer; Joyce worked as a secretary. In 1982 they relocated to Dawson Creek, B.C., and in 1986 they returned to Winnipeg. Joyce, after raising the family, worked in secretarial and office management positions.

Bernard (Ben) and Pat (Gerber) Pauls. Studying theology and music brought Ben to Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana, where he met Pat; they were married on December 28, 1975. They moved to Altona, Manitoba where Ben was the music director at Elim Bible Institute. In 1980 Ben accepted the position of music director at the Mennonite Seminary in Asuncion, Paraguay. Following this assignment they served the King Road Mennonite Brethren Church (1992) in Abbotsford, B.C., and in 1995 began serving the Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Winkler, Manitoba.

Joyce (Pauls) and Barry Suderman. Upon marriage on May 25, 1974, they lived in Winnipeg. In 1978 they joined the MCC voluntary service unit in Toronto. Following this assignment Barry again became involved in computer work and Joyce continued to volunteer and began raising their family. In 1983 they moved to Winnipeg, where Barry again accepted a computer programming position. Currently Joyce is working as secretary in the office of a local school.

Chapter 17

GERHARD AND SUSANNA PETERS FAMILY

Susan (Krahn) Miller

Gerhard G. Peters (1870–1938)

married 1896 to Susanna Reimer (d. 1915)

Gerhard G. Peters was born in the Molotschna settlement but grew up in Brazol, a large estate north of Molotschna, purchased by the Mennonites from a Russian nobleman. His father—our great-grandfather, Gerhard F. Peters—had established a general store in the village of Blumenfeld on the outskirts of Schoenfeld. Mother told me that great-grandfather wished to have each of his six sons employed in the family business.

Gerhard, the oldest, married Susanna Reimer on October 13, 1896, and the young couple moved in with his parents who inhabited the roomy *Gutshaus* (manor house) of the former owner, Brazolovsky. I mention this detail because mother has commented on how the extended family gathered at this large home each Christmas and for other occasions. Great-grandmother would serve the traditional cold lunch of *Plumimoos* (fruit soup) and ham after the church service on Christmas day. Having prepared it ahead of time, she could go along to church.

Six children were born to Gerhard and Susanna, our mother, Justina being the oldest. Eventually the family moved seven miles into Schoenfeld where grandfather became manager of a branch store. There mother attended six years of elementary school. She speaks nostalgically of her carefree childhood. The trip to her grandparents' home was made by wagon, an excursion she claims took most of a day.

In 1911 grandfather became an independent merchant. He acquired a small store in the village of Grigorievka. Mother must have been thirteen when the family moved and began a new life. Since she had completed elementary school and no higher education was available in Grigorievka, she was permitted to attend the girls' school in Halbstadt, the main village of Molotschna. She boarded with relatives and enjoyed her two years at the school very much.

Then her mother's health broke down. She suffered from heart disease and could no longer run the household. Justina was asked to come home and help. They had a simple Russian woman doing much of the cooking and cleaning. "She baked good brown bread," mother recalled, "but I learned to make the buns and cookies." Grandmother had already taught



Gerhard F. & Sara (Enns) Peters family in the mid-1890s, from left (back): Jakob G. Peters (1882–1923), Franz F. Rempel (b. 1872), Susanna (Reimer) Peters (1871–1915), Gerhard G. Peters (1870–1938), Gerhard H. Doerksen (1866–1930), Hermann G. Peters (1878–1918); (centre): Justina (Peters) Rempel (1873–1929), Mother Sara (1847–1921), Marie Peters (1890–1957), Father Gerhard F. (1838–1907), Sara (Peters) Doerksen (1875–1930), Peter G. Peters (1871–1918), Franz G. Peters (1879–1938); (front): John G. Peters (1886–1953), Cornelius G. Peters (1888–1979).

mother to sew; now a seamstress was hired to teach her and two cousins (all three were Justinas—Peters, Dyck, Enns) to sew properly. Mother told me she made most of her siblings' clothes until they were grown up.

One of their neighbours in the village was the Jacob Baerg family. Their daughter Lena became mother's best friend. At age eighteen they were baptized and received into the church by Lena's father who served as a lay minister for many years. That same year a double tragedy occurred in mother's life: her mother died of heart failure at age forty-four, and Lena of typhoid fever at eighteen.

In the early years, grandfather's business flourished. Mother often told us how they lived. "We used to fetch everything we needed from the store: sugar, syrup, rice, cookies. My father would give us children sticks of licorice or candy. Villagers would trade butter and eggs for sugar and coffee." Grandfather dreamed of expanding, and purchased bricks for building. But he had not reckoned on World War I and the coming upheavals in Russia. New merchandise became increasingly difficult to obtain. Furthermore, the relative peace which the Mennonites had enjoyed under the tsarist regime was shattered by ever-increasing unrest

and the threat of revolution. The bricks were never used. All he could do was keep the business going on old stock until the village itself broke up as a Mennonite colony.

At an early age Justina shouldered a lot of responsibility for the household and for her brothers and sisters. When grandfather toyed with the idea of remarriage and considered a young woman not much older than she, Justina told him she could not accept someone like that as a second mother. He gave up the idea and remained a widower. Soon after she herself was of marriageable age. She told her father, "I don't want to marry just anybody. I'd like to marry a schoolteacher." Perhaps she had already fallen in love with our father, Peter Krahn (see the Krahn story in Chapter 12).

Helene Peters (d. 1995)

married 1930 to David Isaak

Helene, the sixth and youngest child of Gerhard and Susanna (Reimer) Peters, was born in Grigorievka where she spent her childhood and youth. When the Mennonites left the village around 1926, father Peters, by then a widower, decided to move to Friedensruh in Molotschna. There, Helene and David Isaak were married on June 16, 1930.

Two sisters, a brother Jasch and father Gerhard, a widower, chose to remain in the USSR because an unmarried sister, Agatha, was denied a Canadian visa for health reasons. Their tragic life story is that of untold millions in Russia: hardship, exile, forced labour, hunger, starvation and death. Their father and brother died, while World War II separated Helene and her husband. The two sisters were part of the general evacuation of Germans living in Ukraine. In 1911 they were sent to Aktiubinsk, Kazakhstan, somewhat to the south of the Ural Mountains that divide Russia and Siberia. They lived there until their emigration to Germany in 1993.

David and Helene had a family of six of which only two survived: Elvera and Edja. Helene was drafted into forced labour (Trudarmee) and sent to northern Siberia for two years, during which time sister Agatha looked after the family. In 1951 Elvera married Siegmund Herdt; they have four sons, three of whom are married. Siegmund worked on a Soviet communal farm from 1946 to 1993. Helene, along with Elvera and Siegmund and family, emigrated to Germany in 1993. Elvera and Siegmund are now retired and live as pensioners in Karlsruhe. Their children have found work and are adjusting to the German society. Edja married Ludmilla Giesbrecht in 1965. They have a family of three, two sons and a daughter, the latter of whom is married. Edja, like his brother-in-law, worked in a Soviet communal farm from 1968 to 1996. At that



Helene (Peters) Isaak

time they emigrated to Germany where they are in the process of finding work.

Father David Isaak was separated from the family during World War II and came to Germany with the German Army. He wanted to go to Canada but was refused, then chose Paraguay. In 1949, having had no news of his wife, he married a widow, Liese Friesen. For thirty-seven years they enjoyed a happy marriage. In 1977 they moved to Asuncion where she passed away in 1986. Soon after, David learned that his first wife was still alive and living in Germany. He came to visit his family in 1995; but for Helene, it was too late to consider reunion and moving to Paraguay. They finally agreed on each living their separate lives, Helene staying with her family in Germany. She died on August 15, 1995.



Helene (Peters) & David Isaak family, from left (back): Siegmund and Elvera (Isaak) Herdt, Edja and Ludmilla Isaak, Hein Herdt (grandson); (front): Woldimar Isaak (grandson).

Sarah (Peters) and Wilhelm Loewen

*Elsie (Loewen) Klassen
and Gerta (Loewen) Funk*

*Although the years have seemed to pass,
They're never really gone—
For memories left within each heart
Will always linger on.*

Sarah Peters (d. 1976)

married Wilhelm Loewen (d. 1985)

Grigorievka was a large, beautiful and clean village with many large trees and lovely sidewalks. *Kruschtje* (wild pear) trees had fruit which was good to eat. Many gardens also had apples, plums, apricots, pears, gooseberries and grape vines. Lilac bushes with gorgeous aromas graced the village streets. Every yard had a spacious flower garden with numerous plots, all kept tidy with a hoe and the *Shuva*. Watermelons were abundant. Meals included meat, potatoes, a variety of vegetables and even *Platz*, since fruit was plentiful. Usually a kitchen maid was hired to do the cleaning and bake the brown bread. These maids were generally Ukrainian peasant girls.

The family farm (*Bauernhof*) was not as large as it is nowadays. Most farmyards had chickens, ducks, geese, a dog, cats and livestock including



*The Wilhelm W. Loewen,
Sr., family.*

horses, cows, pigs and sheep. Even swans were present. Ploughing the soil was done with horses. Since the land was very fertile, the settlement prospered economically as well as culturally.

In the centre of town near the intersection of the two streets, Gerhard G. Peters, our grandfather, owned and operated the village store. There our mother, Sarah Peters, grew up with five siblings: Juste, Agata, Grisch, Jasch and Lenchen. Across the street lived Bernhard Penners, the grandparents to our father, Wilhelm Loewen. The store had adjoining living quarters for the growing family.

Grandfather Peters sold groceries, sewing materials, kerosene and other household goods. These were brought by sleigh or wagon from Barvenkovo (eight verst away) or Kharkov. Once they were old enough, Juste and Agate helped their father in the store. During the dangerous Makhno bandit era (1918–1919) robbers came on horseback and stole items from the store. They demanded clothes and gold. Their sabre marks were left on the table where our grandfather stretched out his hands. It was the hand of God that spared the family's life. In 1915, grandmother became very ill and died close to Christmas. The older girls now cared for the younger children. Then in 1926, the widower moved his family back to Friedensruh, Molotschna.

Wilhelm Loewen's father, also a widower since 1914, went to serve in World War I. The six children resided with the Bernhard Penners during these three years; there father probably played with the Peters children across the road. At this time church life was very important to all families. Wilhelm and Sarah attended church, choir practice, socials and weddings. This was where their courtship started as they walked the village roads to and from church activities. Father attended the village school for eight years. He started Zentralschule with plans to become a teacher. Working in the fields with horses, he still did his share of the chores.

Sarah attended school for six years, learning to sew and bake in the outdoor oven. At twenty-one, they decided to be married and took their vows in the Peters' house. Father always said he had married the prettiest girl in the village. Shortly after their marriage people began talking about emigration. Father and mother also applied because mandatory conscription into the Russian army would separate the young couple if they remained behind. Elly, who was sickly most of her life, lay in a metal crib and passed the doctor's examination. They left by train, via Riga, in September 1926. After a long ocean voyage they landed in Montreal. Mother said she was the only one who had not been seasick.

Father, mother and Elly took a train to Rosenfeld, Manitoba. They worked for a Fehr family, then moved on to Myrtle where work was

available at the Giesbrechts. Dad helped with milking the many cows, while Mother cleaned the Giesbrecht home. At this time, the second daughter, Gertrude, was born, with the assistance of a midwife. In 1929, Father was hired to work for two French farmers named Bullock and Ringe in the St. Francois Xavier area. Mother, with two daughters on her hands, once again helped with tidying their employers' homes. She often talked about how full and hard the days were. While the family resided at the John Martens yard in Springstein, Father worked for seven years as a farm labourer before he purchased his own farm.

In 1929, their first son, William, was born in Springstein. In 1932 Father bought one hundred and sixty acres from John Martens and in 1933 he was in full swing, farming his own land. What a joy it was for him. He always talked about the beauty of a field of wheat. When it was harvested in fall and stored in grain bins, a sense of peace and contentment seemed to come over him. We felt that with him success was not luck, it was hard work.

Of course during those years there were also setbacks. At first my parents lived in two granaries: one served as a kitchen and dining room area, the other as bedrooms for what was by then a family of five. In 1933 a tornado struck our farmyard and moved the two granaries over a few feet. The chickens were settled in for the night under these granaries and, of course, after the tornado they were no more. When we left the granaries as the storm was approaching, I saw the kerosene lamp sliding across the table. Even the strap, hanging on a nail on the wall, swung back and forth. We were filled with fear and sought refuge elsewhere. Mother, Elly, Bill and I huddled under a makeshift roof where we waited for the storm to subside, while hayracks and everything else were toppling over. The next day, much fixing and clean-up had to be done. It was during this time that the family moved into a larger granary which was insulated with sawdust and wallpapered on the inside. It served as the sleeping quarters and was heated only with a wood stove. But an extra shed was added to our abode, which was our eating area and the entrance to our new home. Even though it was rather crowded, we managed quite well.

One Sunday morning while our family was getting ready to attend the local church service in the village of Springstein, we had quite a chimney fire. I can still visualize the red hot, glowing stove-pipes leading from the cook stove to the chimney. Wasting no time after some stove pipes had fallen on the linoleum, Mother took my winter coat and used it to carry the pipes out into the yard. The coat and the linoleum had been ruined, but the house had been spared. In no time church members came with food and sympathy for us.

On Christmas Eve in 1934, Gerhard (Hardy) was born. We as a family were at the Springstein school Christmas program. At that time our teacher, B. B. Fast, had practised all the Christmas plays, songs, and other items in the German language. The tree was lit with real wax candles and the school board watched very closely lest any of the candles ignite the pine needles. Christmas gifts that day were a pencil and a scribbler for everyone, plus a bag of goodies. While all this was taking place, Henry Baergen, who was one of the men with a car, offered to take mother to the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Before our Christmas program was over, Hardy had been born. It was a lonely drive home with horses that evening without our dear mother. But father assured us that all was well and that we had a new baby brother. Ernest, another brother, was born in 1935, the third son born in the month of December. He was a healthy child at birth but later on was troubled with rheumatic fever. He always remained the quiet, peaceful type.

Our oldest sister, Elfrieda, was laid up with a heart condition. She passed away in 1937 at the tender age of ten years. A rider on horseback came to tell us the sad news. It was a hard time for mother and father. The trip across the Atlantic plus the farm had to be paid, and now a funeral had to be planned. Elly had frequented the Concordia Hospital many times, but when she left this last time she asked each one of us to forgive her where she had grieved us. For me this was a very touching experience from so young a child. The funeral took place at the Springstein School, since no church had yet been built. The entire community stood with us during this time of mourning. It was a simple, beautiful funeral. We had made wreaths with spruce branches and decorated with mauve lilacs which were in full bloom at that time. Songs like "Lasst mich gehn, das ich Jesu möge sehn" (Let me depart that I might see Jesus) and "An dem schönen goldnen Strand" (On that beautiful golden shore) were sung. The coffin and Elly's white dress were made in the community. The school students, with towels at their shoulders, were pallbearers from the school to the cemetery. Her teacher, B. B. Fast, grieved with us in our great loss. However, life had to go on and it did.

In 1939 father moved the family into a larger white bungalow home which was built by John Redekop of North Kildonan. There was still no hydro, so we had to light our own little lamp at night. Then in 1941 sister Elsie was born. We still remember what beautiful curly hair she had at birth.

In 1943 father had surgery at the Concordia Hospital. While he was there, mother gave birth to another baby daughter, Johanna Agatha. It was forty-three degrees below. John Martens, an uncle, and his wife Agatha and our neighbour, Jakob Penner, rallied to our need and escorted

Mother to the car. Johanna Agatha was born before they got to Winnipeg, but all was well. What a beautiful sister. Three of our family were now at the Concordia Hospital. Aunt Agatha was a wonderful cook for the rest of us who were at home. We ate great carrot soup and so much more.

In 1939, both the Mennonite Brethren Church and the General Conference Church were built in Springstein. Until then these two churches had held all their worship services together, through which a good relationship had been established which was maintained throughout our lifetime. Major services like Thanksgiving and *Bibel Besprechung* (Bible study) were still celebrated together. Much of this may be attributed to my wonderful teacher, Reverend B. B. Fast, who tried his best to strive for unity and neighbourliness in the community. After eleven years of teaching in Springstein, he left for Winnipeg to join the business of his father-in-law, C. A. DeFehr. A high school was also built at this time, when Gerhard Lohrenz of Lydiatt, Manitoba, became our first principal.

World War II was a restless time. Sugar and other commodities were rationed. However, during this time many farmers prospered financially. This was also the case for father.

After deacon Abram Neufeld passed away in 1946, father was nominated as deacon of the Springstein Mennonite Church, a position he held for life. He was fully interested in the church and its work and also served as a Sunday school teacher and on various committees. He enjoyed doing community work and was a trustee on the local school board.

During the fall of 1947, twins, Alvira Ruth and Ronald Alvin, were born into our family. Our parents were both forty-two years of age at this time. These last two children became the joy of our family. I stayed home for four years to help mother with these two siblings. This was after I had graduated from the Mennonite Collegiate Institute. Staying at home meant denying myself any further education at that time, yet I was given a trip, a sewing course and two years at Canadian Mennonite Bible College during these four years. Later on, I realized the value of this in my life.

In 1948, a large twelve-room house was built for our family. It was white stucco on the outside, had running water, two bathrooms and electricity. It only cost \$18,000. Father also bought more machinery and built more granaries. Things were looking up and it seemed all was well for the future, but changes were coming. We were all getting older. Mother's health was not the best. She had been ailing for twenty years, and finally needed open heart surgery. After that she never really regained her strength to follow up with all the work on the farm.



Wilhelm & Sarah (Peters) Loewen family, from left (back): William, Gerta, Gerhard, Ernest; (front): Elsie, Father Wilhelm with Ruth, Mother Sarah with Ron, Johanna.

There were a number of years of poor crops due to grasshoppers, too much rain one year, and not enough in another year. It was tough going. During the good years father with his sons had farmed six hundred and forty acres. He enjoyed farming until 1969, when the farm was sold to daughter Elsie and son-in-law Harry Klassen. Father could remain a resident on the homestead, but he would not be farming the land anymore. However, he could admire the beautiful fields of grain while touring the countryside with mother at his side. I'm sure they had many good talks and undoubtedly plans for the future. However, soon mother's health necessitated many trips to Concordia Hospital every year so that her condition could be stabilized again.

Dad continued to be involved in all facets of the church. He was very close to our minister, Reverend Wilhelm Enns. His messages touched our hearts; there were no dull moments when he preached the Word of God. Our Wilhelm Loewen family had many good times at the Enns home. They reflected the love of God in their lives and we, in turn, loved them for that.

Mother was an avid reader. She had read every book in our church library and looked elsewhere for more reading material. She also busied herself with sewing dresses for the children or outfitting dolls for church bazaars, which were held annually during the Thanksgiving weekend.

Other handiwork included embroidering or appliqueing pillow cases. Last but not least, mother was a great woman of prayer. She often told me that her sleepless nights were spent in prayer for her family, while she gazed at the starry skies. I remember when both mother and father knelt with me in prayer the day before I was baptized at the Springstein Mennonite Church. It truly touched my heart! Dad also presented me with my own *Gesangbuch* which had been put out by the General Conference Church. I was assured that he acknowledged my decision to become a member of God's church.

During this time, mother's health was such that she could no longer carry on fully as a homemaker. Besides frequenting the hospital, she finally went to the Bethania Personal Care Home where she enjoyed the fellowship of the staff and all the others who visited her. She loved the programs which really perked her up. After a three-month stay at Bethania, mother passed away at age seventy. It was a hard blow for dad. Well I remember how he wrote me a letter about every minute detail of her passing. All we could do was to phone him a number of times every week during the first while. Mother was buried from the Springstein Mennonite Church on an extremely snowy day in February 1976. We as a family granted her that rest.

After suffering a stroke, dad moved to Bethel Place in Winnipeg. While there, his only living sister, Maria Loewen of Germany, came to see him; earlier he had travelled to see her in Germany. This was a joyous time for him. He perked up for a while, taking our Tante Maria to visit relatives. She was past eighty and we had never met her after all these years. The stories she shared with us from the old country, Russia, Ukraine and also the village of Grigorievka were very interesting. Mother and father had often told us about their homeland, but we never really asked enough questions. Maria Loewen told us of her youth and how things had been in the Wilhelm W. Loewen, Sr., family. After all, five children had lost their mother at a very early age while their father had been serving in World War I. Hence, the children had been distributed among the relatives. There had been times when food was scarce and restlessness prevailed.

We as a family had planned to celebrate dad's eightieth birthday in March 1985. But this was not to be. In fall of 1984, he spoke of extreme tiredness all the time. He mentioned to me that he could only do a little bit of work, then would have to lie down to rest. The caretaker at Bethel Place had become aware of his pain and, upon consultation with his doctor, dad was hospitalized. The day before he went to Concordia Hospital, we phoned him. He was full of hope for a complete recovery. He told me that he was planning to purchase a new car in spring. He even

was concerned that the phone call would cost me a lot of money. He talked about the farm and about how he loved the prairies.

We arranged to have our 1984 family Christmas at the Bethel Place dining room. It was good to be together. Hardy even came out from Calgary to be at dad's side. We enjoyed singing Christmas carols and hearing dad join in. He spent the rest of the Christmas holidays at the Concordia Hospital. In January 1985 at age 79, dad went to meet his Maker. He passed away peacefully, which was comforting for the family.

Chapter 18

NIKOLAI AND HELENA PETERS FAMILY

Nikolai Peters

The information on our great-grandfather Klaas Peters (c.1815–1890) is rather sketchy. Apparently he moved from Osterwick to Georgsthal in Fuerstenland, and finally settled in Grigorievka when that village was started. His wife was Katharina Braun (1821–1909). There is no record of the number of children in the family, but one of them was Nikolai (Klaas).

Nikolai (Klaas) Peters (1846–1897)

Nikolai Peters was married to Helena Sawatzky (1849–1919). They built up a small farm near the east end of the village and raised six children:

Helena Peters (1887–1916)

married to Johann Neufeld (1873–1921)

Helena and Johann Neufeld had ten children. Some of them are believed to have moved to Siberia before the Revolution. One son, Nikolai Neufeld, emigrated to Canada with his wife Maria Froese, and they lived in Plum Coulee, Manitoba, for many years. He made his living in shoe repairs, harness-making and carpentry. Johann was an excellent story-teller, and could thrill his listeners with tales of horror relating to his army experiences. The family moved to Winnipeg after retiring from work in Plum Coulee.

Katharina Peters (1878–1932)

married to Jacob A. Wiens (1878–1924)

Katharina and Jacob Wiens had eleven children and lived in Omsk, Siberia. The second oldest son, Jacob, kept up a sporadic correspondence with us until 1991. One of his daughters married and moved to Novosibirsk, Siberia.

Margareta Peters (1881–1922)

married to David J. Klassen (1879–1931)

Margareta and David Klassen had ten children and lived in Siberia.

Johann Peters (1886–1932)

remained single and emigrated to Canada in 1924.

Nikolai Peters (1890–1954)

married 1921 to Sarah Klassen (1892–1961).

Nikolai and Sarah Peters lived in Grigorievka for about a year, then left Russia in 1923 and arrived in Canada in early 1924. Later that year they settled on a farm near Hanley, Saskatchewan. They had five children, the oldest of which died on the train leaving Russia.

Cornelius Peters (1892–1979)

married to Aganetha Klassen (1892–1956)

Cornelius and Aganetha lived in Grigorievka until they emigrated to Canada in late 1924. They had four children.

Nikolai N. Peters, our father, spent his childhood in Grigorievka. During his teenage years he helped his widowed mother operate the farm. Then he served two years in the forestry division (*Forsteidienst*) in lieu of military service. When World War I broke out Nikolai was conscripted into the medical corps and spent most of the war years on the Turkish front where they picked up wounded and sick soldiers and transported them back to the hospitals. He and the rest of the family then lived through the terrible times of the Revolution. Bandits robbed and plundered in Grigorievka, but the village was spared the ghastly tortures and murders perpetrated in other villages.

In 1921 father married Sarah Klassen from Nikolaipol and brought her to Grigorievka. They moved into the small family home where his brother Cornelius and family and brother Johann were already living. Starting in January 1923, father kept a diary of the day-to-day happenings in Grigorievka. This has given us some idea of village life at that time. Living conditions were relatively poor but they were gradually improving. The diary entries frequently express his gratitude for peace and stability in the village, although an occasional break-in did take place and each man had to take his turn as night watchman.

Regular church services were well attended. The ministers were H. Unruh from Petrovka, Kornelius Krahn, F. Baerg and Peter Unger. Peter Unger had spent some time in America and returned to Grigorievka with his family in the early 1920s. He had absorbed some American evangelistic practices, and returned with some of the *Kernlieder*, gospel songs and choruses, which had not been part of the Grigorievka tradition. Traditionally, *Choräle* and venerated church hymns were sung on religious occasions, and nature and folksongs at social events. Up to the time of the Revolution, schools daily offered excellent religious instruction, including Bible stories, catechism and a wide repertoire of hymns, so children were not generally part of the Sunday morning services. Mr.

Unger gathered children, youth and whoever wished to attend, at first in private homes but later in larger quarters, where they were taught modern songs with rhythmic clapping and gospel songs. Revival meetings such as *Zelt Mission* (tent mission) had not been popular in the village until religious instruction and practices were forbidden, and Mr. Unger's efforts were appreciated. During the winter, Bible study hours were also conducted in private homes several times a week.

A great deal of informal visiting and socializing took place. Numerous names of the relatives and visitors are recorded in father's diary. There were Sawatzkys, Ungers, Krahn, Bartels, Buhlers, Schroeders, Thiessens, Hieberts, Friesens, Loewens, Redekops, Pauls, Derksens, Wienses, Penners, Kaspers, Janzens, Toews, Brauns, Harms, Warkentins, Giesbrechts, Duecks, Klassens, Bergens, Neufelds, Tschetters and an elderly man named Tsoson. They all exchanged visits, helped each other with food and clothing, visited the sick and attended funerals. They bartered, sold and exchanged household items such as clothing, vegetables, horses and equipment.

Frequent trips were made to neighbouring villages. Barvenkovo, which was about ten kilometres away, was the business and shopping centre. The Peters' main income in winter seemed to be the sale of butter. This was also the time of extreme inflation in Russia. Butter prices, for instance, rose from six million rubles per pound to seven million rubles in a matter of a few weeks. Potatoes sold for thirty-four million rubles per sack, soap was two million rubles per pound, and a secondhand jacket sold for fifty million rubles. Other villages referred to in the diary are: Petrovka, Nikolaievka, Sheretoka, Ialkanka, Shostok, Rushavali, Dubrovka and Bechok. This last one was further away and required a whole day's drive and an overnight stay.

The Peters' farm (*Wirtschaft*) was relatively small. The two families each owned a cow and shared farm implements such as a one-bottom plough and a set of harrows. My father had two horses, a sleigh and a wagon. The cultivated land must have been minimal because they were able to plough, seed and harrow all the fields in less than a week with these two horses. Reference is made to their acreage in the Brunnen-nummer immediately to the northeast of the village. The crops grown were wheat, barley, rye, millet and corn. In the garden they planted the usual vegetables, potatoes, beans, watermelons and pumpkins. It is interesting to note that the horses received special treatment in that they were taken to the village pond (*Dräntj*) at the end of the day and given a bath. Sometimes father and mother enjoyed a swim and bath in the pond at the same time. After seeding the Peters brothers also did some custom ploughing for the neighbours and for Tante Pauls. They still



Nikolai & Sarah (Klassen) Peters in 1954, from left (back): Nikolai, Jr., Margaret (Koop) Peters, Edward, Elfrieda, Henry; (front): Agnes (Koop) Peters with son Gerald, Father Nikolai, Mother Sarah with granddaughter Kathy Peters, Frieda (Patkau) Peters.

owed her for the lumber used in their mother's coffin four years earlier. This was the final payment. The brothers tried to get more land some distance from the village but were unable to do so. Another important farm activity in spring was the preparation of fuel blocks from the winter's supply of manure. This required many days of careful drying, compacting and then cutting into blocks.

Some people were becoming more optimistic about the future and they formed the Holländischer Verband (Dutch Union), an organization intended to spearhead the economic recovery of the settlements. Father also joined this organization. However, government orders and restrictions were becoming more and more burdensome. All possessions had to be recorded in great detail. Then an order was issued that May 1 was to be celebrated as a special holiday. No work was to be undertaken that day.

Many people became convinced that they should leave Russia. Mother's family in Nikolaipol had already decided to leave as soon as possible, so mother and father reluctantly agreed to go as well. Father submitted their application forms together with the required fee of 150 million rubles. They quickly sold their meagre possessions and on July 17, 1923 were on the emigration train out of Russia. Tragedy struck when their little boy contracted meningitis and died on the train. They had to leave the little one in Smolensk to be buried by strangers. In

Germany they were detained in Lechfeld for six months until father's eye disease was cured. Then on January 6, 1924 they disembarked from the liner *Montcalm* in St. John, New Brunswick. They continued on by train to Herbert, Saskatchewan, where they found work on a farm. Later in the year they moved to Hanley and settled on a farm among a fairly large group of Mennonites. This is where we, the children, grew up.

Children of Nikolai and Sarah Peters

Elfrieda (b. 1932) married Helmut Dueck. They live in Saskatoon where she is a teacher and administrator of a school. They have three children and three grandchildren. *Edward* (b. 1928) married Margaret Koop. They live on the parents' farm and operate a large cattle and wheat farm. They have four children and two grandchildren. *Henry* (b. 1926) married Frieda Patkau. He was the pastor of the local Mennonite church and a farmer. They are now retired and living in the town of Hanley. They have seven children and thirteen grandchildren. *Nikolai* (b. 1924) married Agnes Koop. I am a professional engineer and was engaged in the irrigation dams on the Prairies. We are currently retired and living in Saskatoon. We have four children and nine grandchildren.

We, the children and grandchildren, are truly thankful for the heritage passed on to us by our ancestors and, above all, humbly grateful for God's guidance and protection over these six generations. The inscription on our parents' gravestone reads, "Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from generation to generation" (Psalm 90:1).

Chapter 19

THE SAWATZKY FAMILY

Cornelius and Susanna Sawatzky

John Sawatzky

My parents Susanna (Unger) and Cornelius Sawatzky were married in 1916 and went to live in Moscow until father's term in the Red Cross Hospital was over. I was born in October 1918 in Grigorievka where my parents then acquired some land in the "suburbs"—the second row—and in 1922 built a house. I was very happy helping where I could; I remember they made their own bricks out of clay. In that period goods became very scarce. Both mother and father sewed clothes for me and made sandals out of wooden soles and leather straps.

My father was unemployed at this time. He was a teacher before the war and had finished two years of mathematics and physics at the University of Kharkov. There were many visits to the two sets of grandparents, the Johann Sawatzkys and Abram Ungers. All my aunts and uncles also lived nearby in the village. Past our house, our family had a big garden and I recall going there with my parents and aunts to pick watermelons. The melons were loaded onto a big wagon with racks, in which they were driven home to be cut up and boiled in a big cauldron in the garden. After much boiling, the result was watermelon syrup. This



Johann J. & Anna (Thiessen) Sawatzky family, from left (back): Cornelius (b. 1891), Franz (b. 1890); (front): Dietrich (b. 1896), Mother Anna (1857–1939), Heinrich (b. 1898), Father Johann (1845–1927), Peter (b. 1894).



The Franz J. Sawatzky family.

syrup was quite valuable because it was not only good on bread but it was also our sweetener when sugar was not available.

One of the highlights was a trip to our local water hole, the *Dräntj*, situated about a kilometre from the village. Cattle were taken there to drink, horses to be bathed and, of course, it was a swimming hole for everybody. At age five, I nearly drowned there by going too deep while mother was not looking. She saw what was happening and pulled me out in time. My mother was a good swimmer, having been brought up on the Dniepr River in Niederchortitza, where she went swimming and fishing with her brothers and sisters.

A big treat was driving to Barvenkovo with my father and uncles. The attraction was the open market (probably on Saturdays) and my father always bought me some hard *Kringl* (pastry) strung on a loop of string. Once we went there on a Sunday and attended a worship service in a Russian Orthodox Church. I recall the fabulous singing.

I was too young to remember the fears and uncertainties which came with the aftermath of World War I. However, Grigorievka was blessed with crops and vegetables during the early twenties, which spared us from the starvation which occurred in the Mennonite villages further west and south. Yet my family was not free from sorrow. My brother Herman, who was only a year old, died in 1923 of a children's disease. He was buried in a graveyard close to our home. When we left, mother's brother Jacob promised to tend the grave.

My parents quietly aligned themselves with many others who applied for permission to leave Russia. I recall that in July 1924, many of us assembled at a nearby railway station for the trip to America. The train



John Sawatsky (b. 1918)

was a day late, if I recall correctly, so we just camped outside the station and waited. In the meantime, my uncle Jacob Unger (who was not going on the trip) went home and had Grandmother Unger bake a big pile of cherry pancakes. These he brought the travellers for a farewell breakfast. There was much sorrow in my family saying good-bye to both sets of parents who stayed behind. For me, getting into the freight cars for the big trip was a great adventure.

John Sawatsky

John Sawatsky was born in October 1918 in Grigorievka; his parents were Cornelius and Susanna Sawatzky. The family left for Canada in 1924, arriving in Altona, Manitoba. Later they moved to the Whitewater area. John graduated from the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna in 1938. He later studied at the University of Manitoba, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree. In 1941 John left for Leamington, Ontario, for a job and there met Helen Dyck. They were married a year later. After the war they moved to Toronto where John earned Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in Psychology from the University of Toronto. Shortly thereafter John received an appointment from the University of Toronto, where he taught Industrial Psychology until 1966. He left there to become a consultant in his field, working with clients that included a number of banks and insurance companies, the Ontario Provincial Government and the Federal Government of Canada, Anglican and United Churches of Canada and the Ontario Provincial Police.

While on leave of absence from the University of Toronto in 1963–1964, John worked on a United Nations project in Geneva, Switzerland. He and his family, wife Helen and teenage children Ingrid and Bob, enjoyed the international lifestyle. At that time, John conducted

seminars and lectures in India, England and Switzerland. He participated in founding numerous organizations including: Toronto United Mennonite Church, Conrad Grebel College, Ontario Psychological Association (of which he was president in 1961–1962), and the Faculty of Management Studies at the University of Toronto. John is now retired. He and Helen live in Scarborough and enjoy many visits with Ingrid and Bob's families which include five grandchildren. John's brother Henry, a chemical engineer, recently retired from a successful industrial career.

Peter J. and Katharina Sawatzky

Helene Dick

Peter J. and Katharina (Funk) Sawatzky had many happy memories of life Grigorievka. Father often mentioned swimming in the village pond and mother spoke of the beautiful flowers of spring. We always enjoyed father's good sense of humour. Years earlier, when our grandparents went visiting, they usually took young Peter with them. Grandmother would announce, "Den Buntan han vie met" (we've brought the lively one with us), thereby ensuring that it would be calm at home in their absence. He spent his forestry service at a research station in the Crimea on the Black Sea coast. One of the projects was viniculture research.

In reading mother's diary I gained a new appreciation for the stressful times in which they were living prior to emigrating to Canada. She writes from New York, Ukraine:

July 11, 1923

One day our leaving is imminent and the next it has been delayed.
When will we overcome all the hurdles?

August 14, 1923

We have news that we will be leaving for America. From the land
of slavery to the land of freedom. Hurrah!

January 3, 1924

We have just returned from Grigorievka and have missed
celebrating Christmas. There they are still using the old calendar
and here they are using the new one. It will be a long time
before we get to celebrate Christmas.

January 23, 1924

We have news that Lenin is dead. What will be the conse-
quences?

They finally left Russia on July 14, 1924 and arrived in Altona in August. Their son Peter was three years old when they left. There had



Peter J. & Katharina (Funk) Sawatzky family, from left (back): John, Helene, Katharine, Father Peter J., Peter P., Henry; (front): Elizabeth, Mother Katharina, MaryAnn.

been many farewell gatherings; one day Peter climbed up on a chair and declared, "Ein Abschied ist ein Abschied" (a farewell is a farewell.).

Father's journal of their travels from Russia to Canada ends on a less euphoric note than it began. As their group dispersed at the railway station in Altona, he compares their feelings to the season of fall and that they will soon experience the harshness of winter. But winter can't last forever and spring is sure to follow.

A highlight for them was the reunion in 1938 of former Grigorievka residents in Starbuck, Manitoba. On this occasion it was decided that their group would establish a scholarship fund of \$150 for a student attending Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna. The committee consisted of Peter J. Sawatzky, Halbstadt; P. Krahn, Edental; and J.H. Enns, Winnipeg. In spite of numerous pleas published in *Der Bote*, by 1943 only \$24.12 had been collected; this was turned over to the MCI.

The move to Ontario in 1942 was a happy event. They enjoyed the years in the apple orchards and later their retirement in Leamington. Mother and father were gracious hosts and welcomed many relatives and friends into their home. Father was also very active in organizing and teaching German school classes. He and mother were very involved in presenting German plays in the community. They also enjoyed reading and had an extensive library. We children enjoyed listening in on readings of Low German. It was always a joy to go home.

Reflections on Courtship and Marriage in 1920

Peter J. Sawatzky (written in 1980)

Prompted by our children to relate some happenings of days long gone by, I decided to comply with their wishes. What could be more appropriate at this sixtieth wedding anniversary than to tell you how all this came about; that is, how father came to meet mother, how he courted and finally married her. Even before our time, when a couple had found each other, the young man in question and his beloved would appear before her parents and recite this little verse: "Wir haben einander gesucht und gefunden und sind miteinander in Liebe verbunden." (We have searched for and found one another and are united in love.) Then the engagement would be celebrated with a long sermon preceding it. It was not quite so formal in our case.

At the close of 1917 just before World War I ended, I returned home from the forestry service. At literary evenings I became acquainted with Tina Funk and was astounded to find such an intelligent and artistically gifted girl in our village. Her father was a minister, loved music and played the violin. Although her father died when she was fourteen years old, as a child she learned many of these songs which have stayed with her all through her life. She read much and retained what she read; frivolous socializing did not appeal to her. She often stayed with her mother and sang comforting songs to her. This girl interested me more and more and in the summer of 1918 I began to seek her friendship. When in the fall of 1918 I started my first teaching position, I left with the impression that she was not indifferent to me.

The summer of 1919 was a wonderful time for us. I did not want to be obtrusive, but a little hint could be helpful. One evening I brought her a delicate rosebud and said, "May your love for me develop like this tender bud." This made her happy and I thought I had expressed a beautiful sentiment. It may not have been an original thought, perhaps something I read somewhere and repeated.

In the fall of 1919 my colleague and I went to the city to buy school supplies. The communist government was then in control. I had a little money and, because of the rapidly rising inflation, wanted to invest it in something of worth and bought two rings. I had them both engraved: Tina Funk in the one and Peter Sawatzky in the other. As you can see, I had great hopes that one day we would belong to one another. Human nature is such that when the heart is overflowing it spills out of the lips. On our return journey I confessed to my colleague that I had bought rings. Mr. Warkentin replied: "It seems Sawatzky is gathering for his nest." He was absolutely right. I was pleased with the lovely gift I had for Tina, but how would I be able to go home for Christmas? Revolution and civil war had ruined the

economy. Trains were not running and no one dared to travel with horses for fear they could be requisitioned by the local authorities.

At the time I was boarding with the Gerhard Lehn family. One night, a Russian arrived at their home with a small horse and sleigh and requested lodging. He had been forced to transport some military to our area and now that he was released he was on his way home to a village not far from Grigorievka. Mr. Lehn soon had a plan. He offered the Russian some corn if he would take me as far as his village, to which he agreed. Other obstacles cropped up. Mr. Warkentin became ill and I had to take over all the singing and practices for the Christmas concert. I had the program well practised with the children and Mr. Warkentin encouraged me to go home. They would somehow manage without me. I was told later that the program had been excellent.

The next morning I left for home. Mr. Lehn lent me his sheepskin coat. It reached down to my toes and kept me as warm as if I was in a cosy room. I walked the last stretch to our village and arrived home in time for the Christmas Eve service. The whole congregation was in attendance—only rarely did the old or weak stay at home. There I also met my dear Titchen and after the service we walked home together. We were so happy and fortunate. I took her hand and slipped the ring on her finger. Tina was overjoyed! The time passed quickly and I had to go back to school. Luck was with me again. Aunt Susan's brother, Peter Unger, was taken into the Red Army. His unit had come into the area where my school was; when he became ill with typhoid fever they left him behind. He knew he had relatives in Leonidovka and was able to get to their home where they nursed him. His parents received news of his whereabouts and went to fetch him shortly after New Years. I had the good fortune to travel back to school with them.

There was great sorrow in Leonidovka. Mr. Warkentin had died and was buried during my absence. This was a heavy blow for me. Henry Janzen, Mr. Warkentin's nephew, was hired as teaching assistant. The school year drew to a close and teachers' salaries had to be negotiated for the next year. My salary in my second year had been 120 pood of wheat—in our measure that would be 4,320 pounds equal to 72 bushels. The economic situation obviously had taken a turn for the worse. The White and Red Armies had been fighting in our area all winter long. The village of Leonidovka changed hands seven or eight times during this time. The village council came to the decision that they could only pay me 2,700 pounds of wheat. Two-thirds of that would be required for my board and a third would have to keep me afloat. I could see the plight of the farmer and accepted the offer.

Although we had spoken of marriage at Christmas, my Tina felt we should wait a while. I think she was ashamed that she had no dowry

and so few clothes. I, on the other hand, thought that nothing would be gained by waiting. The situation would not improve but I did not want to press the issue. I had given in and neglected to prepare for our future household. This was a difficult situation as there was nothing one could buy.

Only a month before school was to begin again, on the first of August, a Saturday evening, I went as usual to visit my bride. I mentioned how sad I was that I would soon be leaving her and how nice it would be if she were coming with me, that the teachers' residence was available. This must have touched her heart and, a bit timidly she said, that perhaps we could marry after all. Oh how happy I was, but at the same time dismayed that I had made no provisions for our household. In the excitement I mentioned that we did not even have a frying pan, but Tina helped me out of my embarrassment by volunteering that her mother had two and would surely give us one. A frying pan was one of the most important items in the kitchen and was not available for purchase. We were happy and now there was nothing that could stop us from marrying.

It was late evening and when Tina suggested going to the cemetery to visit her father's grave, I agreed. The cemetery was a short distance from the village. During the summer Tina went there every Saturday to decorate the grave with flowers. It was a joy to behold. There at the father's grave we knelt and asked the Lord's blessing on our union. Our motto for our marriage would be Joshua's expression, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

I was so happy and excited that I slept poorly that night. Sunday morning I went to my parents and told them of our intentions and asked their permission. I asked father to tell our minister to announce our engagement to the congregation. Afterwards I went to the bride's mother who lived nearby; she was still quite unsuspecting. Russians had come into the village with woven baskets that they wished to exchange for pears. Grandmother agreed and was still in the garden. Tina had finished the milking and other chores and was dressed in her Sunday best when she came to tell her mother to hurry and get changed, for Peter would soon arrive. I was not afraid of her for I had already noticed that she favoured me. In fact I was welcomed and invited in. When I announced my intentions and asked for Tina's hand in marriage, she hesitatingly replied that Tina didn't have any clothes. I told her that I was not marrying Tina because of her clothes; I wanted her the way she was. In that case, everything was fine. Soon we were on our way to church, but not arm in arm—people seeing us thought we had met by chance. Uncle Jasch Pauls' Aunt Gretke was quite disappointed and said, "Poor Tina had to walk that difficult path alone."

This was August 2 and two weeks later was our wedding day; August 16 was also the anniversary of her father's death. The

wedding invitations were circulated throughout the village on August 13, 1920. One invitation from the bride's mother went to the older people, another invitation from the bride and groom went to their friends.

Now I had a problem: my salary was very low. It would have been sufficient for me alone, but for two it was not enough. We would also be responsible for custodial care of the school. At this time two delegates were sent to New York. They had their own transportation and took me with them to Leonidovka. There I asked the village council to increase my salary. They didn't think they could do that and so I decided to resign my position.

On the way home we stopped in the Mennonite village of Ekaterinovka where I met C.C. Peters, the minister and teacher. I asked him if he would come along with us to Grigorievka and there marry us on August 16. I also bought a myrtle plant, the traditional head-dress for a bride. From old curtains that had first to be repaired, Tina fashioned a lovely wedding gown. On her head she wore a borrowed veil and a wreath of myrtle. Oh, what a beautiful bride she was! Many young people had gathered to accompany us to the church. About ten couples, also in love, made up our honour guard as we walked to the church which had been beautifully decorated by friends. At the front were a carpet, flowers and palms; also the chairs for the bride and groom and for the ten couples were tastefully decorated with garlands of flowers. Reverend Peters' meditation was based on the text about the wedding at Cana.

After the service we walked back to the home of the bride's mother. The wedding meal was served in the farm shed which had been beautifully decorated with garlands and flowers. I must mention how a meal for so many people was prepared. Two days before the wedding, friends and neighbours brought milk, butter and cream, usually enough for bread and Zwieback. My father bought mutton that was used to make a very good borscht. The coffee was roasted rye, wheat or barley. Unfortunately, it was not all joy and gladness on our wedding day. My bride was lame and had difficulty walking. An insect had stung her toe and infection had caused her foot to swell. It was too painful to wear shoes and, after the wedding meal, she retired to the house where she had to sit with her foot up. I stayed in the house with her while the young people enjoyed themselves outdoors playing folk games and singing. Even the village watchman had joined in the celebration. As the young people sang, he fired a shot into the air after every verse, which caused great merriment.

This is how it was sixty years ago. Our happiness was boundless and could not be dampened by our poverty.

[Thus far Peter J. Sawatzky's recollections]

Chapter 20

THE FRANZ SCHELLENBERG FAMILY

Henry Schellenberg

One of the most prominent men in Grigorievka was Franz Schellenberg whose property (*Wirtschaft*) was adjacent to the school yard. He was a son of Johann Schellenberg who lived in Neu-Rosengart (Old Colony). In his younger years, Franz Schellenberg was a rural farmer, not living in any village, who joined the Grigorievka colony as a wealthy, retired gentleman and now could pursue other hobbies, should he be so inclined.

The Schellenberg clan has been traced back to the sixteenth century and placed in the Principality of Liechtenstein (Fuerstentum Liechtenstein), although they had lived in Switzerland and Austria before they came to Liechtenstein. When the father of Franz Schellenberg first witnessed the Ukrainian dances and polkas in Ukraine, he is supposed to have exclaimed: “Now I am back in Liechtenstein!” It is doubtful that he was ever in Switzerland, although it is suggested that some Schellenbergs migrated to Prussia and then to Russia with the Danziger Mennonites. The names Johann and Hans appear often. Apparently in 1538 a Hans Schellenberg lived in Switzerland and was heir to about half of the Swiss region of Liechtenstein. In fact, the two halves of the region contained the towns of Vaduz and Schellenberg. Later Vaduz became the capital city of the principality as it is today.

Franz Schellenberg I (July 14, 1863–July 4, 1925)

Franz was born in Neu-Rosengart and became a wealthy man before moving to Grigorievka. At one point he administered 12,000 acres of land for several Russian nobles and grew wheat—how many horses and Ukrainian peasants this required is hard to say. By 1889, when Grigorievka was founded, he was ready to retire there. It should be noted that one of the peasants that worked for him became a general in the Bolshevik army in 1917 and helped Franz Schellenberg protect the village from raiders later on.

Schellenberg was an entrepreneur and also became an auctioneer. He loved buying and selling horses and frequently went to Moscow’s annual horse show and sale. It is said that he bought a beautiful pair of dapple greys on one occasion, but when he got them home, he noticed he had an old pair of horses, since bidders could not see the animals closely enough

for a thorough inspection. He laughed when the horses' teeth confirmed their age. Often he rented a train from the government and, with hired help, went to Siberia to catch the Arabian ponies which were trained and sold for fabulous prices in southern Russia. They could run non-stop in winter for twenty miles at about ten to fifteen miles per hour. After tying up their heads for an hour, they could be watered and fed, and an hour later would be ready for the trip home. Only one, a stallion, could not be broken and had to be destroyed.

Franz had one of the best wine cellars in any village and was a mainstay in the church, which was very important after 1917. His first wife (nee Thiessen), bore him his first son, Franz, on January 3, 1888, but unfortunately, she died in 1890. His second wife (nee Bergen) had four children: Margaret (1892), John (Johann) (1894), Isaac (1897) and Marie (1899). The mother of these four children died in 1902. The widower married for the third time in 1903 (nee Wieler). Only one child, Sarah, was born of this marriage in 1904, and the mother died within a year. He was a widower until he died in 1925.

Franz had become involved in investing money in the local flour mill, which had been financed mainly by the Braun families who represented the wealthier element of Grigorievka. The Brauns at one time owned a German Opel car. Franz I had a strong personality. He was blonde, not very tall and seldom sick. He did not like to have hired kitchen maids in the house, so he bribed his eldest daughter, Margaretha, not to marry. This arrangement supplied her with fur coats and other luxuries.

When the Revolution broke out in 1917, Franz I's business acumen came into play and he quickly converted much of his money into gold on the advice of his friend, a communist general who had once worked for him. Estimates of the value of the gold vary—some suggest it was over half a million. The gold was hidden in a large wooden bench (*Ruhbentj*) with an upholstered top four inches thick. The main slab was sliced, hollowed, lined with felt and had gold pieces sewn to the felt.

After 1919, when the years of anarchy and revolution had taken their toll on the peaceful lifestyle in Grigorievka, this bench was opened once a year and Grigorievka residents were able to get white flour when few other villages could. Later a son, Isaac, was given custody of the bench. But all things come to an end, and on July 4, 1925 the dynamic Franz Schellenberg I passed away. Fortunately, he did not see the demise of his beloved village which was only a year away.

The story of Franz I lived on in the lives of his six children: Franz, Margaretha, John (who died during the Revolution), Marie, Isaac and Sarah. Today there are already great grandchildren.



The children at the funeral of Franz Schellenberg I on July 4, 1925, from left: Marie & husband Abram Penner, Sarah, Isaac, Margaretha, Franz & wife Agatha (Kroeger).

Franz Schellenberg II (Jan. 3, 1888–1935)

Franz II, the oldest son, was born in Neu-Rosengart. In 1908 he married Agatha Kroeger (1890–1962)—he was twenty and she eighteen. Her father, Reverend Abram Kroeger, was the first minister in Grigorievka. It is said that his long drawn-out sermons caused much dozing off among the congregation, but he would mercilessly call out the names of those who had dropped off to sleep. Franz lived in the village and with his inheritance obtained a half-farm which meant a smaller lot. He was the only child from his father's first wife and was often at odds with his entrepreneur father who seemed to be able to make money out of every venture.

When the war broke out, Franz was conscripted and opted for Red Cross service. Unfortunately, he contracted typhoid fever and was sent home to die. It was Isaac, his youngest brother, who came to his house, one of the few not afraid to offer help despite this highly contagious disease. He spent many days at his brother's side. Franz II survived, in spite of the pronouncement that he would die. After his recovery, he became executive secretary for the local Soviet committee. One of his duties was issuing local passports to Moscow for people wishing to emigrate. Despite his protests, he became involved in issuing a passport to a relative. This meant trouble: the five more passports that this relative purloined and got stamped was the end for Franz. In 1930 he was brought before a communist court and banished to Siberia for ten years,

where he died. His last letter to his brother Isaac in Canada around 1933 stated: "If you cannot read this it is because my fingers have frozen off at the first joint. You will likely not hear from me again." To the sorrow of this surviving brother, Franz died in about 1935.

His wife and children were taken in at Alexandertal by a man who felt he owed Franz something. He saw how the Communists confiscated her house and all her possessions. During World War II she and two of her children went to Germany with the retreating German army, but she was sent back to Siberia, although her children were able to remain in Germany. Her son, Gerhard, gained her release from Siberia to join him in Karaganda where she died on April 23, 1962 at the age of 72.

The children of Franz II and Agatha had bitter experiences. The oldest, another Franz (January 1, 1909–1946), was sent to Kazakhstan where he died of starvation at the age of thirty-seven. The second oldest, Katharina (born May 25, 1910), managed to stay in Germany after her mother's exile to Siberia. The third, Edward (1912–1942), retreated with the German army and went to Argentina. He later came to Canada and passed away in St. Catharines. His wife and one child are still in Germany. The fourth child, Agatha (1916–1956) never married and died in a Kazakhstan concentration camp of starvation. The fifth child, Gerhard (born 1917), lived only two days. The sixth, Margurete (born September 5, 1919), lives today in Winnipeg with her husband, Nick Romsa. The seventh, Gerhard (born March 3, 1924), now lives in Germany. He emigrated after his mother died in Karaganda where he had brought her from Siberia. The eighth, Lydia (1928–1932), died at the age of four in Alexandertal, Molotschna.

Margurete and her husband, Nick Romsa, appear to have had better luck than many of her siblings. They retreated with the German army in 1944 and Nick saw action on the western front. After the war they came to Canada and farmed near Oakville for six years. Later Nick worked on the railway and today they live in Winnipeg.

Margaretha Schellenberg (Sept. 4, 1892–Aug. 26, 1980)

Margaretha, the second child of Franz Schellenberg I, was born to his second wife in Neu-Rosengart. She had her father's strong personality and was his favourite. Her father contrived to belittle her many suitors and kept her at home so he did not need to hire strangers as kitchen maids. Her reward was special status in the family and she was given valuable gifts by her father. In 1920 a gang of marauders entered Grigorievka and chose Franz Schellenberg I's home as their target. One of the gang who had worked for the Schellenberg family knew that there was a quantity of gold somewhere. They moved in and were threatening

Franz Schellenberg, the head of the household. At this point Margaretha stepped in. She thoroughly berated them, especially the former worker, and saved her father as well as her brother Franz, offering the gang food and clothing. They left not only the Schellenberg home but also the village.

Jacob Braun had come courting Margaretha after his wife died. In 1924 her father turned him down as a suitor. The Schellenbergs and Brauns were not friends. Later there was a death-bed reconciliation between father and suitor and the couple was married the next year. On September 23, 1926 at the age of thirty-four she married this widower with five children, three girls and two boys (see Chapter 7). The newly married Jacob Brauns and four children arrived in Winnipeg in the spring of 1930. (The oldest Braun daughter, Katja, married the principal, Cornelius Loepp, and remained in Russia where she is buried.) Jacob Braun soon got employment operating a grain farm for a trust company near Headingley. In a few years he bought the farm and became a wealthy farmer, buying several more farms. Margaretha gave birth to three children, but none survived. The first was stillborn; the second died at the age of two; and the third, Harry (1934–1942) died at the age of eight in a train-car accident when the family chauffeur was bringing him home from a private school for the weekend.

Immediately after the war the Braun family retired to a new home in Winnipeg. Jacob Braun died on October 23, 1964; one son, John, preceded him, and the other, Jake, passed away in the early 1980s. Margaretha Braun retired to a unit for seniors near her church, First Mennonite, and passed away on August 26, 1980.

John Schellenberg (1894–1919)

John was the second child of Franz Schellenberg I and his second wife. He never married, but was extremely handsome and had many girlfriends, finally finding the one and only one for him before he entered military service. In 1914 at the age of twenty, instead of joining the alternate forestry service, he joined the tsar's White Army. Late in the war, when he came home on leave, he told his girlfriend that he felt they were not meant for each other. He had always wanted to be a preacher and the final months of his life indicated his serious intentions; he also had difficulty reconciling his position as a Mennonite carrying a gun. His last letter from the Belarus area stated that he would be there for some time. He asked about the crops and about Grigorievka and spoke of the goodness of God. He was never seen or heard from again and, in late May 1919, his clothes arrived at his father's house. They never heard whether he died in battle or before a Red firing squad, but the circum-

stances of his death confirmed his brothers' opinion that their days in southern Russia were numbered.

Marie Schellenberg (b. Dec. 3, 1896)

Marie was the fourth child of the Schellenberg family. In the early 1930s she married Abram Penner who lived across the street from the Schellenbergs. By late 1937, the year Abram was sent to Siberia, they had three children: Abram, Jacob and Gertrude. In 1938 she had a set of twins that Abram never knew about. Marie, with her children, retreated with the Germans to their homeland in 1943, although her sister Margaretha had sent her many packages. In 1946 Marie was returned by Russian officials to Kazakhstan to live out her life alone in misery in a concentration camp: one son dead, another in Canada, and three children in Germany. She was over ninety when she passed away in the 1980s.

In Germany her son Abram joined the German army and died in battle early in 1945. Jacob was renamed Waldemar on September 25, 1947 and came to Canada. He is married to Erna Rempel. They had a set of twins, and today live with their family in British Columbia. Gertrude, named for her paternal (Penner) grandmother, married in Germany. She has children and grandchildren with a set of twins among them, all living in Germany.

Isaac F. Schellenberg (Aug. 31, 1897–Sept. 19, 1976)

Isaac was born in Grigorievka when the village was eight years old, and the Schellenbergs had lived in the village for only four years. He never had to learn to work hard, but helped his father with the horses and out in the fields. He and his brother, John, both received a high school education, where they excelled in writing skills, learned German, Russian and several Russian dialects. He was fun-loving and, although he was serious at times, played the mandolin. He respected his brother John, but brother Franz II was his hero.

Isaac was seventeen when the war broke out, and a year later he entered the forestry service (*Forstei*), instead of the Russian army, in the capacity of a cook. There are several delightful stories about his life on the *Forstei*. After some time he asked for a transfer to the Russian army as a cook. This was not a challenging job, since it merely involved preparing gigantic soup wagons. The wagon was never cleaned; a few bags of rotten fish were thrown into the water and brought to a boil, while the bread was so dry that, if it had been dropped on a dog's head, the animal might have been knocked out. Isaac asked for another transfer—this time to the Red Cross unit (*Sanitätsdienst*). There he found himself carrying the dead and wounded off the battlefield. This took a toll on his nerves and he took up smoking to hide the smell of death. The

wagons were long and the rack built so that the dead could be rolled to the roadside in order to get the living to hospital for help more quickly. There was always a shortage of Bibles.

Then a transfer came from an unexpected source. After the 1917 Revolution, the Russian army had been under the command of the Bolsheviks, and they immediately started negotiations to end the war with Germany. The Russian general, who had worked for Isaac's father, remembered the young lad who had the neat, elegant handwriting. The army needed someone who could read and write both German and Russian well, and Isaac fit these requirements. He soon found himself in a railway car with half a dozen other translators and legal people. He was often in a boxcar with German officers, but worked in Russian only. Isaac was justly proud of being a translator of the important Brest-Litovsk Treaty.

He arrived home soon after dispersal from the now obsolete services, and life in the 1920s went on as usual, while other villages were often attacked. By 1924 Isaac was courting Katharina Froese down the street; she came from a large, good middle-class family. She had an elementary education and was a trained seamstress. Before they could marry, Isaac's father died of pleurisy. On January 17, 1926 Isaac and Katharina were married in Grigorievka; on September 23 that year Jacob Braun married Isaac's sister, Margaretha. Much was happening in the village: Russian peasants were moving into the abandoned homes of Mennonites who had moved to Canada. Isaac and Katharina moved to Zagradovka to try to escape the "collective farms" system. Because of his good education, Isaac became secretary of the local Soviet, but good Christians often ended up in Siberia. He felt it was only a matter of time until the Mennonite farms would be obliterated. He was fortunate to have good land and a house in Zagradovka.

Many of Katharina's relatives and her widowed mother emigrated to Canada in 1927–1928. Isaac and sister Margaretha and spouses applied for passports to Moscow, but they did not come. Many people were sent to Siberia. Isaac kept a pair of horses harnessed day and night while Katharina had suitcases packed. In the kitchen was the *Ruhbentj* with a quantity of gold in it, and they had considerable money in the suitcases. In 1927 a daughter, Sarah, had been born, and in mid 1929 Katharina was expecting again. One day, as they were sitting down to chicken noodle soup, they saw what they had long dreaded: a big wagon with four horses coming up the back way. Isaac ran to get his horses and buggy, while Katharina snatched up the little girl and the suitcases and they were off. The *Ruhbentj* with its gold stayed right there—not a hard choice to make. They escaped Siberia with a matter of minutes to spare.

Isaac and Katharina arrived in Moscow to find sister Margaretha and husband already there, but with no money. It took more than a month to gain passports. With his surplus money, Isaac bought passports for the Brauns and for five more families, with promises of repayment in Canada (one man who settled in Rosthern sent him money for a bag of flour in 1933). By December 1929, when they arrived in Berlin, they found over 600 fellow Mennonites housed in the East Berlin Prenzlau area, but German measles broke out and their daughter Sarah died. Shortly after the burial, on December 29, a son, Henry, was born. German officials wanted to baptize him and name him Paul after their President Paul Hindenburg, but the child remained Henry. Just as they were leaving, Henry developed whooping cough, but they managed to get him past the customs officials on the way to England. They sailed from Cardiff, Wales on the *S.S. Minnedosa*, arriving in St. John, New Brunswick, on April 4, 1930. Isaac was thirty-three years old and Katharina twenty-eight. They travelled on to Manitoba by train and soon joined mother Sarah Froese and relatives in Boissevain.

The years in Boissevain were often difficult, but also happy. From 1930 to 1942 the family lived on an empty farmyard west of Boissevain, since Isaac worked for the owner, Mr. Wilson. Most of the children were born there, two girls and four boys. In 1942 they rented a farm northeast of Boissevain where their last child, Eddie, was born, mentally handicapped, in 1946. Finally, in 1955, Isaac bought the farm and lived there until 1966 when Rudy, the second youngest, took over the farm.

In 1966 Isaac and Katharina moved to Morden into a new house and spent ten happy years there, with Eddie at home with them. They attended the Berghthaler church, enjoyed the Corn and Apple Festivals, and in 1976 celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. Later that year Isaac passed away after a struggle with cancer, and Katharina and Eddie lived on in the house until Eddie died on December 1, 1983 at age thirty-seven. After a year Katharina sold the house and moved to the Tabor Home in Morden. She died on August 3, 1987 at age eighty-four after a broken thigh bone from which she never recovered. The last link with Grigorievka was gone. The Russländer were gone and only the grandchildren of Franz Schellenberg were left.

Sarah Schellenberg (b. Dec. 11, 1904)

Sarah was the only child of Franz Schellenberg I's third wife (nee Wieler). Being the youngest, she was a favourite of all the family members. She had no other training after her elementary school education, but enjoyed the freedom of her happy life, often riding the horses after threshing to get the flour milled. It was Sarah who, in 1919,

received the last letter from John in Belarus, who died later, a Christian. Around 1924 or 1925, she married Peter Regehr. After her father died in 1926, she and her sister Marie received a considerable inheritance. Her son, Henry, was born in 1926 and two years later her daughter, Elisabeth. At this time the family lived in Kleefeld, Molotschna.

When war broke out, Peter was sent to Siberia, and Sarah to a women's concentration camp in Kazakhstan. Both children were sent to an orphanage, where Henry protected Elisabeth as well as he could. But Sarah never heard again from her husband Peter (Regehr). In the labour camp she was forced to cut down trees, and one evening she did not return to the barracks. She was found the next day—a tree had fallen on her and she had frozen to death. She died in 1942 or 1943, not yet forty.

Henry and Elisabeth found their way to Germany in the later stages of the war. Henry had married a Volhynian girl, while Elisabeth had married a German from the Crimea area. Henry died on March 28, 1996, in Germany.

Chapter 21

THE TIESSEN FAMILY

Childhood Memories of the Old Country

Margaret (Tiessen) Krahn

My earliest recollection of childhood days goes back to the big farm (*chutor*) in the Kharkov district of southern Ukraine, where I was born on September 16, 1913. I remember a very big yard with many buildings. There was a nice brick house where I lived with my parents, brother Nick, a chubby boy; sister Elizabeth with long golden hair, rather shy; sister Anna, a friendly, talkative girl; a younger brother Johnny; and sister Mary. We lived in a very nice part of the country where summers were long and winters short. The land was very fertile, allowing all kinds of grain and fruit trees to grow. We had close to 900 acres of land with no stones, sloughs or bush. There were three forests on our land, one planted by hand and used for cutting wood.

Winter wheat, I've been told, was the main cereal crop and was sown in the fall. I remember a barn full of horses—about thirty-five working horses and many two-year-old colts. There was a barn with about thirty cattle, twelve being milk cows. Hogs, poultry, ducks and geese and about 200 pigeons and some bees made up the rest of our farm stock. I remember a well with lots of good drinking water which was very soft, good for washing. We had an orchard of about twelve acres, filled with all kinds of fruit trees. My parents' plan was one day to build a big brick house in the garden. Due to the upheaval of the Revolution, this never happened. Still, there were two or three more houses on the yard, including a house for the farm manager, the hired man and the cooks. In the yard was a large granary, similar to a machine shed now-a-days, where the grain was stored in bags and piles. People would always come into the yard to buy grain and horses. I remember Russian priests in their long cloaks and long hair coming to buy grain. When the large granary doors were open, we enjoyed playing there. We had five dogs, one for the house, four in the yard—two of these were freed at night to watch for thieves. We had many implements including three binders, a non-binder and a cutting machine. Vaguely I remember a threshing outfit, a big black steam engine with its loud whistle.

Whenever there was need for a tasty meal, pigeons would be slaughtered. One man would stand on a ladder against a building, taking

the pigeons that were given to him from a small door inside the upper storey. He pulled off their heads and threw them on the ground, thirty or forty at a time. Then they were picked up and taken to the cook's house to be cleaned and prepared for a delicious meal.

We had two house maids and a younger girl to look after us children. In the evening before going to bed, the girl would tell us all kinds of stories, sometimes rather scary stories about *widmas* (witches) and timber wolves. No wonder we would wake up during the night and scream, "There's a wolf or a *widma*." One dream I remember so well—I must have been about four years old. I woke up one night, screaming. Father called to see what was wrong. I pointed to the window and screamed, "A wolf, a wolf!" All it turned out to be was a bright moon shining on father's clothes hanging over a chair and his long shiny leather boots standing beside the chair.

In those days there were no bathrooms in the house; we used a tub or went bathing in the water outside. We had a nice self-made lake between our neighbours (my father's aunt and uncle, Henry Schulzes) and us. There was a deep creek on one side of the dam and nice clear water with lots of fish on the other side. The water was very close to us and very sandy on our side. So on Saturdays after *Vaspa*, mother and dad would take us children to that little sandy beach and give us all a nice clean rubbing with lots of soap and water. Father would bathe us and mother would put on our clean clothes, then comb and braid our long hair. On Sunday morning, the braids were opened and red ribbons tied around the head. One day sister Anna, aged five years, was sitting beside father with her own fishing rod. All of a sudden she caught a big fish which pulled her right down into the deep water. Father was so quick jumping in after her, he saved her from drowning.

Another day mother and one of the maids were carrying loaves of bread on pans to the cooks' house to be baked. When I saw them leave, I started following but was quite a distance behind them. The door was on the other side of the house, so by the time I got there they were already inside. There I came face to face with our flock of geese and the gander that went right at me. I ran as fast as my legs would carry me back to the house, screaming as loud as I could. Father was standing by the open window and pulled me into the house, shutting the window just in time.

We had a loving father and mother but, for our own good, father was very strict with us children. Spankings were quite common in our house—if we disobeyed or told a lie we were sure to get one. Father said lying was the beginning of all evil. I think he was right. We had

God-fearing parents and they tried to live it. The Bible was read every morning at breakfast time and in the evening before going to bed. We would all kneel down to pray.

In 1917 Russia had pulled out of the European War but was then engaged in a bloody civil war that lasted for three years. Two armies were fighting for control of the government. They were known as the White and the Red armies. The Red Army released the criminals and one by the name of Makhno encouraged his followers to steal, plunder, burn and kill at any sign of resistance. With the country at war and no protection from the state, the population fell prey to the rebel groups. The situation got worse and we were not safe any more. People started fleeing their farms and homes when they heard the bandits were coming; several times we also fled. All of a sudden there would be a wild hurry when we noticed something was wrong. Clothes were packed and food was prepared; many *Rollkuchen* were baked and put in baskets; water was filled into gallon bottles. Then we would go in a carriage to some distant relatives for days or weeks. I do not remember much, but heard later in what danger we had been. In the fall of 1918 we moved to a village, Grigorievka, several miles away. In the fall of 1919 we lost the farm with all our possessions. Father was forced to sign a paper that he was leaving willingly and giving up the farm.

Our mother was not a very strong person. The Revolution and all the turmoil in the country had been very hard on her. Her parents were brutally murdered, relatives and friends had lost all their possessions and all this had left a bad scar on mother's health. After father had signed "that paper," everything belonged to the Red armies or Bolsheviks. Father had to deliver our carriages and wagons with a team of horses wherever they ordered him to go. Coming home late in the evening he was hungry and tired, having walked so many miles. One day when he was transporting some men to their destination, one man held a gun to his face while driving. These were dangerous trips for father. We do not know how many times mother feared for his life, and we always thanked God when he returned home again, alive and safe. At that time praying and thanking God was a daily routine. God was our only help and did not forsake us.

In Grigorievka we had a house, barn and shed all in one long building. That winter, mother's sister, Aunt Agatha, with eight children stayed with us for a few months. They also had to leave their big farm. Uncle Gerhard, father's brother, stayed somewhere else with the older three children. When bedtime came, all the children would lie down on the floor to sleep—like sardines in a can. As children will, we younger

ones soon got used to the change, and we played, laughed, quarrelled, sang and enjoyed ourselves. The older three had to help with the work as mother wasn't well and she no longer had domestic help in the house. Nick, Elizabeth and Anna started attending school; one year later I too could go. We liked the school, made friends and enjoyed the village way of life, though it was quite different in many ways.

At home I played with my younger sister and brothers. Brother John was too close behind me in age, so we did not always see eye to eye—whatever I did he was sure to do a little better. Sister Mary was a very blond, sweet little girl with a little turned up nose and freckles. Father used to call her “miene Nuscht” (my nothing). I think she always answered his questions with a “nothing.” But little Mary was not the only one with freckles; we were all blessed with them, especially our oldest brother Nick. Brother Martin was a chubby, friendly boy, loved by everyone, even though he took his time in learning to walk (close to two years). Elizabeth, who looked after him a lot, was getting worried. She would often ask, “Mother, will he ever walk?” Then there was Arthur, the black-haired little boy. One Sunday right after dinner I was standing with him by the fence on our street; he still had his little white laced pinafore over his red shirt. Some passersby commented, “What a cute little girl.”

Since we had lost our farm and all our land, we became poorer and poorer. In the village we had about twenty-four acres of land and some horses and cows. Later our last horses were stolen and many other things taken away. Eventually our last pig had been butchered and eaten; and then came the day that we had to butcher our last cow. Here I must stop—it would be much too difficult to write what happened after that. Between 1921–1923 was a time of hunger and starvation for hundreds of thousands of people. God did not forsake us and we came through. In summer there were fruit and vegetables, melons and watermelons. Things were a little better. Brother Nick was working for other people and for this we would get the employer's team to work our land.

In the winter of 1921–1922, we lived in two rooms of our house because we lacked heating materials. One day John came home from school with the measles. Soon Mary, Martin and Arthur, all except I, got them too. The older three had had them and other sicknesses some years before. The children had to stay in bed, but the room was small. I lay at the foot of the bed (*Schlopbenk*) and told them stories, one after the other. I remember my mother being very happy, saying it kept the children quiet and kept them from getting so restless.

Father was a homeopath and got medicine from Germany—it was usually in a liquid or crystals. He studied a lot to find out how to mix the medicine. With few doctors and none close by, his know-how had come in very handy on the farm and in our family. After a war and hard times there is always a lot of sickness. In our area there was an outbreak of typhoid fever, a very contagious disease. Soon people would come to father, asking and begging for help; many a night father was called to a sick patient. When he could not order any more medicine from Germany, he tried his best with what he had left to help the sick and dying and ease their pain. How my parents prayed for God's help! It was hard for father when people came for help in their distress and he had so little to offer them. But pray they did. Every morning after breakfast father would go into the *Grosse Stube* (parlour), close the door behind him, kneel down by a chair and pour out his troubled soul before God.

When typhoid fever had run its course in our village—some had died, others got well again—father himself came down with the illness. He was a very sick man, delirious for days and days. Again there seemed to be no hope for us except to put our trust in God. Mother and we older children got down on our knees and prayed. Our poor mother, very weak and not well herself, now had to be the strongest one. Finally and gradually, the crisis was over and father began to get well again. How we thanked God for this miracle in our family.

Father was not only called a doctor, but sometimes also a dentist. He was the only one in our village with a tooth plier; as soon as people heard of this they would come to have their teeth pulled. They were often teeth with big holes or only stubs. Can you imagine pulling them out when they would break in pieces and people were moaning and groaning. One of my sisters, usually Anna, had to hold the patient's head for support. Father did this for a thank-you or sometimes for a small gift of food.

In July 1924, a little baby sister was born into our family, a joy to us all. She was called Agatha after mother's sister. Six weeks later, in August, our mother passed away. What we had feared for so long had happened. We were so alone—father with nine children and no mother. But God was with us and helped us again. A cousin of mother's, not far from our village, with a large family of her own, took our baby sister and was going to keep her for a year. Sometimes on a Sunday, some of us would go down and see her. As soon as she reached the age of six months, Elizabeth and Anna begged father to bring her home. They promised to look after her and feed her *Brocken* (bread soaked in milk).



Father Johan H. Tiessen with his nine children in 1925.

So father brought her home one day. Having her took away so much of the longing for mother. The first thing after we got home we would go to her cradle and play with her. I remember father would go to the cradle, kneel down and play with her, while his eyes looked far in the distance, thinking of mother. Little Agatha grew to be a friendly, loving child—she meant everything to us.

In 1924, a month after mother had passed away and school had just begun on a hot September day, I came home with a fever. I didn't know what was wrong with me, I was so cold. Father was not at home, so I went to the neighbours. They were cooking syrup outside over a hot fire. Everyone cooked their own jam; it was a long and tiresome procedure till the juice would boil down to the syrup stage. Their daughter, my age, had to tend the fire, feeding it with straw to give the heat. She was very hot, so I asked her if I could tend the fire because it felt so good to my cold body. Next morning at breakfast, father look at me and said, "No school for you, Gredel, you are getting the measles." So it was and for two weeks I was a very sick child. How I missed mother when I was sick in bed. I got well again and no other child in school or in the village got the measles; this was a very unusual case.

One year later in July or August of 1925, brother Arthur and I got bitten by our own dog. When father came home at noon and heard this, he knew the dog must have rabies so he had to work fast. Before evening, Arthur and I were given a steam bath for one full hour to take

the poison out of the dog's bite. That meant sitting in a large tub, one at each end. In the centre stood a small container with alcohol burning. We were covered with sheets up to our necks which was to help sweat out the poison. After one hour, we were put in beds and covered with a feather-down comforter to sweat for another hour. To say the least, that was a terrible day. The big worry was wondering if the steam bath had done its purpose. The saying was that one got the rabies in "nine days, nine weeks or nine months," so I was counting the weeks and months. In October that fall we came to Canada, with me still counting the months and worrying.

As times became worse, people began to leave the country for Canada. Since we wanted to leave too, father began working on getting the papers and passports. To do so he had to go to the big city. It took about three days for his return. In the time father was away, our little sister Agatha became very sick. We girls didn't know what to do, because she would not eat, only drink. We were so worried. When father came home, he said, "God has been with us. We can leave the country, but we have to be ready in three days. If not, we cannot leave and that would mean another hungry winter without food and clothes."

Some of mother's cousins from the next village came to help us get ready. They washed, sewed and packed. Many ladies from our village baked a lot of buns for us, cut them in half and roasted them in the oven. In this way they would keep indefinitely and still taste very good. In those days you had to have your own food while travelling, so we had to take enough food to last for weeks. On train stops, people would come and sell Culbasa sausage, fresh bread and apples. Father occasionally bought some, a very special treat for us children. All we could get on the train was hot water for tea. We were ready for travelling in three days. On the third evening we all took a bath. As the clothes we had been wearing were so badly worn, father threw them into the fire. Early next morning we put on our Sunday clothes and that was *all* we had to wear for a whole month—no sweater or jacket to put over them. The dresses we four girls wore were the one's mother had sewn from two white tablecloths (her wedding presents) for the last Christmas she lived. Seven months later, in August, mother's cousins came to dye the white dresses—two in navy and two in brown—for our mother's funeral. These were our only Sunday dresses. Early that morning all the baggage was loaded onto wagons. Together with several other families, we were all leaving for Canada.

It was a very emotional morning, mixed with happiness and sadness. We were taken to a station where we boarded a train for Losavaia where



Family of Margaret (Tiessen) & A. J. Krahn in 1959 at their 25th wedding anniversary, from left: Margaret, Elsa, John and Abe.

we waited for hours for our next train to Moscow. Our baby sister was very sick and had not eaten anything for days. In the large station at Losavaia, crowded full of all kinds of people, our little sister died. God in His great love had seen fit to take her to be with Him and mother. It was such a shock to us children because we had loved her so much. To add to the burden, we weren't allowed to cry. In that unruly time we were afraid of the police or those in authority. If they noticed that something was wrong, we would not be able to send her back with the people from our village who had accompanied their relatives to the city to see them off. As Agatha wasn't walking yet, father had made something like a cradle in which to carry her. In that cradle she was taken home to our aunt, the one who had taken care of her at the beginning of her infant life. Later father received a long letter telling how they had done the burial and how two of their daughters had carried the little yellow casket to the grave.

That evening the train left for Moscow with the group from our village and our family, minus our sister. But life had to go on. Father said God knew what He was doing; in the end it would be better for us and so much easier on the long journey. Just as we boarded the train, we went through a big scare. The train was about to leave and the door already closed, but father and Nick were not there. Finally they came running, all out of breath. They were carrying our big basket with all the food and dishes. The conductor had not wanted to let them take it on the train; they felt it should go as baggage. God had helped again. Our two-day train ride to Moscow and four-day stay there came to an end.

Leaving Moscow we were put in freight cars with many more immigrant families leaving for Canada. In several days we came to Riga, Latvia. We had left Russia, once a wonderful country, but now we were glad to be free of the persecution, the hunger and everything else. In Riga, everyone—women and children in one room and men and boys in another—had to strip to the bare skin to be herded into a steam bath. Our clothes were sorted and numbered, then put into a bake oven. This was delousing, as the steam and heat would kill any of the insects. The immigrants were then put into clean and bright quarantine buildings. There we received food and clean beds to sleep in. What a change from the box cars. Also in Riga father took us to some stores and bought us each shoes and sweaters, things to keep us warm in cooler weather. The old wooden sandals we had been wearing were thrown out the apartment window. What else could we do with them?

After a four-day stay in Riga we were taken to the harbour where we saw our first ship. After what I believe was six or seven days of sailing or rocking on the ocean and a lot of seasickness among the passengers, we arrived in Southampton, England. Early next morning we were taken before a doctor, then rushed to the shipyard to the ocean liner, *Melita*. It was a nice big ship with a huge dining room and lounge area. The meals were better and one Sunday morning we received our first oranges. We sailed for eight long days on the Atlantic Ocean before arriving in Quebec. When we landed we received a friendly welcome with a cup of hot cocoa and two biscuits. Each immigrant, big or small, received a small New Testament book of either the gospel of John or Mark. With thankful hearts to God we were now in Canada. From there we went by train for several days through the other provinces. We kept wondering where all the farmland and farmers were. For several days we saw only rocks, lakes and trees. Finally we arrived in Winnipeg. People looked so strange and so dark with such different clothes, especially the men's caps. We thought they looked terrible.

From Winnipeg we took a train to Winkler. So ended our long journey from Russia to Canada. At Winkler I was taken from the station with an older girl without knowing for a week where the rest of my family had gone. At the station the man and woman who took me in came to me and said, "We're going to take this little girl." Frantically, I looked around to see where Nick and father were. They were off getting the luggage. The people who took me were very good to me and dressed me from head to toe with many nice clothes. Later they wanted to adopt me, as they felt a widower with eight children could easily give one away. But that's not what my father thought.

Then something special happened. One day I received a letter from father stating we were going to have a new mother and two brothers named Peter and Martin. I was so happy I could hardly wait to see them. Then in a year's time we got another little sister called Agnes. I was thankful to God for answering my prayers for a little sister. That made our family complete—six boys and six girls and all of us with blue eyes. We loved each other and were happy on our first small farm with a very, very small house. Little Agnes was and stayed the centre of attention in our family. Some time later we moved to another farm with better buildings in an English-speaking district where Mennonites were unknown at that time. When we came to school, seven of us came from one family, three pairs being the same age, but with two different family names. That was hard for the other children to grasp.

My childhood years have been quite eventful. Now at sixty-nine, I feel I could write many books of my life. They would be of good, and not so good, things that happened through the years and would show how God helped us and was with us every day.

Chapter 22

THE UNGER AND HARMS FAMILIES

Peter and Helena (Nikkel) Unger

Jake Harms

Peter Unger was born in 1855 in Niederchortitza, but then moved to Grigorievka, probably in 1889. He was a successful farmer in Russia but, due to circumstances caused by World War I and anarchy in Russia, in 1925 he emigrated to Canada. He married Helena Nikkel (1857–1954). They arrived first in Osler, Saskatchewan, but a year later, in 1926, they moved to Haskett, Manitoba. There they built a small house attached to Isaac and Elizabeth Buhler's house, in which they resided until Peter's death in September 1936. Peter was a hard worker and demanded the same from the people who worked for him. This was most evident during harvest time when he considered it a waste of time to stop and eat meals. He often told the workers, "Swallow now, chew later."

During his final years, Peter Unger became very ill. His many friends tried to help where possible. He appreciated this help very much. On his eighty-first birthday, April 1, 1936, he invited his many friends to their home to express his thanks. In anticipation of this event he penned a letter addressed to his friends. In it we catch a spirit of gratitude, of joy and even of praise. It also contains an admonition to others to consider the seriousness of both time and eternity. The letter was preserved by his wife, Helena, and made available to the extended family.



Peter & Helena (Nikkel) Unger family, from left (back): Abram Klassen, Henry Pauls, Jacob Pauls, Justine, Jacob, Margaret, Anna, Peter, Aganeta; (front): Katarina (Unger) Klassen, Helena (Unger) Pauls, Marie (Unger) Pauls, Aganeta (Peters) Unger, Mother Helena, Elizabeth, Father Peter.

Peter and Helena were blessed with twelve children, one of whom is still living. Elizabeth, born in February 1899, resides in Winkler, Manitoba. Son Jacob was the only one who remained in the Soviet Union when all the others emigrated. No one knows how things went for him or exactly when he died.

Recollections

Justine (Harms) Warkentin

The original founders of the village of Grigorievka in 1889 were forty-one families with many children. My grandparents, Peter and Helena Unger, arrived with six children; like most families, theirs kept growing. The community built a school the very next year. This building served as a church as well, so naturally religious instruction was part of the curriculum.

Hard work was the order of the day, and people took pride in what they did. Next door to the Ungers were the Bernhard Krahns who had a family of boys. There was running competition for the girls to hoe more of their endless rows of corn than the Krahn boys could. Milking was a woman's job, so their days started very early. The herdsman for the village drove the cows to the pasture through the entire length of the village, and the milking had to be finished before he arrived at the gate. During the day the cattle grazed in a large common pasture; by late afternoon they were all returned for the evening milking. After a late supper, the work day was over, but there was still time for relaxation, recreation or just plain visiting. In summer the young men might go swimming, or groups of young people would go walking down tree-lined streets. The older people visited and the children played; but by nine o'clock the village settled down for the night. Morning came early.

In winter the women knit, crocheted or did fancy work. Mother was very excited when they got their first sewing machine; it did away with the arduous job of sewing by hand. However, grandmother was a very cautious lady. She made sure everyone of her daughters learned how to sew a shirt entirely by hand—you never knew how long it might before you were no longer able to get sewing machines. The washing had to be done by hand about once a month. It was a two-day job; everything had to be hung out to dry so good weather was a must. The menu on wash day included *Tjieltji* (noodles) because the water in which they were cooked provided starch for the laundry. The baking was synchronized with the ironing because the irons had to be heated on the stove.

All the old-timers could come up with stories of how justice was meted out to fellows who stepped out of line. Some dark night a group

of young men would gang up on an offender. They threw a big coat over him so he could not recognize them, then they gave him a beating. They insisted that this was very effective. Non-resistance in action!

The picture of my grandparents' house is very typical. By the turn of the century most of the houses were built of brick with shutters on the windows. The house was attached to the barn. Households vied with one another in planting lovely fruit and flower gardens and every house had a white picket fence at the front.

All but two of the Unger family moved to Canada in 1925 and 1926. Only Aunt Katherine did not apply in time and had to go to Paraguay instead. Her husband's health broke down within two months due to the heat, the pathetic diet and the desperately poor conditions. This left her to struggle alone with only her children. Canada turned out to be a country of opportunity for the children. Jacob Unger, the oldest son in the family, stayed in Russia. He was sent to Siberia where he died.

Abram and Susanna (Harms) Unger

Jacob Unger

I was an infant when my parents, together with many others, left Grigorievka and emigrated to Canada. Although my father and mother were thankful and happy to be in Canada, the land of freedom, they often spoke about and recalled the many happy experiences in the village. Some stories I heard over and over again from parents, uncles and aunts. My father, Abram Unger, enjoyed the outdoor life with his friends. He would often go swimming and fishing in the reservoir behind the village. He also took the horses for a swim, which would strengthen their legs. Father enjoyed working on the field together with the Ukrainian servants, planting corn, sowing winter wheat and rye and planting watermelons.

During World War I my father served for a few years on the Polish front. Together with others from Grigorievka, he worked with the Red Cross as an ambulance stretcher bearer. He told many tragic stories about the war. But father must have been homesick for the quiet village life from which he was absent for over two years. Back home in the village was his sweetheart, Susanna Harms, later to become my mother.

Of course, mother's experiences were different because she had older sisters and brothers and did not have to do much field work. She enjoyed visiting neighbours and friends, all within walking distance. Also, she spoke of the good times, singing in the choir as a soprano, always sitting next to her friend who later became her sister-in-law. When someone received a new book from Germany, a group of young people would gather and listen to stories about folklore, romance, or about people in



Abram & Susanna Unger family, from left (back): Julius Friesen, Wilhelm Buhler, Susanna & Jacob Unger, Cornelius Sawatzky, Peter Unger; (centre): Mrs. Julius Friesen, Anna (Mrs. Wilhelm) Buhler, Mother Susanna, Father Abram, Susanna (Mrs. Cornelius) Sawatzky, Anna (Mrs. Peter) Unger; (front): Abram, Henry.

faraway places. These reading evenings were informative and expanded the imagination to other worlds outside of their peaceful village.

Mother lost her father at an early age so their family had servants helping them on their farm. Mother was always occupied with domestic household duties. She often spoke of the many varieties of fruit that they could grow and use. When she came to Canada in the 1920s, mother left behind her one sister, never to see her again. They continued corresponding in the early years, but lost contact during World War II. Much later, mother heard that her sister had perished somewhere in Siberia.

Living on an isolated farm in Manitoba, mother often spoke of her earlier life in this beautiful village. I think from time to time she was homesick for the good years she experienced in Grigorievka. In comparison to other villages further west and south, our village suffered very little during the Revolution. Still, there were quite a few beggars during the 1921–1922 famine, but only one violent death. In 1926, as my parents boarded the train for Moscow to leave for Canada, their teenage Ukrainian servant called Vasil stood at the train weeping because he wanted to go with my parents but could not.

Peter J. and Susanna (Funk) Harms

Elisabeth Peters

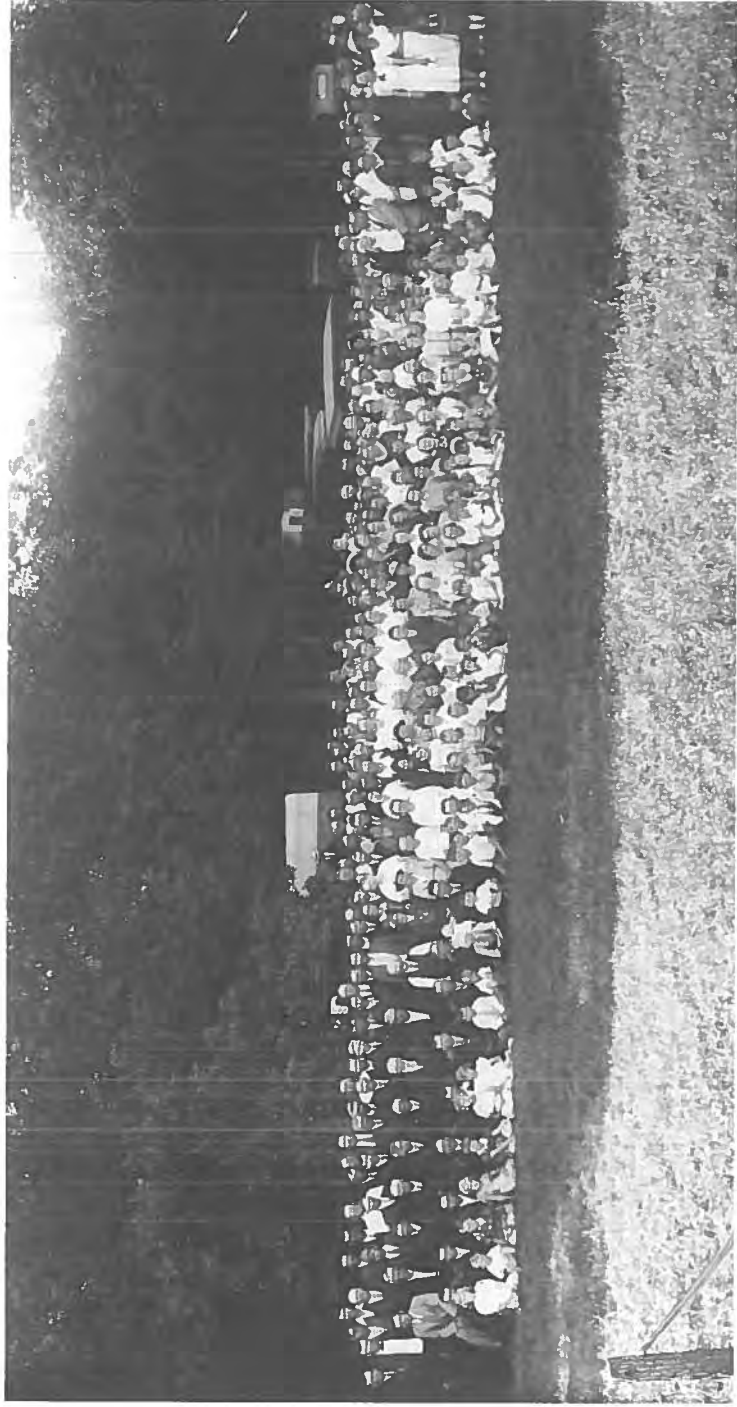
Peter J. Harms married Susanna Funk from the Old Colony. They made their home in Grigorievka, where they had a fine farmstead. Unfortunately, Peter died young and the oldest son, Peter, had to take over leadership in farming. With the help of Ukrainian workers, the family managed to keep up the standards of their *Wirtschaft*. Besides the two sons, Peter and Jasch (Jakob), there were several girls: Katharina, who married Diedrich Sawatzky; Maria married Jakob Baerg; Helene perished in Siberia during the communist regime; Susanna (Sauna) married Jakob Unger, son of Abram Unger.



Jacob & Susanna Unger family, from left (back): Ed C. Stoesz, Peter, Ann & Jacob Unger, Henry, Frank Engbrecht; (front): Sara (Unger) Stoesz, Mother Susanna, Father Jacob, Susie (Unger) Engbrecht.

All except Helene emigrated to Canada in the mid-1920s and settled in Manitoba. Peter and Aganeta lived in the Deloraine-Boissevain area. They had two sons: Peter (Margaret) and Jakob (Anne); and four daughters: Nettie (C. Reimer), Lena (H. Franz), Tina (G. Neufeld), and Elsie (P. Dyck). Peter Harms, Sr., died in 1946 and his wife, Aganeta, mother of their six children, died in 1994 in Boissevain at the age of 103.

Jasch Harms, who was married to Elisabeth Wiebe, moved his family to British Columbia where both he and his wife died. They had six children: Susie, John (a minister), Jasch, Mary, Henry and Herbert.



Reunion of former Grigorievka residents and their descendants on July 1, 1938 in Starbuck Manitoba.

EPILOGUE

Ted Friesen

The primary purpose in compiling this book was to record the history of a village and its people. We hoped it would have interest and significance not only to the inhabitants and their descendants, but would be another telling of the story of our people. It would depict how a world of yesterday, a world of security would act and react, living through a cataclysm and a disaster. And it would attempt to portray how faith and determination helped the survivors that emigrated to begin a new life in a new country. To achieve that picture was the motive and design of this book. The stories have been edited with both readers young and old in mind. It is hoped that the book, at least to a degree, has accomplished these aims.

To paraphrase Deuteronomy 6, “When your child asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies,’ then you shall say: ‘We were captives in a foreign land, and the Lord brought us out with a mighty hand, He brought us out from there, that He might bring us into a new land. And it will be well if we remember what the Lord has done, and respond in gratitude.’”

GLOSSARY

- Alte Kolonie* or *Altkolonie* – the first (oldest) Mennonite settlement of Chortitza and its surrounding villages
- Altkolonier* – one who lived in or came from the *Alte Kolonie*
- Ältester* – the ordained leading minister of the church who performed the baptismal rites, sometimes called “elder” or even “bishop”
- Babuschka* – grandmother in Russian
- Barstanen* – (usually *Bastan*) melon fields, especially watermelon
- Bauer* – farmer
- Bauernhof* – farmyard
- Beutelkasten* – the container in a treadmill with a sack or bag inside which collected the unrefined flour from the bran after separating
- Brädätün* – wooden fence
- Brunnennummer* – the field numbers of the *Brunnenthal* lots
- Brunnenthal* – a lush valley near Grigorievka which had excellent water in its wells. At first the founding group wanted to locate the village there, but opted for the present site because it was on a plateau or “the back of a hill.”
- Bursche* – fellow, chap; also the valet of German officers
- chutor* – country estate of the wealthy
- czardas* – a dance
- dessiatin* – a land measure, approximately 2.7 acres (a hectare)
- Dorfschulze* – village mayor
- Dorfgemeinde* – village congregation; community
- Dräntj, Traenke* – pond
- Droschki* – a light vehicle drawn by two horses; in urban centres they were used for taxi service
- Dreschstein* – a heavy stone moved over ripe grain stalks on the farmyard to separate kernels from chaff. Horses moved the stone around in circles
- Dweagaus* – the short street intersecting the long main street
- Eckstube* – corner room, usually the parents’ bedroom
- Fortbildungschule* – continuation school after completion of the village elementary school
- Forstei* – the camps or centres where the *Forstei* service was stationed—there were numerous locations; *Forsteidiens*t – forestry service by young Mennonites as an alternative to military service
- Goot Maun* – advisor assigned to a widow (often chosen)
- Griebenschmalz* – pork crackles strained out of rendered lard on slaughtering days; usually eaten for breakfast
- Groote Stow, Grosse Stube* – large room, parlour or living room; guests were entertained in the *Groote Stow*
- Gutshaus* – manor house
- Hungerjahr, das* – the famine year, 1921
- Hüstji* – a small house; also an outdoor toilet (*Hiestji*)
- Janisied* – on the other side; in Manitoba used to differentiate between the East and West Reserves, separated by the Red River

- Jugendunterricht* – catechism instruction to baptism candidates
- Kirchenrat* – church council
- kirchlich* – Mennoniten-gemeinde versus Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde
- Kolnisten* – German Lutheran settlers or colonists living in Ukraine
- kopeki* – plural of kopek, the smallest Russian coin
- Kringl (Kringel)* – bagel-like dough circles boiled and then glazed—a delicacy
- Kruschtji* – wild pears
- Kruschtjibeem* – wild pear trees
- Lehrerinstitut (Lehrerseminar)* – teacher training institute.
- Leiterwagon* – a hayrack-like vehicle, the sides of which were made of ladders; usually the wagon was longer than our hayracks
- Lobograika* – an early grain reaper which cut the grain that then was cleared from the reaper manually
- Makhno* – notorious gang leader known for his brutality, who murdered several villagers and terrorized the Mennonite settlements; later he collaborated with the Reds.
- Makhnovzi* – followers of Makhno
- Mädchenheim* – girls' home established in Winnipeg and other cities to provide a meeting place for Mennonite domestics on their day off
- Mädchenschule* – girls' school for post-elementary education up to approximately Grade 10, somewhat like a Mennonite finishing school
- Mauergrapen* – large iron kettle or cauldron used to heat water and cook meals for large gatherings; for pig killing it was set up outside to cook the meat and render the lard.
- Meddachschlop* – afternoon nap or siesta
- Nebenhaus* – an auxiliary house usually used as a summer kitchen, located beside the big farm house
- Nebenstrasse* – residential or neighbouring street
- Ohm* – used to address respected or elderly men, especially clergy and community leaders; *Ohmtji* or *Onkel* were used for men generally.
- Ovintjrettjen* – long poker to stir the fire in large outdoor bake ovens
- Pels (Pelz)* – fur, also a furcoat
- Pfingsten* – Pentecost (Whitsuntide or white Sunday in old England); usually the day for baptism
- Petliura* – Ukrainian national leader—his followers were Petliurovze
- Plumimoos* – thick sweet soup made of dried fruits; commonly eaten on Sundays and holidays
- Polka* (pl. *Polki*) – berth in a train
- Prodalog* – a grain contribution every farmer had to pay to the government after the Revolution—Grigorievka had to deliver to Barvenkovo. This was a heavy tax since they frequently had to give up seed grains if their own grain crop did not produce enough. In some cases even those who had no farm had to pay this tax and buy grain to avoid trouble with the government.
- Reiseschuld* – debts owed to the Canadian Pacific Railway by many Mennonites who came to Canada as credit passengers
- Ruhbentj* (also *Ruhbenk*) – wooden bench or couch, sometimes upholstered, often used for an afternoon nap

- Sanitäter* – medical corpsman
Sanitätsdienst – medical (often Red Cross) service
Saturatj – formal frock coat worn by clergy, often by Mennonite men socially
Schlopbentj – a wooden sleeping bench which served as sitting accommodation during the day but could be pulled out to make a comfortable double bed for the night
Schmaunkauntji – cream pitcher
Schmurzschoavil – an improvised lighting device made by burning a wick in a saucer of melted lard or tallow
Scholle – home soil
Schultebott – village council
Seelenangst – severe inner panic due to stress or depression
Selbstschutz – selfdefence; home defence
Sillfleesch (Suellfleisch) – pickled pork hocks and head cheese, often enjoyed as a-before-bedtime snack
Sommastow – the boys' room opening into the large kitchen (*Hinjatues*) with a window in the wall to the stable. Newlyweds often lived in this room until they found their own house or land.
Struk – shrub, low bushes
Tjieltji – eggless noodles cut into wedges, usually served with cream gravy and ham
Trajchtmooaka – chiropractor
Trudarmee – forced labour, usually in labour camps
Ulka – hardy variety of wheat
Vaspa – afternoon coffee break around 3 or 4 o'clock
vaychers – variety evenings; concerts; plays
Verband der Bürger holländischer Herkunft (Association of Citizens of Dutch Extraction) – a Mennonite agency organized to assist in the process of immigration
Vollwirtschaft – a full-sized farm of 79.9 hectares
volost – county, or county-seat
Vorgarten – front garden
Vormund – guardian
Vorsänger – song leader in church
Waisen – orphans; *runde Waisen* – full orphans
Waisenamt – Orphans' Council (or board)
Wirtschaft – village farmstead
zemlin (or zemlind) – a dug-out with an improvised roof of straw or sod to save building walls
zemstvo – regional legislature
Zentralschule – continuation school after Grade 6 up to Grade 10 or higher; at first they were for boys only, but later became coed.
Ziffern – music notation consisting of numbers instead of notes
Zwieback – double little yeast buns

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