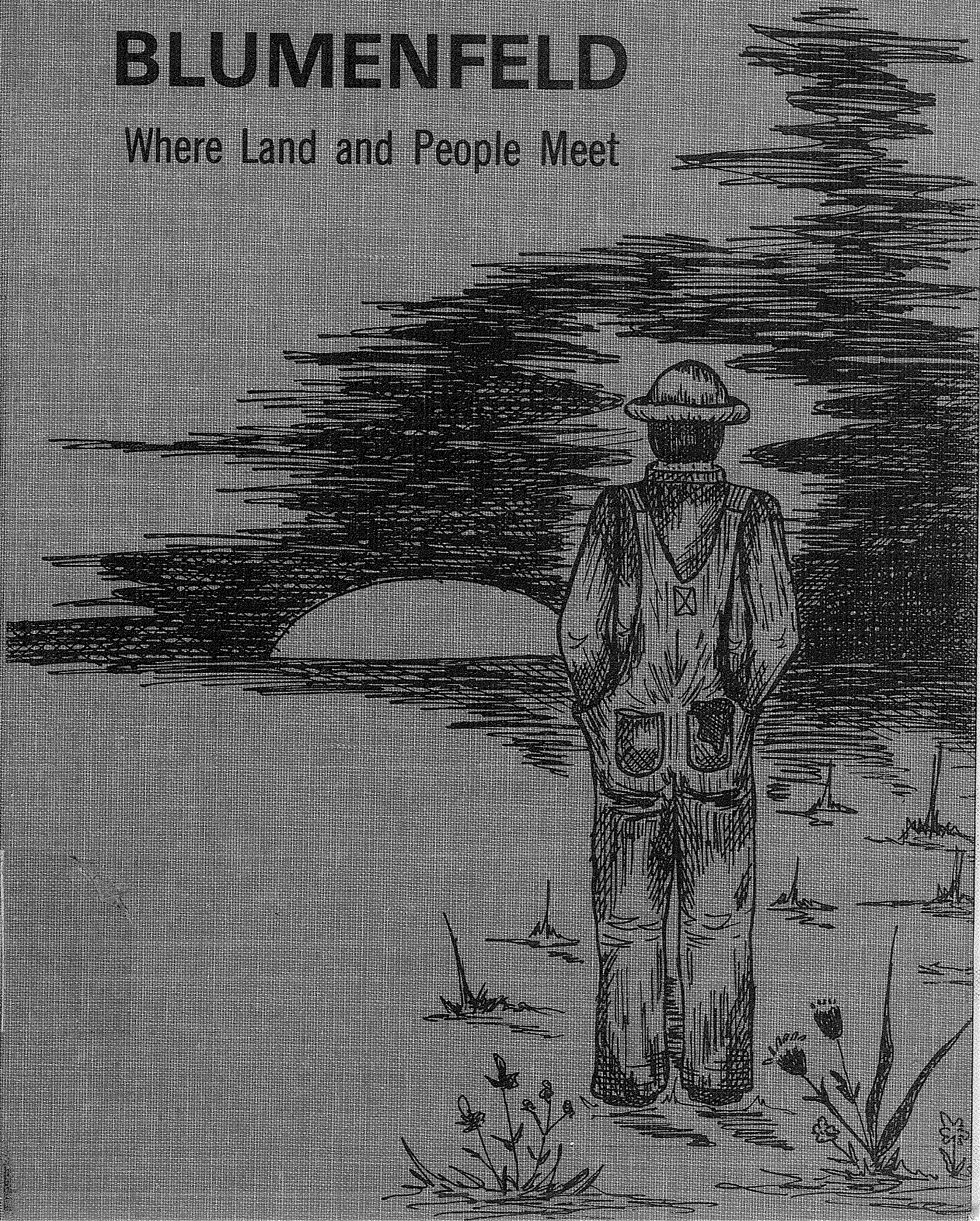
BLUMENFELD

Where Land and People Meet





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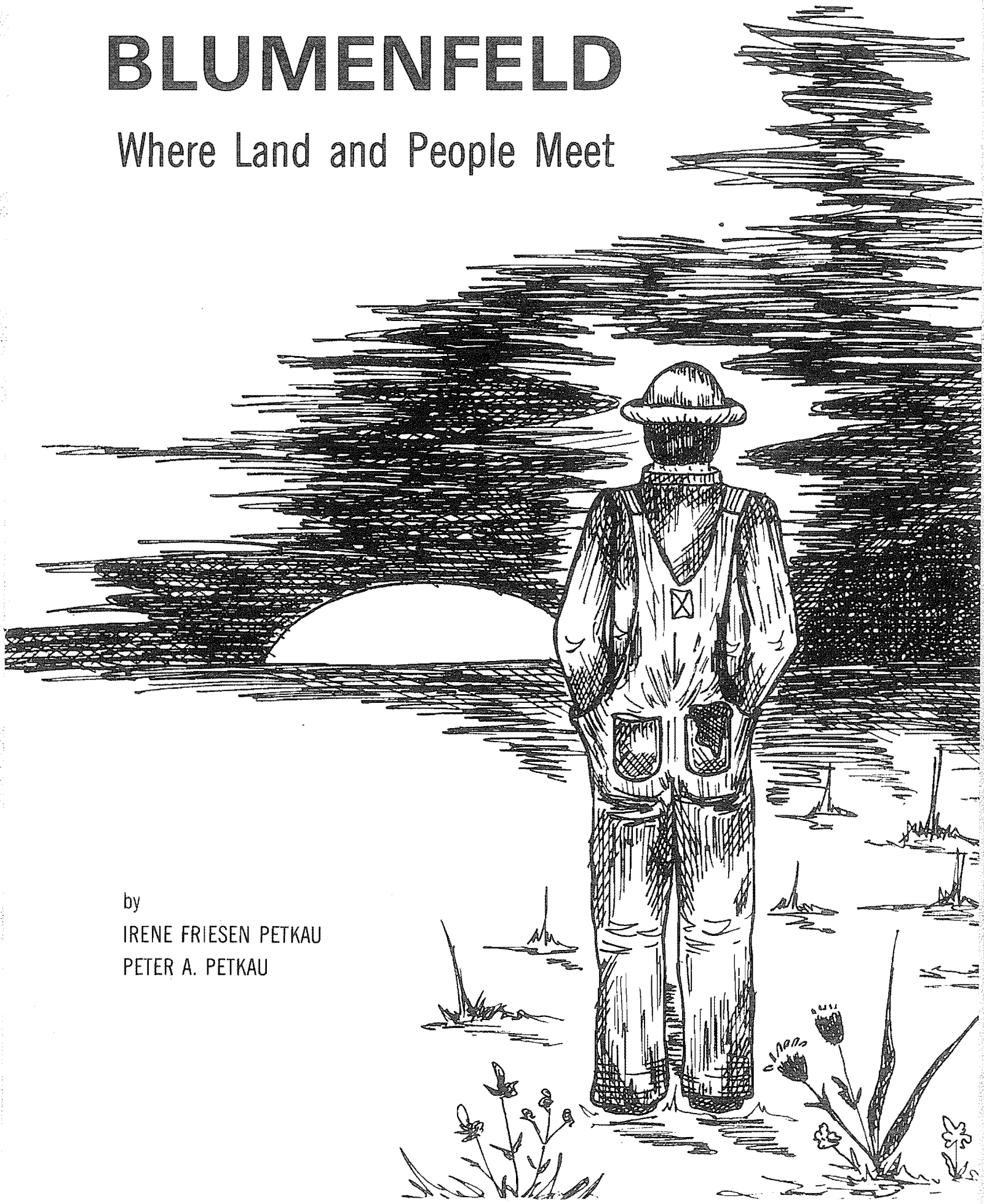

by
IRENE FRIESEN PETKAU
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Blumenfeld History Book Committee

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An article submitted by Frank F. Enns has been integrated into the manuscript of Chapter 4. Jake Elias' article on the Depression appears in Appendix B. These articles provide valuable perspectives from inside persons, in contrast to the authors' impressions which were gleaned as observors of the community.

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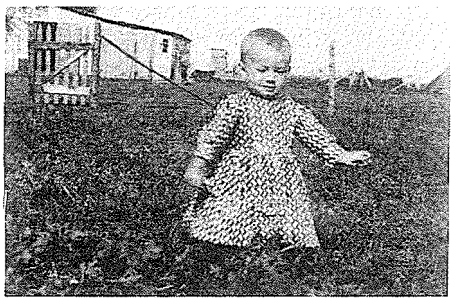
Irene Friesen Petkau
Morden, Manitoba
October 7, 1981



Peter Schmidt grew up in the Eichenfeld area. Photo circa 1937.



George P. Klassen wears the dress that children of either sex wore until the age of two.



Jacob E. Neufeld

Foreword

In telling its story, the community of Blumenfeld has done something very important. It has shared a significant experience of life together, and thus opened itself to other groups as well. For resident and former families of the village this will be particularly meaningful. It will also help to shape a memory and record for generations still to come.

The village localities of southern Manitoba have tended to disappear in the changing patterns of development during the past one hundred years. Indeed, some of these early settlements have totally vanished. Blumenfeld, along with a number of others, has not. It is an exciting glimpse for outsiders to catch the unique way of living which these Mennonite village families have created and sustained even to the present day.

One must marvel, in this instance, at the rich tapestry of individual and group experiences which the story of Blumenfeld, portrayed by this volume, reveals. Though not a native to the area, the author nonetheless managed to capture in a fascinating style, and with inimitable detail, the ways and means by which the Blumenfeld people became a community to stay.

An unusually large number of photos, maps and charts provide the firming up of the story line, and such flashes of local color as the Low German conversations and phrases, the expressed opinions of aged residents, along with memories and letters, create variety and new information for the portrait of the larger Old Colony church society and the Manitoba provincial scene to which Blumenfeld belongs.

Local histories, including Mennonite ones, are no longer as rare as they once were. But we need more. They are a source of enjoyment and instruction. As one person has put it, "We actually study ourselves and our homes", and there is value in that.

So this study, too, will take its valued place with those of Arnaud, Gruntal, Reinland, Winkler, Steinbach and others which have appeared before. The diligence of Irene and Peter Petkau, who had the patience and the endurance to see this project through to completion, is much in evidence. To them, as well as to the committee which brought them to the task, and to the village which sponsored the project and constantly stood by, we are grateful.

Lawrence Klippenstein, Historian - archivist
Mennonite Heritage Centre
Winnipeg, Manitoba
October, 1981



In Search of a Homeland

CHAPTER 1

Nun hatten wir die Reise hinter uns und hatten wieder alles verlassen, ohne einen Zent dafuer eingenommen zu haben. Weil der Winter vor der Tuer war, entschlos ich mich, den Eltern beim Maehen zu helfen, damit wir im Winter Futter haetten. Dan baute ich mit Schwager Loewen ein Haus halb in die Erde und Halb ueber der Erde. Wir bekamen es auch fertig und zogen bei Loewens ein. So verlebten wir unsern ersten Winter in Amerika. Da ich aber wieder keine eigene Wohnung hatte, kaufte ich im Fruehling meinem Fetter Abraham Dueck in Blumenfeld die Erdhuette mit zwei angenommenen Farmen Land fuer $30 ab. Die Erdhuette und die Farm behielt ich und die andere Farm ueberliesz ich meinem Bruder Johann Elias. Weil den Winter viel Schnee gefallen war, so fuerchteten wir, ob die Erdhuette nicht voll Schneewasser fliesz en koennte. Deshalb baute ich mir ein kleines Haeuschen auf der Erde. Die Erdhuette richtete ich mir zur Schmiede ein. Nun hatte es mit dem Schneewasser keine Gefahr; aber als erst das Grundwasser und das Wasser von den Bergen kam, liefen beinahe alle Erdhuetten in Blumenfeld voll Wasser. Deswegen war das Dorf verbraucht und man suchte sich einen andern Platz und verlegte das Dorf.[1]

Now the journey was behind us and we had arrived without having to receive a penny of assistance from anyone. Because winter was near, I decided to help my parents with the haying so that we would have food for the winter. Then my brother-in-law, Loewen, and I built a house, half underground and half above ground. We completed it in time and moved in with the Loewens. That is how we lived our first winter in America. The following spring, because I did not own a house, I purchased a sod house and two quarter-section farms for $30.00 from my cousin, Abraham Dueck of Blumenfeld. I kept the sod house and one farm, and handed over the other farm to my brother John Elias. Because there had been so much snow that winter, we feared that the sod houses would flood from the waters of the melting snow. For that reason I built a small house above ground and remodelled the sod house for my blacksmith equipment. The melting snow caused inconsequential damage. Then the run-off from the Pembina hills came. Nearly every house in Blumenfeld was flooded. That is why the village was finished, and people looked for a different place to relocate the village.[1]

Peter Elias was one of eighteen thousand people who, in the 1870's, left the security and comfort of the Mennonite commonwealth in Russia to establish a new home in Canada, to make Manitoba's West Reserve their homeland. These Mennonite immigrants shared a desire to be faithful to the traditions of the church and to retain their way of life. The move to a new country was spurned by a shortage of land, by changes in the education system and by the possible termination of Russia's promise of military exemption, as well as by changes

in church life. Bishop Johann Wiebe who led a group of Fuerstenland and Chortitza Colonists to the West Reserve had visions for reforming the church and its community. At the immigration sheds at Fort Dufferin, near present-day Emerson, Bishop Johann Wiebe called a brotherhood meeting in order to achieve some unity of purpose among people of diverse religious and cultural experiences. His vision was to initiate a "reform movement"[2] which would restore the New Testament Church.

Bishop Wiebe's vision was one of many visions in the history of the Mennonite Church. Renewal movements motivated by visionaries have attempted to generate new life into a church community that had become content to be left alone. Our first two chapters will reflect the chain of events which birthed the Anabaptist movement and the Mennonite church as it is known in Blumenfeld today. The value of reflecting on a period of history that spans four centuries is in understanding and articulating clearly what the unique emphases of our faith are which have shaped our communities, families, even our personalities, as well as our religious experiences. Space will not permit a description of all renewal movements which have attempted to generate new life in the whole Mennonite church community. We will look primarily at those renewal movements which have built up, and yet fragmented, the Mennonite church since its coming to Manitoba in 1875.

Renewal movements are necessary for giving new life to established and routine expressions and institutions. Renewal movements eventually give birth to new forms and new institutions. Succeeding generations can continue to experience the vitality of the spirit of renewal and the merits of forms and institutions if there is an openness to change. When the institution loses the function of generating new life and when there is a resistance to change, the movement takes on the characteristics of that which it originally tried to reform. It, too, becomes like a stagnant pool, until a new generation of people have the courage and the vision to give leadership to yet another renewal movement.

The Birth of Anabaptism

The Roman Catholic Church had been the only church in Europe until the 16th century. It wielded not only religious power but also great political and economic influence by virtue of its extensive land and business holdings. Peasants and serfs were powerless against such a master.

But by 1500 many people within the Roman Catholic Church were calling for reforms to cleanse the church of corrupt practises. The reforms came, but not from within the church. The renewal of the church led by Martin Luther gave birth to Protestantism. In Switzerland, the Reformation Movement was led by Ulrich Zwingli of Zurich.

Both Luther and Zwingli had implemented their religious reforms by using the power of the city or district government to enforce their views. Thus, every citizen of that area had to change, whether or not they understood or agreed to the changes. This alliance between the church and secular government followed the pattern which the Roman Catholic Church had used to exercise power over European Christians for many centuries.

Conrad Grebel and Feliz Manz had been supporters of Ulrich Zwingli in establishing the evangelical church in Zurich. Although

they shared the common goal of eliminating the abuses which had spread under Catholicism, they differed in the procedure for implementing changes. "Zwingli believed that the Catholic customs would slowly die out under the influence of the new preaching, but Grebel was for thorough and quick action. . . Grebel was also much more bound to the literal wording of the Bible than was Zwingli."[3] In 1525, Zwingli and the other reformed pastors were still celebrating the Lord's Supper in the Roman Catholic tradition. They spoke the mass in Latin; they wore official gowns called chasubles; they withheld the cup of wine from the congregation, sharing only the bread. They also practised baptism according to the Catholic tradition with blowing, exorcising the devil, crossing, moistening with saliva and anointing with oil.[4]

Grebel was impatient with the contradiction between Reformed preaching and Catholic ritual. For a time he continued to believe that the reforms could be implemented in the context of the state church, but gradually he was compelled to reject the Zurich church of Zwingli. Grebel saw the Christian church as the congregation of a few who believed and chose to live according to the example set by Jesus. He believed that confessing Jesus as Lord meant changing from the old ways, repenting of sin, and resolving to live as Jesus' disciple. This emphasis on Christian living has been called "Nachfolge" or discipleship. He began to emphasize that baptism and the Lord's Supper be practised in the apostolic tradition, that is, in the manner of the early Christian church.

Some of the men who were persuaded to align themselves with Grebel were Georg Blaurock, Felix Manz, Reublin, Haetzer, Broetli and Castelberger. The leaders of Grebel's circle conducted prayer meetings in homes of people who were sympathetic to their views. At these meetings the Bible was studied and prayers were offered for strength and discernment of the truth.

These separating Christians, who were calling themselves Brethren in Christ or simply "Christians", boldly asked the town council for a formal debate with Zwingli on the question of the scriptural teaching of baptism. Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, Reublin and Georg Blaurock debated with Zwingli in December, 1524. Both sides claimed victory, but Zwingli and his town council obviously had political power on their side. On the day following the end of the debate, January 18, 1525, the council decreed that all parents refusing to baptize their infants would be exiled from the Zurich district. On January 21, 1525, Grebel and Manz were forbidden to hold any more "schools for agitation", as the prayer meetings in the homes were called.[5]

That evening, sympathizers of the new movement met at the home of Felix Manz in Zurich. After prayer, Georg Blaurock requested Conrad Grebel to baptize him. Then Blaurock baptized the others. This was the first rebaptizing of adults upon their confession of faith. At this meeting the Christian brothers and sisters committed themselves to the ministry of preaching the Gospel and living the faith. An account of this first meeting is preserved in a Hutterian Chronicle in South Dakota.

With them he (Blaurock) spoke and talked through matters of faith. They came to one mind in these things. . . And it came to pass that they were together until fear *(angst)* began to come over them, yea, they were oppressed *(gedrungen)* in their hearts. Thereupon, they began to bow their knees to the Most High God in heaven and called upon him as the knower of hearts, implored him to enable them to do his divine will and to manifest his mercy toward

them. For flesh and blood and human forwardness did not drive them, since they well knew what they would have to bear and suffer on account of it. . . After the prayer, George Cajacob (Blaurock) arose and asked Conrad to baptize him, for the sake of God, and with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with that request and desire, Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no ordained minister *(Diener)* to perform such work. After that was done the others similarly desired George to baptize them, which he also did upon their request. Thus they together gave themselves to the name of the Lord in the high fear of God. Each confirmed *(bestaetet)* the other in the service of the gospel, and they began to teach and keep the faith. Therewith began the separation from the world and its evil works.[6]

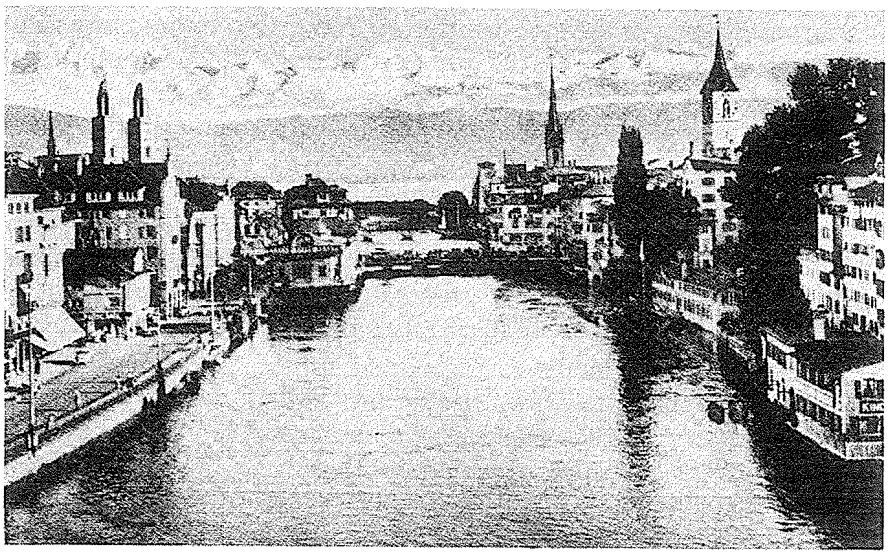
The Brethren dispersed to the rural areas surrounding Zurich; preaching, teaching and re-baptizing those who confessed personal faith in Christ. The "schools" reconvened. Rebaptism was most often the simple act of sprinkling with water from a well or from a pitcher. The Lord's Supper was celebrated several times using common bread and wine in imitation of the New Testament accounts. Eating the Lord's Supper was a fellowship meal and implied an obligation to live the Christian life.

On the basis of their interpretation of the authority of Scriptures, the Grebel circle had the courage to withdraw from the Reformed folk church to form a Christian fellowship based on voluntary membership and independent of the state.

"But Grebel did not preach withdrawal only from the folk church, but also from the life of the state. . . He demanded that right believing Christians must not accept public office nor participate in war."[7]

By January 30, 1525, the moderate Zwinglian council was forced to exercise a heavy hand against these Brethren. Twenty-five people, including Manz and Blaurock, were arrested and imprisoned. Soon after their release, however, the missionaries began preaching again, baptizing all those who would repent of their sins. Zwingli and other opponents labelled these Brethren "Anabaptists", meaning rebaptizers.

The movement grew quickly. In the spring of 1525, one of the Brethren missionaries convinced Balthasar Hubmaier, a minister in the church at Waldshut, Switzerland, to be rebaptized. Hubmaier, in the days following Easter, baptized most of his congregation of 300 members, using a milk bucket with water from the fountain in the town square.



This scene of the Limmat River in Zurich, Switzerland shows Zwingli's Reformed Church on the left. This was the site of Felix Manz' martyrdom, 1527.

But persecution became increasingly severe. Early congregations were forced to flee the cities and to disperse in the countryside where they held meetings in the mountains, woods and fields. But wherever they went, persecution followed. In 1525, prison terms, fines and sometimes torture were standard, but by March, 1526, life imprisonment sentences were being imposed. Some were being burned at the stake, beheaded, or buried alive. On November 19, 1526, the Zurich council passed a new law attaching the death penalty not only to acts of rebaptism but also to attendance at Anabaptist meetings.

In January, 1526, Feliz Manz was condemned to die by the Protestant council of Zurich. Execution took place the same day. Manz went to his death with courage. "As he walked from the fish market to the Limmat River, he praised God while his mother and brother waited along the way to encourage him to remain steadfast. He was trussed, with a stick thrust between his roped, doubled-up legs and arms, and as he was being drawn into the icy water he sang."[8]

Solidarity at Schleitheim

In February, 1527, Anabaptist leaders assembled in the village of Schleitheim under the leadership of William Reublin and Michael Sattler. Their meeting was necessitated by several factors. Persecution or martyrdom had claimed many leaders, and there was a need for guided direction. The pressure of persecution had pushed some Anabaptists into fanatic behaviour which destroyed the credibility of the Anabaptist church. The conference attempted to prepare guidelines for daily living and for congregational life.

The Schleitheim Confession, a document originating at this assembly was addressed to "Certain false brethren among us . . . in the way they intend to practice and observe the freedom of the Spirit and of Christ." The writer of the confession was Michael Sattler.

The first article on baptism emphasized repentance and the need to change one's life. The second article detailed administration of the ban as a means of purifying the church. The procedure for excommunication was based on Matthew Chapter 18, and was carried out prior to eating the Lord's Supper. The third article provides insight into an essential difference between the Anabaptist church and the Zwinglian church. The Zwinglian view held that the saints are known only to God and that the true church is invisible. The Anabaptists, however, said that the church became visible when Christians committed to walk as Christ walked could be distinguished from other people. The first three articles of the Schleitheim Confession addressed the desire to "safeguard the purity of the communion fellowship"[9] from apostacy within and the influence of worldliness from without.

The fourth article emphasized the separateness of the Christian fellowship from the world. The fifth article outlined the duties of the pastor. This office is clearly defined in the emerging Anabaptist church where the pastor is not the roving evangelist of the 1525's, but a settled minister. Emphasis is placed on his role as a Bible-teacher and as a leader in executing the pre-communion ban. Provision is made for replacing the pastor if he is banished or martyred; another should be elected "in the same hour in order that God's remnant and little folk may not be scattered."[10]

The sixth article expounds the Anabaptist position on pacifism. The Schleitheim synod claimed that Christians, like Christ, must

recognize the need for government, but that they must refuse to act the part of judge or magistrate. The seventh article concerns the Anabaptist refusal to take an oath, particularly an oath of allegiance to a civic government.

The Schleitheim conference contributed two important documents to the church. The "Congregational Order" attempted to give direction to personal and corporate life in the congregation. Excerpts from the seven articles are cited here in order to shed some light on the intensity of the commitment to the congregation and the commitment to be rooted in the Scriptures.

1. The brothers and sisters should meet at least three or four times a week, to exercise themselves in the teaching of Christ and to exhort one another to remain faithful to the Lord as they have pledged.
2. When the brothers and sisters are together, they shall take up something to read together. The one to whom God has given the best understanding shall explain it, the others should listen. The Psalter shall be read daily at home.
3. Let none be frivolous in the church of God, neither in words nor in actions. Good conduct shall be maintained by them all, also before the heathen.
4. When a brother sees his brother erring, he shall admonish him according to the command of Christ.
5. Of all the brothers and sisters of this congregation none shall have anything of his own, but rather, as the Christians in the time of the apostles held all in common, and especially stored up a common fund, from which aid can be given to the poor. . .
6. All gluttony shall be avoided among the brothers and sisters who are gathered in the congregation; serve a soup or a minimum of vegetables and meat, for eating and drinking are not the kingdom of heaven.
7. The Lord's Supper shall be held, as often as the brothers and sisters are together, thereby proclaiming the death of the Lord, and thereby warning each one to commemorate how Christ gave His life for us, and shed His blood for us, that we might also be willing to give our body and life for Christ's sake, which means for the sake of all the brothers and sisters.

From John Howard Yoder, **The Legacy of Michael Sattler.**

The Anabaptist church in Switzerland survived the persecution of the sixteenth century. Complete toleration and full citizenship was not granted until the Congress of Vienna in 1815.[11] Their struggle for liberty caused a large group to seek refuge in America between 1683 and 1865. Their descendants are known as the Amish.

Anabaptist Developments in Germany

In the formative years, the Anabaptist movement in Germany was not united. Leaders in various cities or regions acted independently of each other in theological emphasis and in congregational structure. Leaders such as Hans Denck of Worms, Hans Hut of Austria, and Hut's three evangelists, Schlaffer, Schiemer and Spittlemeier each added their peculiar touch to the Anabaptist movement in Europe.

In August, 1527, Hut, Denck and others met in the city of Augsburg for the purpose of achieving some unity in theological teaching. Discussion at the conference focussed on the 'last times'. Anabaptist leaders in South and Central Germany were preoccupied with the manner and time of Christ's return to inaugurate the Kingdom. This eschatological expectation added impetus to the second function of the conference — to extend the Christian witness by sending out missionaries.

Missionaries were appointed and assigned territories in the German states. The strength of this missionary witness led to a counter-attack by the local authorities who hired a two-hundred man force, called the *Taeuferjaeger* (hunters of baptizers), to hunt down the

Anabaptists. Because many of the Augsburg missionaries gave their lives to the cause of Anabaptism, the conference has become known as the Martyr's Synod.

Strassbourg in Central Germany was one of the few cities in Europe which tolerated Anabaptists. It became a home for Anabaptist refugees who sought safety for their families. One of those refugees was Pilgram Marpeck who, for the sake of his Anabaptist convictions, had been forced to leave wealth and prominence in the city of Rattenburg. He was soon employed by the city of Strassbourg as an engineer. But Marpeck was not content quietly to be the leader of the Anabaptist church which met in his home in Strassbourg. He felt compelled to speak to other Christians about his understanding of the Christian faith. As a result of his refusal to be silenced by the city religious official, Martin Bucer, Marpeck lost not only his job but also his right to live in Strassbourg. Upon receiving news of his banishment he asked for four weeks of grace in which to settle his financial affairs. During that time he wrote a 35-page document which outlined his confession of faith. After leaving Strassbourg he "continued as an important leader among the Anabaptist of Germany, Switzerland and Moravia, apparently traveling a great deal and writing letters to churches and individuals.[12]

In Moravia, Jacob Hutter organized an Anabaptist community based on sharing economic goods and living in close communities. This branch of the Anabaptist family continues to identify themselves by their first leader, the Hutterites.

Menno Simons Unites the Movement in Holland

The story of the Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands has its scandals as well as its heroic tales. Men and women, carried away by uncontrolled zeal and personal ambition brought the Anabaptists into ill repute. Authorities were merciless in the persecution of Anabaptists, and claimed as many as 1500 lives in Flanders and Holland.

The source of this ill feeling was the Muensterites. Jan Matthys, a fanatic, undertook by force to set up the New Jerusalem at the city of Muenster. His followers were guilty of many extremes which were contrary to Anabaptist ethics: radical chiliasm, the use of arms, polygamy. The city of Muenster fell to the troups of the Roman Catholic bishops in June 1535 at the cost of 500 lives.

Shortly thereafter, in 1536, Menno Simons, a young Catholic priest left the priesthood, married and was baptized upon his confession of faith in Jesus as Lord. Simons' leadership abilities won the confidence and respect of other Anabaptist pastors who ordained him as their elder. Simons' tasks, as he saw them, were to correct the misguided and to restore order through more faithful teaching and application of the Scriptures. The people in the congregations to which he ministered were proud to call themselves Mennists (eventually Mennonites) and attempted by their peaceful witness to separate themselves from the ill-reputed Muensterites.

Menno Simons' primary opponents were the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformers who, by supporting the state church model, insisted that a society which didn't have a common religion was dangerous. Simons' debates and writing attempted to clarify the two issues where Mennonites differed from the other Reformers. The first was the insistence that the new birth must be evidenced in a serious



Menno Simons, through teaching and writing, clarified the principles of Anabaptist belief and gave strength to young congregations. The Anabaptists in Holland were proud to call themselves Mennists.

attempt to live as Christ's disciples. The second was that the church was a voluntary gathering of believers, bound by loyalty to Christ and each other, and willing to give and receive discipline regarding the Christian life of separation from the world.[13]

Bitter persecution drove many Dutch Anabaptists eastward to the Lowlands of Prussia.



Jacob Dircks and his two sons, Andries and Jan, were arrested for belonging to the Mennists. At their trial, they were condemned to be burnt at the stake. The three were bound together and led to the place of execution. On the way, Jacob Dircks' youngest son, Pieter, met them. In his grief, Pieter ran to his father and flung his arms about his father's neck. The police siezed the young boy and threw him under the feet of those that followed. What sorrow for Jacob Dircks whose bindings made him helpless to assist his dear son. At the stakes, Jacob Dircks showed a fatherly compassion for his two sons and encouraged them to be strong. They died on March 17, 1568.



Maria and Ursula van Beckum died at the stakes in 1544. At the time of death, they encouraged each other to remain steadfast and sang for joy at their coming reunion with the Lord. Through prayers and persuasion, they witnessed to their executioners.

This eastern Anabaptist thrust played such a prominent part in Canadian Mennonite history that it must be given more than just a passing reference. The competing Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed landlords soon discovered that the value of Anabaptist virtues far exceeded the danger of their so-called heresies. At first the refugees were labourers only; later they were granted leases as managers, and eventually they came into full possession of their own lands in the vicinity of Danzig, Elbing and Koenigsberg. By 1608 a Lutheran bishop was complaining that the whole delta was overrun with Mennonites.[14]

The Anabaptists or Mennists who stayed in Holland gradually improved their status. Under the new national government they experienced greater tolerance and by the late 1700's were able to participate in national life and commercial affairs without hindrance. The Dutch Anabaptists became known not as Mennonites, but as the *Doopsgezinde.*

A Refuge in Prussia

Anabaptists, fleeing the Netherlands, sought refuge on the east fringes of the Roman Empire, sometimes by special invitation from landlords and noblemen who were anxious for honest, hard-working persons to assist in the economic development of their lands. By 1642, the Polish monarch had issued an edict favouring Mennonite settlements in his lands. The respect of the government had been gained primarily through their work in draining the swamp lands bordering the Vistula and Nogat rivers. Useless lands had been transformed into profitable pastures and wheat farms.[15]

Congregations were established near the West Prussian cities of Elbing and Danzig where Mennonites were tolerated although their increasing prosperity often aroused the jealousy of guilds who exerted pressure on the city council to deny the Mennonites citizenship in the city. As a result Mennonites lived on the outskirts of Danzig as late as 1800.[16]

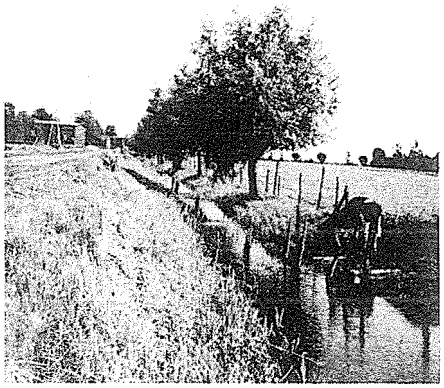
With greater tolerance in the 1700's came the freedom to build their own churches. Congregations gradually began to use German instead of Dutch in their worship services. But the church was affected by internal divisions as well as migrations.

> Because of its prevalence among the Anabaptists, this tendancy to fragmentation was called the *Taeuferkrankheit* (the Anabaptist sickness). Menno Simons had once identified the essentials of the Anabaptist movement but, for his followers, the nonessentials had a way of moving to higher priorities.[17]

But in spite of the edict of toleration issued by Frederick the Great of Prussia in 1780, faithfulness to Anabaptist principles motivated a migration to Russia which began in 1789.

Mennonites in Prussia experienced increasing discrimination in economic and religious matters. Most significant was the prohibition against purchasing land, unless the purchase was from another Mennonite. Special taxes had to be paid for exemption from military service. Citizenship rights were denied them. Marriage to a non-Mennonite caused the loss of military exemption, but enabled the purchase of land if the person gave up membership in the Mennonite church. For most Mennonites, there were only two alternatives: to compromise one's religious beliefs or to emigrate.[18]

Two delegates, Jacob Hoeppner and Johann Bartsch, were sent to Russia to investigate the possibility of a large block resettlement in



One of the canals dug by the Mennonites in Prussia. They are credited for reclaiming the Vistula delta and converting it into productive farmland.

the lowlands of Berislav in New Russia, and to negotiate a long list of conditions in regard to various forms of financial and material assistance, permanent exemption from military service, and guarantees of freedom of religious beliefs and practise. The agreement, referred to as the *"Privilegium"* (contract of privileges), indicated that the deputies were "fully conscious of the worth of those whom they represented."[19]

Migration to Russia

The purpose for a brief review of the social, economic and religious developments in Russia is to provide background information that will assist the reader in understanding the situation of Canadian Mennonites.

The approximately 225 families who emigrated to Russia in 1788-1789 found that their chosen home was no longer available to them. Instead, they were forced to settle on the estate of General Potemkin, who had handled many of the negotiations. The land was on a higher plateau, and although picturesque, was hardly suitable to agriculture.[20] These first immigrants were mostly poor, landless craftspeople who had little firsthand experience with farming. They experienced innumerable difficulties in establishing their new homes at Chortitza.

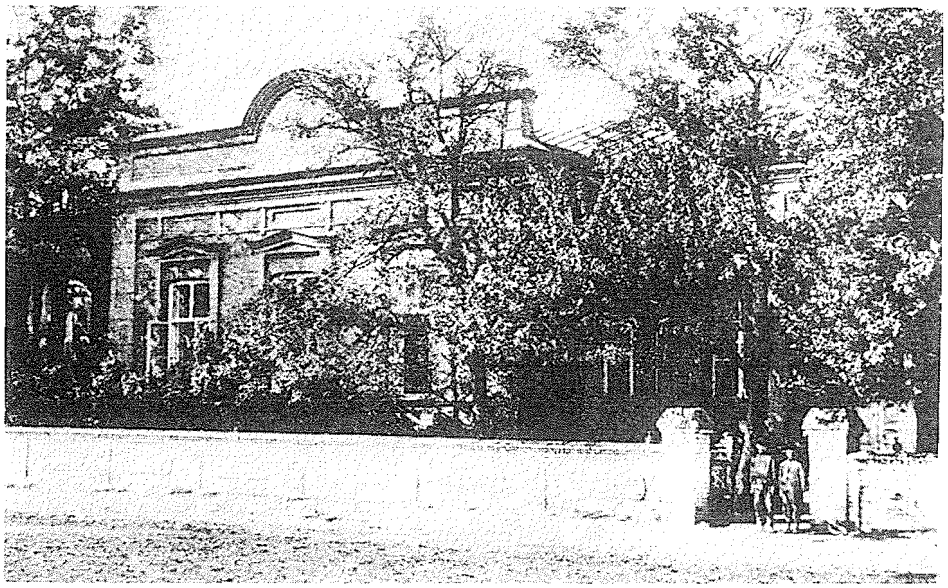
A second group of immigrants arrived during 1793-1796. These 118 families settled in and around Chortitza. They had left Prussia primarily due to conscience because their religious beliefs were being compromised. Because they had been landowners in Prussia, their adjustment to the new country was made easier.

The third and last group of 180 families left Prussia from 1803 to 1840 when it became clear that the government was making the stance non-resistance impossible for future generations. This migration of prosperous families necessitated the founding of a second settlement which was called Molotschna. Chortitza, thereafter, was frequently referred to as the *Alt Kolonie* (Old Colony).

Social Organization of Mennonite Settlements in Russia

"The Mennonite immigrants to Russia had no prior experience whatsoever in the administration of the affairs of their communities, since (they had not) . . . been accorded citizen status (in Prussia). In Russia, therefore, they faced the very difficult task of acquiring the ability to govern themselves on the village and district levels."[21] Initially the colony's affairs were governed by directors whose tendency to fleece the colonists and to use corporal punishment only fuelled the disputes already in existence. Investigations initiated by Czar Paul during 1798-1800 led to the establishment of a new system of government.

Each village formed a separate unit of government led by a leader, *Schult,* elected by the village landowners. The *Schults* of the villages in a district *(Volost)* elected the *AevaSchult* who administered the affairs of the district and represented the district before the higher government agencies. The Mennonites perfected this form of government and their colonies became centralized, autocratic regimes with almost total autonomy from the national government.



The Chortitza Volost Office was the administrative centre for the Chortitza Colony.

Johann Cornies influenced the Mennonite colonies in Russia more than any other person. Many of the agricultural reforms he instituted were practised by the Mennonites who came to Canada in the 1870's, although his educational reforms were rejected by the conservatives.



> Small wonder then that these Mennonites in Russia were prone to regard themselves as constituting, to all intents and purposes, a state within a state and representing a people peculiarly favored by a succession of czars. Nor were they devoid at times of a feeling to view themselves as a people, or folk, which was also benevolently looked upon by God. For how else could they have been so richly blessed in all their earthly endeavors?[22]

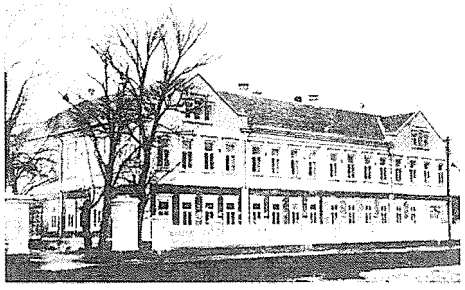
In the early years educational leadership was inadequate. School attendance was irregular since the children were needed at home. Teachers were untrained. The curriculum was limited to the Bible and catechism. In later years, village administrators who controlled the schools retained the schools in this primitive form. Johann Cornies, under the auspices of the Agricultural Association, reformed the educational facilities by revising the curriculum and providing teacher training. In 1843 further reforms, first in Molotschna, later in Chortitza, took the control of the educational system out of the hands of the village administrators and the church leaders and placed it under the Agricultural Association.[23]

Some of the accomplishments of the Association were the development of high schools and other special schools such as the *Kommerzschule* (business college), *Maedchenshule* (high school for girls), and schools for deaf and mute children.

Some of the economic institutions which served the colonies were the fire insurance company, the Mutual Credit Societies for banking, and the *Waisenamt* which was associated with the Mennonite system of inheritance.

Handicapped and ill people were accommodated in health institutions such as hospitals, homes for the elderly and asylums.

The block settlement of Mennonites in Russia gave them a minimum of association with the Russian people. The little contact that existed was through patronizing relationships to servants and other workers. The Mennonites regarded their Russian servants as culturally inferior and made no attempt to learn the Russian language or to appreciate Russian literature or customs. "The mother tongue

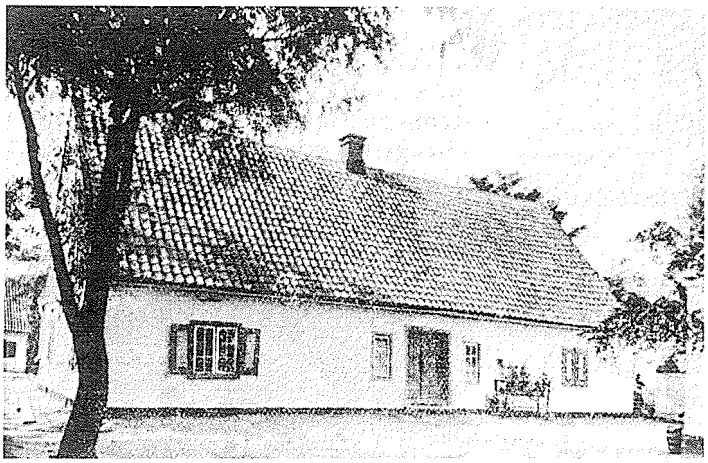


Economic prosperity and the freedom to govern their own affairs made it possible for the Mennonites to establish health institutions such as this 60-bed hospital.

The teachers and senior students of a Mennonite high school take a tour of the Crimea. It was customary for students to wear uniforms.



The Halbstadt Central School, first built in 1835, served the Chortitza region as a high school for boys. A similar school for girls was built in 1895.



throughout their sojourn in the empire of the czars was their own form of Low German, a basic Dutch-Low German."[24] Most Mennonites of the eighteenth century migrations who lived in Chortitza and its colonies learned High German only in Russia, and then after the 1840's, as a result of a government edict that official communications be in High German.

Economic Developments in Russia

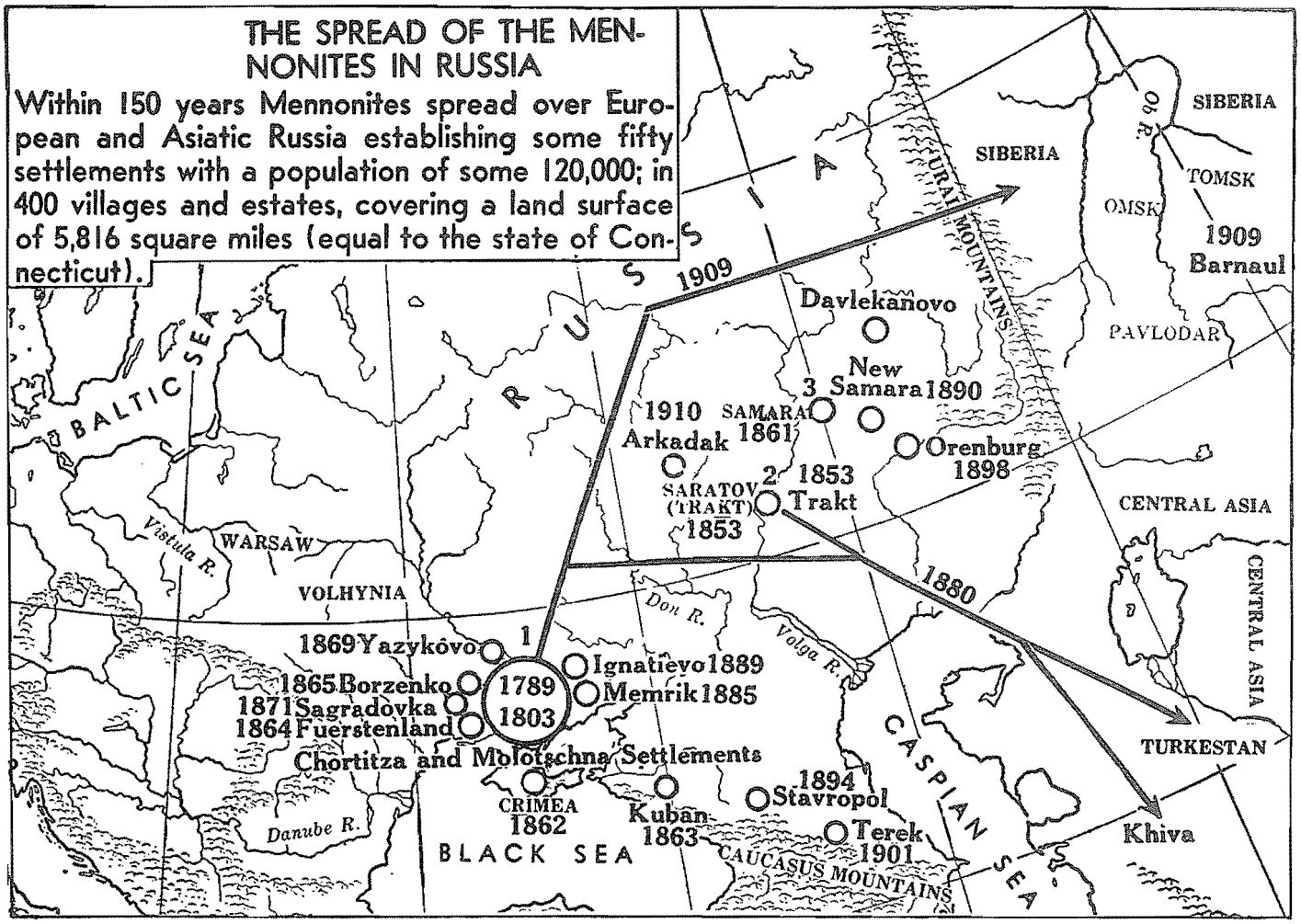
One of the clauses in the Privilegium was a policy of inheritance which stipulated that the 175 acres alloted per family could not be subdivided, but must be given to the youngest son of the family. Reserve lands were set aside for future generations. Over the years, however, a class of landless people grew larger and became increasingly restless and bitter as the colony failed to use the surplus and reserve land funds for relieving the situation of the landless, the *Anwohner.* "By 1860 about half of the Mennonite families in the seventeen villages in Chortitza and nearly two-thirds of those in the 57 communities in the Molotschna were landless cottagers, with or without ownership of their homes."[25]

Since payment of all taxes was the joint responsibility of the entire village community, there was reluctance on the part of the *Schult* and village administration to grant exit visas so that tradesmen could leave the colony to seek their livelihood elsewhere. By refusing to grant exit permits, the village officials were assured of plenty of cheap farm labour and a broad tax base.

The landless were powerless to effect change within the Mennonite administration because they, having no land, had no voting privileges. The landless finally appealed to the Russian government, and with its assistance, were able to break the power of the land-

owners. A settlement was reached whereby the original allotments could be sub-divided into half-farms and quarter-farms, and whereby funds from the surplus and reserve lands would be used to purchase lands for new settlements called daughter colonies.

The Chortitza Colony had taken the lead in devising a solution to the land problem and had started five daughter colonies between 1836 and 1852, among them the Bergthal Colony (1836) and the Fuerstenland Colony (1864).





Some wealthy Mennonite farmers bought large tracts of land outside the villages and established homes there. These isolated estates, called *Chutors,* boasted elaborate dwellings like the one shown here.

The first Mennonite emigrants from Prussia had been livestock farmers. But as Russia developed its ports on the Black Sea and entered the grain market of the world, there was demand for increased production of cereal grains. The Mennonite colonies re-

sponded and under the leadership of Johann Cornies, director of the Agricultural Association, a number of improved methods of cultivation of the soil were introduced, such as, "the use of the black fallow, use of manure as fertilizer, change to the four-field system of crop rotation, introduction of better seed grains and reaping larger crop yields, etc."[26]

The Mennonite Churches in Russia

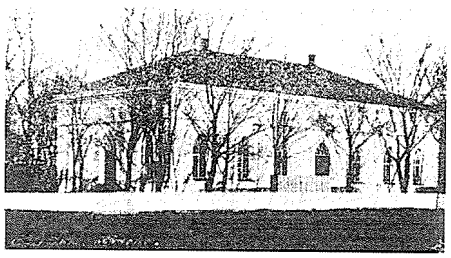
The system of church heirarchy, where bishops ordained ministers and both were conferred with special status and powers, was transferred from Prussia to Russia. From the early beginnings in the Chortitza Colony, religious leadership was weak. No ordained ministers accompanied the first migration and for several years, the colonists, who had left Prussia primarily for economic reasons, were in a spiritual desert. (The Old Colony Church in Manitoba experienced a similar vacuum for more than a decade following the migration to Mexico).

Ministers were elected and not hired. Thus they frequently became the elected representatives of the wealthy land-owners and supported their interest in the political and economic affairs of the village. In the struggle for land, the landless received no support from the church, and their allegiance to it was weakened, making them receptive to the influence of the German Pietist movement of the neighbouring Lutheran colonies.

The alliance between church and colony leaders had produced something of a state-church, such as the Anabaptist in Switzerland had resisted. Baptism of adults had become a "routinized"[27] ceremony for marrying-age adults. The concept of a visible church profiled by the radical discipleship of its adherants had been lost.

The Mennonites were prevented, by law, from witnessing to and converting the Russian population which was Muslim and Orthodox. This in itself was considered by some a betrayal of the faith. A British scholar, James Urry, described the Russian Mennonites in these terms:

> They had shifted from viewing themselves as a religious community to an idea of themselves as an elite group of colonists whose task was to present the world with a model image of an enlightened and perfected people. Thus they changed from being an inward looking religious society dedicated to following a narrow path in opposition to the world, to an open culture which was above the world in its advancement, knowledge, and way of life. The sense of "being different" thus shifted from one of a religiously oriented life style to one of a superior cultural tradition in which religious differentiation was no longer the key marker but merely one amongst many.[28]



The congregations of the Chortitza Colony worshipped in churches such as this one in Neuendorf.

The German Pietist influences created a wave of spiritual renewal which contributed to the founding, in 1860, of the Mennonite Brethren church which "confessed the teachings of Menno Simons, emphasizing particularly a baptism upon confession of the new birth, communion with foot-washing only for true believers, and discipline and excommunication for carnally-minded and intentional sinners."[29] Persecution and harrassment could not bring the Mennonite

Brethren back into line with the *Grosse Gemeinde* (large church).

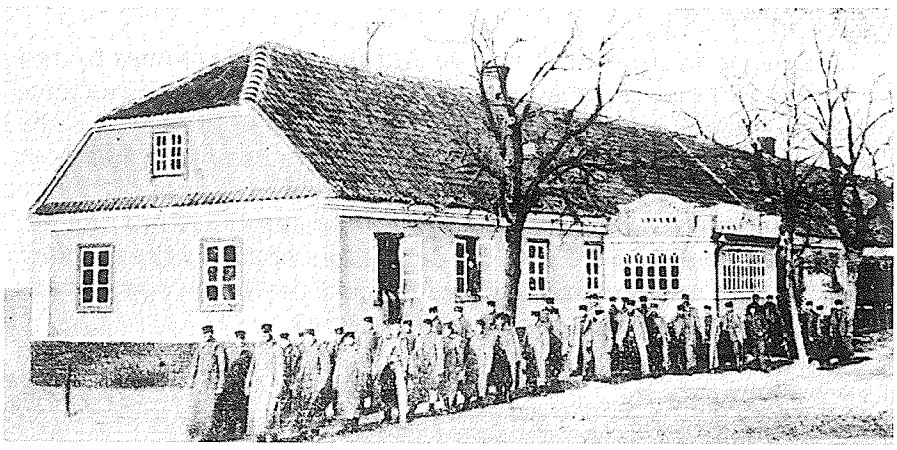
The spiritual revitalization that accompanied the Pietist influences made people willing to sacrifice time, energy and money to build educational and health institutions.

Meanwhile the Russian government, in view of the rising power of her neighbouring German nations, was planning a strategy to make her German colonists into good Russian citizens. This program of "Russification" required the Mennonites to use the Russian language instead of German for all their administrative and official correspondence.

> The biggest threat to the Mennonite way of life, however, lay in the requirement that Russian be taught in all schools and that Russian teachers would be provided where Mennonite teachers were not qualified. . . Russian had been used in some Mennonite schools as early as the 1830's and many more used it by the 1860's but from 1881 the State Department of Instruction kept close watch over the Mennonite schools, and in the 1890's all instruction came to be in the Russian language, with the exception of Bible and German as a language. It is possible that this development conditioned the Mennonites to see the German language as an essential part of the Mennonite faith itself."[30]

During their century of life in Russia, Mennonites lived in communities insulated from the outside world. They were not allowed to evangelize their Russian neighbours. Ties of kinship became strong. The system of self-government permitted them to cooperate in creating institutions to meet their unique needs. All of these factors fostered the feeling of separateness as an ethnic group. They were a small nationality with a common heritage of belief, customs and traditions, numerous cultural, social and economic institutions and a common language. They came to see themselves as a *"Volk"*, a nationality.[31] The Mennonites felt that their identity was threatened if they were to be assimilated into Russian culture. They saw themselves not only as separate, but as superior.

In 1870, Mennonite leaders were warned of the termination of their military exemption privilege as promised for eternity in the Privilegium negotiated with Czarina Catharina. Initially they reacted



The Old Berdjansk Forestry servicemen go to their work. In 1881, the first group of Mennonite boys began alternative service. This alternative, unacceptable to many, was a chief reason for the migration to Canada and the United States in the 1870's.

with anger and refused the government's offer of an alternative service. The universal military service law was passed in 1874 with a provision for alternative service by the Mennonites. About one-third of the Mennonites living in Russia considered this alternative to be a violation of their conscience and a threat to their faith. These people emigrated to the United States and Canada. The group numbered 18,000.

The Remnant who remained in Russia

The majority of those who remained in Russia were progressive people who were willing to accept the government's alternative rather than uproot themselves from their comfortable stations in life.

As German-speaking people, the Mennonites who remained in Russia were suspect throughout World War I. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, in which peasants rose up and seized power from wealthy landowners, did not leave the Mennonite settlements unaffected. Russian peasants and officials were jealous of Mennonite achievements and special concessions. This jealousy was fueled by the Mennonite attitude of disdain and condescension. The Mennonite colonies became specific targets for the revolutionaries. Many men were killed, women were raped, villages were destroyed and possessions were plundered. The violence of this attack broke down the principle of non-resistance when a minority of young Mennonite men took up arms to protect their people. This small Mennonite army was called the *Selbstschutz* (self-defense).

Famine and disease took the lives of many more from 1921-1923. As a result, Mennonite Central Committee was organized in North America to send aid and to assist emigration. From 1923 to 1928, over 20,000 Mennonites emigrated to Canada.

Those who remained were relocated. Many were banished to years of exile and toil. Today, Canadian Mennonites can visit their relatives in the cities east of the Ural Mountains. Few, if any, Mennonites reside in the former colonies in the Ukraine.

Seeking a Homeland

The governments of Canada and the United States were both eager for farming people to settle the West. William Hespeler, a Canadian immigration official, travelled to Russia to invite immigrants to settle the new province of Manitoba. Jacob Y. Schantz, an Ontario farmer and businessman from the Old Mennonite settlement around Berlin (later Kitchener) wrote the promotional literature which recommended Canada as the preferred country for settlement.

A delegation from the Bergthal and Borozenko colonies toured the United States and Canada to inspect the lands and to investigate the privileges offered by the governments. The delegates favored the Canadian offer. In spite of the swampy land, mosquitoes and poor roads in the East Reserve, they were lured by the advantages of free land available in large blocks, and absolute exemption from military service. In July 1873, in Ottawa, the delegation received a fifteen point version of the Canadian Privilegium.[32] Nine of the fifteen points were:

1. Entire exemption from military service
2. Eight townships of land available, free, in quarter section allotments
3. Exclusive use by Mennonites of the reserved land
4. Additional townships, if needed, and exchange privileges

5. Purchase rights at $1.00 per acre of additional three quarters to make the section
6. Full exercise of religious principles and education of children without restriction
7. The right to affirm instead of swearing the oath
8. Transportation credits
9. Supplies for the sea voyage

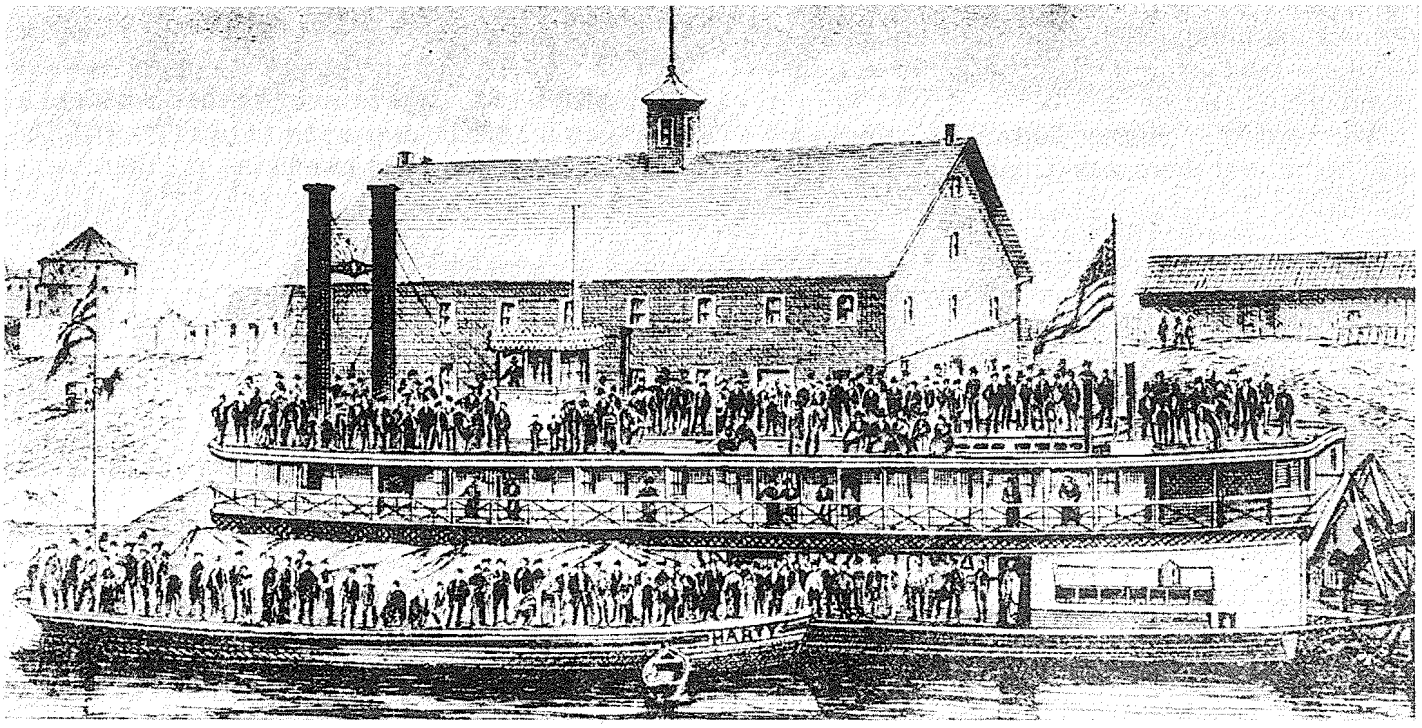
The return of the delegates with this Privilegium caused a flurry of activity. Emigration fever was high. Prospective emigrants were busy arranging the sale of their properties and securing the necessary exit visas.

The entire Bergthal Colony of six villages moved to Canada. Led by their bishop, Gerhard Wiebe, they settled on the East Reserve in 1874. The land, they found, was of marginal quality, and some of these emigrants sought better land on the most easterly sections of the West Reserve in 1876 and later.

Seventy families, representing the entire population of Borozenko, a colony established by the *Kleine Gemeinde* (the small church), made their home in Manitoba on the East Reserve and in the Scratching River area in 1874.

The Fuerstenland Colony, established in 1864, was composed primarily of poor families. They were anti-education and felt particularly threatened by the intrusion of Russian language and culture into their schools and colony administration. They rejected the Pietism that was influencing Mennonites in the Molotschna and other colonies, choosing rather to emphasize discipleship. Most of the Fuerstenland Colony immigrated to Canada in 1875. They were led by their bishop, Johann Wiebe, and colony administrator, Isaak Mueller. 266 families made their home on the western half of the West Reserve.

The arrival of the first Mennonites in Winnipeg aboard the S.S. International, 1874.



About one-third of the families from the mother colony, Chortitza, immigrated as well. The total number of immigrants from Fuerstenland and Chortitza was 3,000 families.

The route took the emigrants overland from Odessa to Hamburg where they boarded ships for Quebec via Liverpool. After a train trip to Toronto they went overland to Collingwood, then by boat to Duluth, overland to Moorehead and finally by boat on the Red River to their destination in Manitoba. Household and farming necessities were purchased in Moorehead or in Winnipeg. "The first sixty-five families spent $20,000 in three days, the most costly items being wagons and horses."[33] Other items were scythes, hayforks, stoves, coffee mills, frying pans, horses, cattle, flour. The final disembarkation was at the juncture of the Rat and Red Rivers near St. Agathe. Immigration sheds, set up by Shantz, housed the immigrants for the first winter at a location close to present-day Niverville.

Peter Elias, an early resident of Blumenfeld and later Gruenfeld and Hochfeld recorded the trek in his journals:

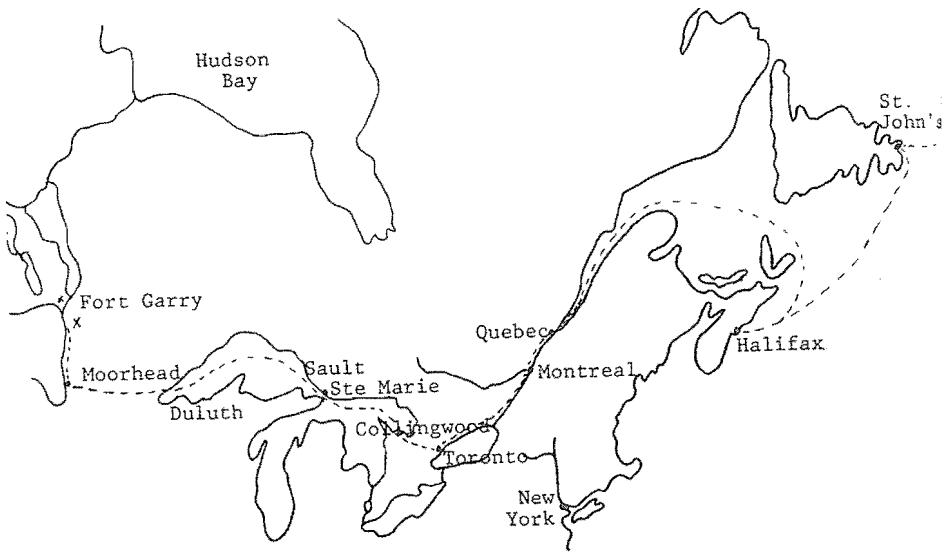
We planned and prepared for the journey. I sold everything and made the travel plans. Finally, on May 24, 1875, after saying good-bye to our neighbours, we left our yard in the village of Michaelsburg. We travelled to Lipitsche for the night. There we boarded a steamship. It was my first excursion on a steamship. On May 26th, we came to Odessa in the evening. Our baggage was immediately transported to the train station where we left at 9 p.m. Now I enjoyed my first experience in a train car. There were many first experiences and first sights.

On June 3rd, we arrived at Liverpool, England where we stayed for two nights before leaving for the 14-day ocean journey. Finally, in July, we arrived at the immigration sheds on the East Reserve after having travelled up the Red River from Moorehead.

We needed to proceed toward securing our new home. But there was so much to consider. There were necessities to purchase. What should I do first? What was the most important? "Surely a cow is our first concern," suggested my wife, and for the sake of the children, I agreed to purchase one immediately.

I went with my brother, Gerhard, to a nearby farm. We observed from a distance until we saw the cows grazing in the bush. But how were we going to communicate our intention to these people? Would we be able to complete the deal with gestures and handshakes. Fortunately we had learned the necessary work for dealing, *"hamutsch?"*. We bartered over the price of the cow, and finally closed the deal. I paid him $10.00 and walked home with the cow.

But the cow was only the beginning. A pair of oxen was also very necessary. I took the earliest opportunity to go to Winnipeg where I bought a wagon for $75.00 and a pair of oxen for $190.00. These were our major purchases, but there were



so many other small necessities that I can hardly begin to list them here.

We stayed in the emigration houses for three weeks, during which time I signed for a homestead and began to build a *"semlin"* (sod house) with my brother, Jacob. We intended to spend the winter with Jacob and his family. While Jacob and I built the house, my wife and children took the oxcart to the bush to gather kindling and firewood so that we would not freeze during the winter.

We waited for our friends and relatives from the Old Colony to arrive for we thought that all the immigrants would pass through the immigration houses where we had stayed. One day a stranger informed me that the Old Colony immigrants were disembarking at West Lynne from where they travelled west to the new settlement. I realized that my parents and friends would have arrived already. I was eager to rejoin them, so I bought another oxcart and hired a driver to accompany us to the West Reserve. We prepared for the journey, leaving behind our half-finished house, the hay I had cut with a borrowed machine, and the firewood that my family had patiently gathered. We had been in Manitoba for eight weeks.

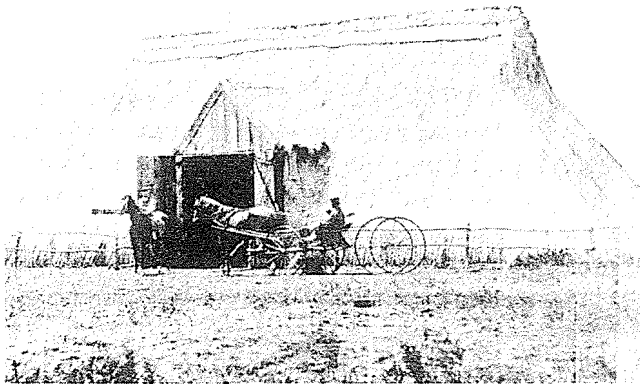
When we came to the Rat River there was no bridge. The boat anchored there was too small to transport our two vehicles. Besides, the water level was very low. The only alternative was to unload our wagons and to dismantle them as much as possible in order to transport our possessions, piece by piece, over the river. Even then the boat had to be shoved across the river using logs, as if it were a raft. At sunset the task was complete and we found some men who helped us reassemble the wagons. My wife cooked our evening meal and we thanked God for nourishment after a hard days work.

We slept well that night and in the morning, we arose early and set out in order to be in Emerson by noon. At Emerson we took a ferry over the Red River to West Lynne, where we ate dinner at the Immigration houses. Then we set out for the west.

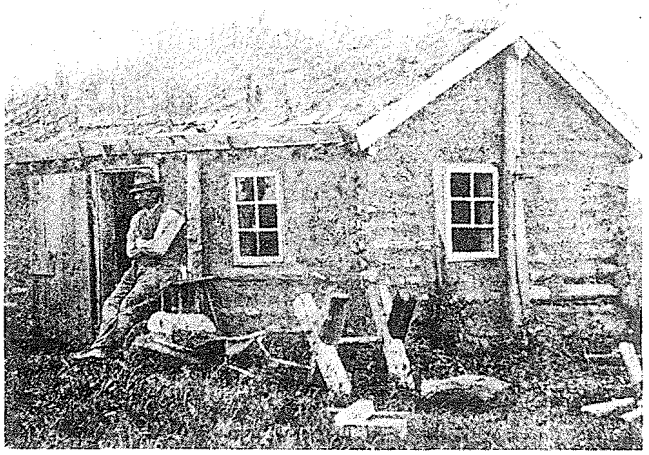
Our family stayed on the open prairie one night so that the oxen could feed. The next morning we were off very early again, and by midmorning we met Father and Jacob Neudorf on their way to Emerson. We arrived in Rosengart that same day, August 28th.

Now again we were among our own people. We had to make a fresh start. We did not have housing. Money was running low and winter was at the door. We agreed to spend our first winter with my in-laws, the Johann Loewens. There was some urgency to get on with the haying, and when the machine broke down, I had to repair it with the blacksmithing equipment I had brought from Russia.

Haying finished, we hauled wood from the hills for the *semlin* and the barn, as well as for firewood for the winter. When the first snow came on October 13, 1875, the barn was not nearly complete.[34]



The *Sarai* was an alternative building style to the *semlin*, but was not as warm.



The *Semlin* sheltered the Mennonite settlers for the first several years in their new homeland.

Two Manitoba Settlements are Established

The first emigrants from the Bergthal Colony and the Kleine Gemeinde arrived in the East Reserve in the summer of 1874. They were dismayed to discover that their land had to be cleared of trees and brush and that the soil was inferior. "This discovery, tentative at first but later confirmed, led to serious discontent and grumbling from the beginning; it was followed by accusations that the authorities had deliberately misled them."[35] The authorities however, had given first consideration to natural resources of fuel and water, the essentials sought by settlers coming from Ontario. But the timber in the East Reserve was of poor quality as well. Application for 17 townships west of the Red River was made that same year (1874).

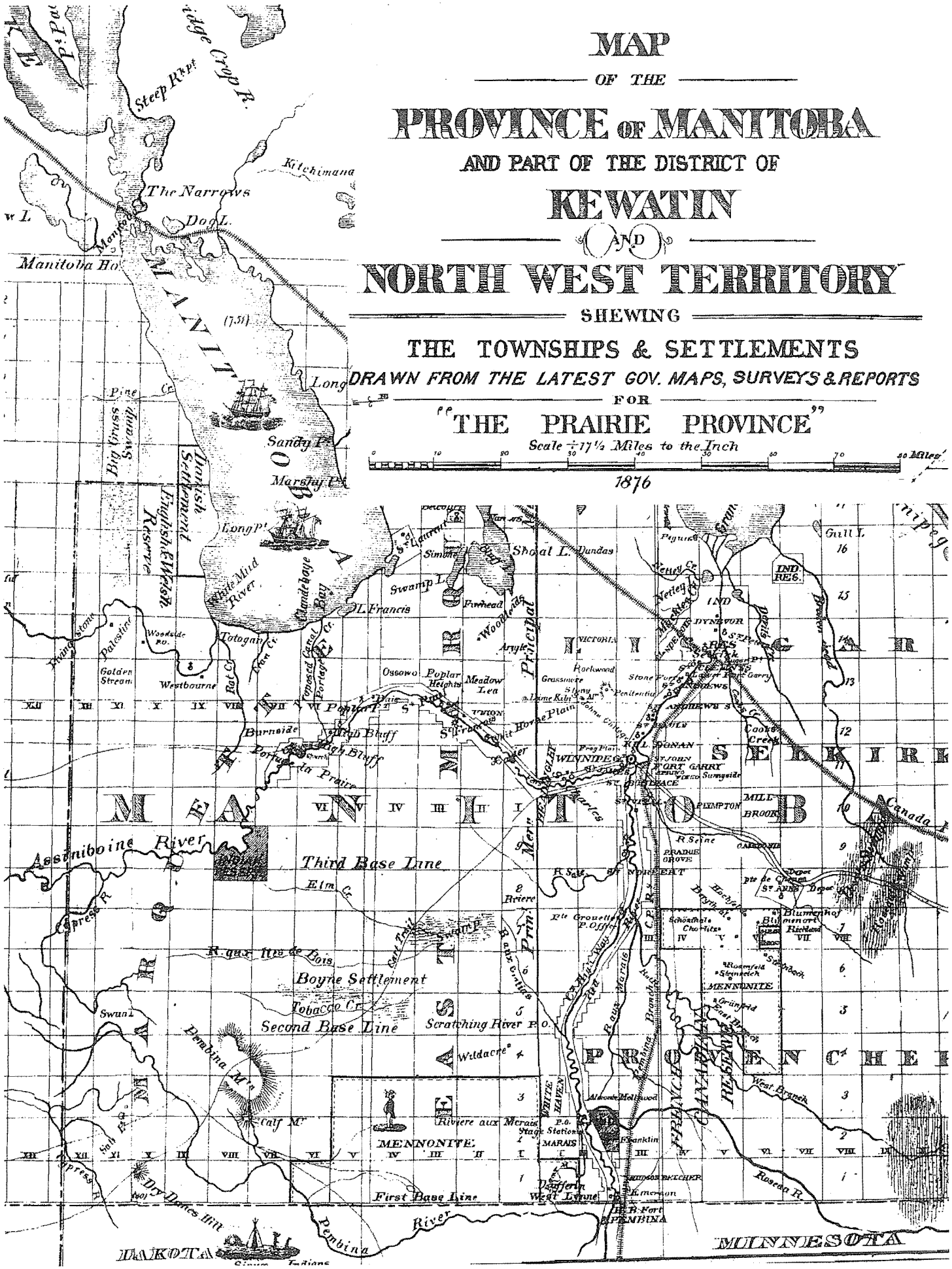
The land in the townships that later became the West Reserve was first inspected by Mennonites in the spring of 1875. J. Y. Schantz, accompanied by two Mennonites from the East Reserve and a land surveyor examined the plain between the Red River and the Escarpment. There was really not much choice, because to the east homesteaders were already settled on the plain to a distance of twelve miles from the Red River, and to the West the Ontario settlers were occupying the land along the tree-lined creeks flowing from the Escarpment. To the south, of course, was the United States Boundary, and to the north a poorly drained area, that was decidedly marshy in places. It was essential that the Mennonites have some timber, so scouts included some of the land in Pembina Mountain in their request for a reserve. Hay and water were just as important for livestock so some of the wet lands in the north were included as well. Apparently the agents of the Department of the Interior looked quite favorably on this selection because they allowed the Mennonites to settle on these lands even before all the land was surveyed.[36]

Settlers from the Fuerstenland and Chortitza Colonies began to arrive in July, 1875. They were allowed to settle on the West Reserve although the settlement was not officially created until April, 1876. The Mennonite settlers there were squatters until 1877, when surveying was completed.

Ontario settlers had avoided the treeless prairie, thinking it impossible to survive a winter there.

> In 1875 the few settlers at Pembina Mountain fondly hoped that in the course of 15 or 20 years this plain would become settled notwithstanding the absence of timber. Before the summer was over, a long line of camp fires, extending for miles and miles, announced one evening to the lonely settlers that thousands of Mennonites were locating on Seventeen townships.[37]

The migration to Manitoba fell off sharply after 1876. Most of the Mennonites who had intended to migrate had already done so. Many of the later migrants were Mennonites who had remained in Russia to wind up the affairs of the villages, arrange for auction sales and so on. Also by a Russia law passed May 14, 1875 the Mennonites were relieved of compulsory military duty and given alternative services instead. Thus some of the pressure causing the Mennonite migration was removed. By 1876 too, it was proving increasingly difficult to sell property at a reasonable price and many Mennonites were deterred from migrating by the material sacrifices they would have to make. Combined with this was the fact that ruble-dollar rate of exchange was very low; and it was difficult to get sufficient capital to finance the journey, let alone to start anew in Canada. . . Migration in large numbers stopped completely after 1880. That was the deadline fixed by the Russians for unrestricted migration from Russia, including the transfer of money and all possessions.[38]


MAP
OF THE
PROVINCE OF MANITOBA
AND PART OF THE DISTRICT OF
KEWATIN
AND
NORTH WEST TERRITORY
SHEWING
THE TOWNSHIPS & SETTLEMENTS
DRAWN FROM THE LATEST GOV. MAPS, SURVEYS & REPORTS
FOR
"THE PRAIRIE PROVINCE"
Scale ÷ 17½ Miles to the Inch
1876
Steep Rkpt
Ridge Crop R.
The Narrows
Dog L.
Manitoba
Long
Pine Cr.
Big Grass Swamp
British Settlement
English River Reserve
Sandy P.
Marshy Cr.
Long P.
White Mud River
Manitoba
Swamp L.
L. Francis
Shoal L.
Dundas
Woodlands
Principal
Totogan
Woodside P.O.
Palestine
Golden Stream
Westbourne
Rat Cr.
Gen. Cr.
Composed Canal Portage
Ossowo
Poplar Heights
Meadow Lea
Arnyle
Harkwood
Grassmere
Stony Mt.
Penitentiary
Lime Kiln
Stone Fort
Lower Fort Garry
Cook's Creek
Burnside
High Bluff
Portage la Prairie
Assiniboine River
Third Base Line
Elm Cr.
Cypress R.
R. aux Iles de Bois
Boyne Settlement
Tobacco Cr.
Second Base Line
Swan L.
Dembina Mts.
Calf Mt.
Scratching River P.O.
Wildaene
Riviere aux Marais
MENNONITE
Dry Dukes Hill
First Base Line
Pembina River
DAKOTA
Sioux Indians
WINNIPEG
ST. JOHN
FORT GARRY
Sunnyside
ST. BONIFACE
Seine R.
Red R.
Rat R.
Prairie
Scotch Settlement
Ste Agathe
Ste Anne des Chenes
Ste Anne
Ste Genevieve
Ste Marie
Ste Agathe
Ste Croix
Ste Francois Xavier

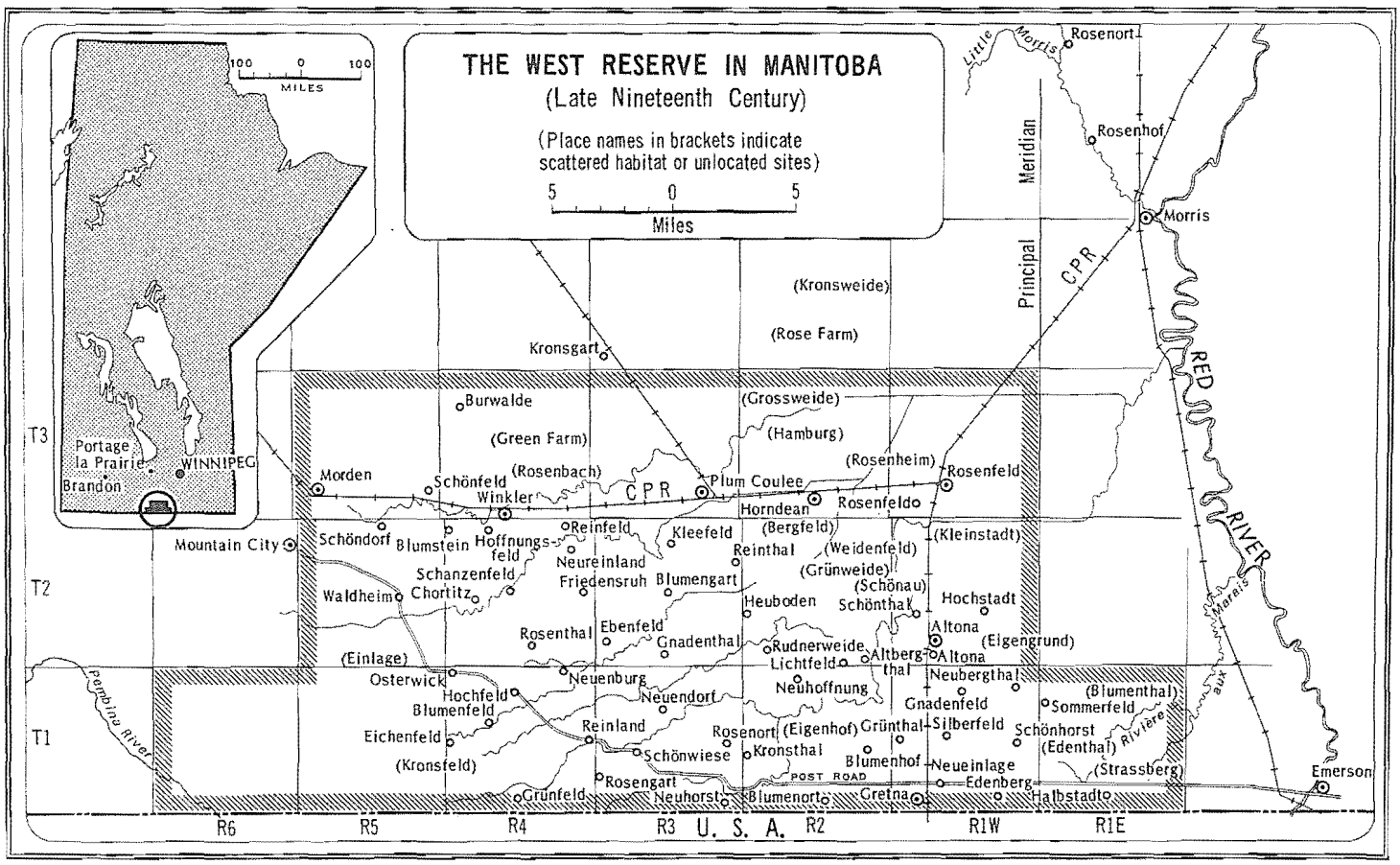
Settlement Patterns

The Mennonite delegates had chosen Canada over the United States because of the possibility of block and village settlement similar to the pattern they had become accustomed to in Russia. In spite of advice from Schantz to abandon this pattern because of its unsuitability to the prairie[39], the three bishops were insistant on preserving the system in order to establish village schools, and to allow religious leaders to govern the people more closely.

The Mennonite immigrants ignored the rectangular survey pattern used in western Canada, and proceeded to establish villages according to the pattern of the *"Gewanndorf"* that had been used in Russia. The hamlet privilege, allowing Mennonites to settle in villages rather than on farms, was abolished in May, 1885.[40]

The reserve was far from full in 1882, and the government wanted to throw open the reserves to other settlers. Inspite of protests from Mennonites, an inventory of vacant lands was set up for public auction. The Dominion Lands Surveyor, however, saw the list as unreliable, for it comprised as vacant the very sites of large occupied villages including Gruenfeld.[41] The sale finally included only those unoccupied lands outside the strip 15 miles north of the border.

A map of vacant lands in May, 1898 showed only a few unsold lands on the western fringe of the reserve. The reserve was terminated on August 1, 1889 and odd-numbered sections were put up for sale to Mennonites only, from 1889-1891, before the reserve was opened up.



RUSSIAN MENNONITES HAVING EMIGRATED TO MANITOBA, THEIR NUMBER, ARRIVAL DATES, AND CAPITAL

Arrival in Toronto	No. of Families	Individuals	Capital
July 19, 1874	65	327	$63,000
July 30, 1874	85	290	8,000
July 31, 1874	100	504	30,000
September, 1874	24	120	22,000
September, 1874	23	166	20,000
June 27, 1875	28	140	23,000
July 3, 1875	135	664	68,000
July 7, 1875	96	480	40,000
July 15, 1875	111	555	27,000
July 22, 1875	195	998	64,000
July 29, 1875	72	362	20,000
June 21, 1876	42	214	30,000
June 26, 1876	44	224	11,000
June 29, 1876	48	244	20,000
July 12, 1876	14	68	
July 20, 1876	14	78	
August 1, 1876	82	511	58,000
June 30, 1877	35	183	19,000
July 1, 1878	48	270	
July 8, 1879	33	207	60,000
August 4, 1880	14	69	7,000
Totals	1,281	6,674*	$591,000

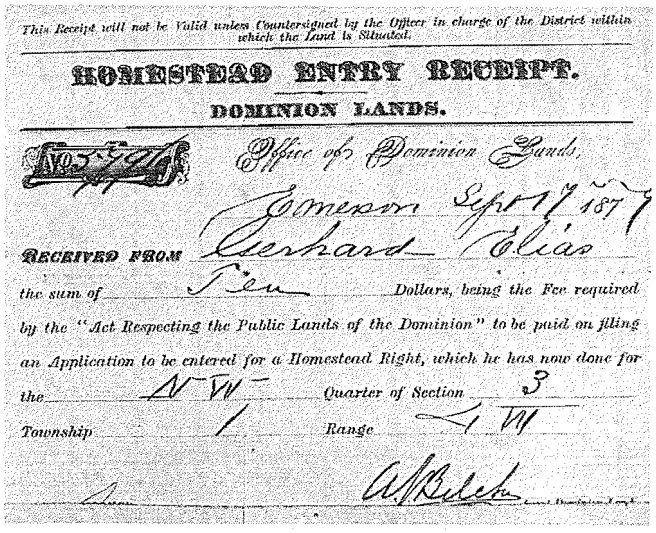
*Based on Philip Wismer.
from Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada,* Vol. 1; p. 201.

Boundary Disputes in the West Reserve

The Privilegium had outlined the procedure by which settlers could obtain homesteads. Heads of family over the age of twenty-one were entitled to apply for a quarter-section homestead. The applicant would receive a patent for a free grant of this land after three years residence, according to terms and conditions outlined in the Dominion Lands Act. The ninth clause of the Privilegium indicated "that from the moment of occupation the settlers acquire a homestead right in the land."

This system was followed in the East Reserve with few obstacles since the land had already been surveyed. In the West Reserve

After surveying was completed, the Mennonite farmer filed an entry for a homestead. He received a deed signifying ownership after three years during which time he had to improve the land.


This Receipt will not be Valid unless Countersigned by the Officer in charge of the District within which the Land is Situated.

HOMESTEAD ENTRY RECEIPT.

DOMINION LANDS.

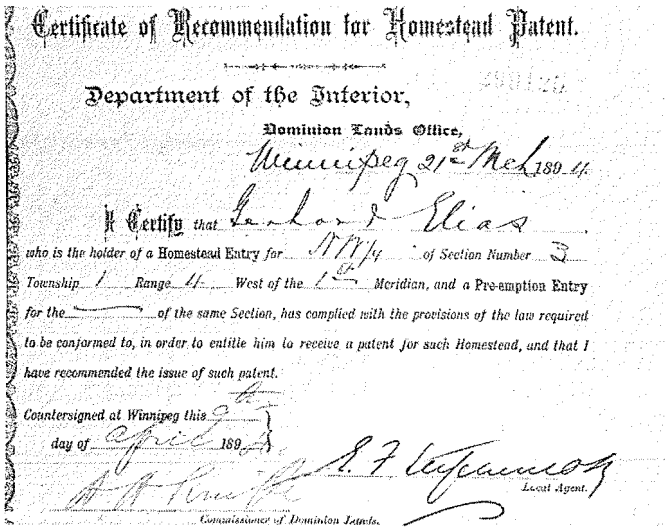
No. 5779 Office of Dominion Lands,

Emerson Sept 17 1877

RECEIVED FROM Gerhard Elias

the sum of Ten Dollars, being the Fee required by the "Act Respecting the Public Lands of the Dominion" to be paid on filing an Application to be entered for a Homestead Right, which he has now done for the NW Quarter of Section 3

Township 1 Range 4 W


Certificate of Recommendation for Homestead Patent.

Department of the Interior,

Dominion Lands Office,

Winnipeg 21st Mch 1894

I Certify that Gerhard Elias

who is the holder of a Homestead Entry for NW¼ of Section Number 3

Township 1 Range 4 West of the 1st Meridian, and a Pre-emption Entry for the — of the same Section, has complied with the provisions of the law required to be conformed to, in order to entitle him to receive a patent for such Homestead, and that I have recommended the issue of such patent.

Countersigned at Winnipeg this 9th day of April 1894

Local Agent.

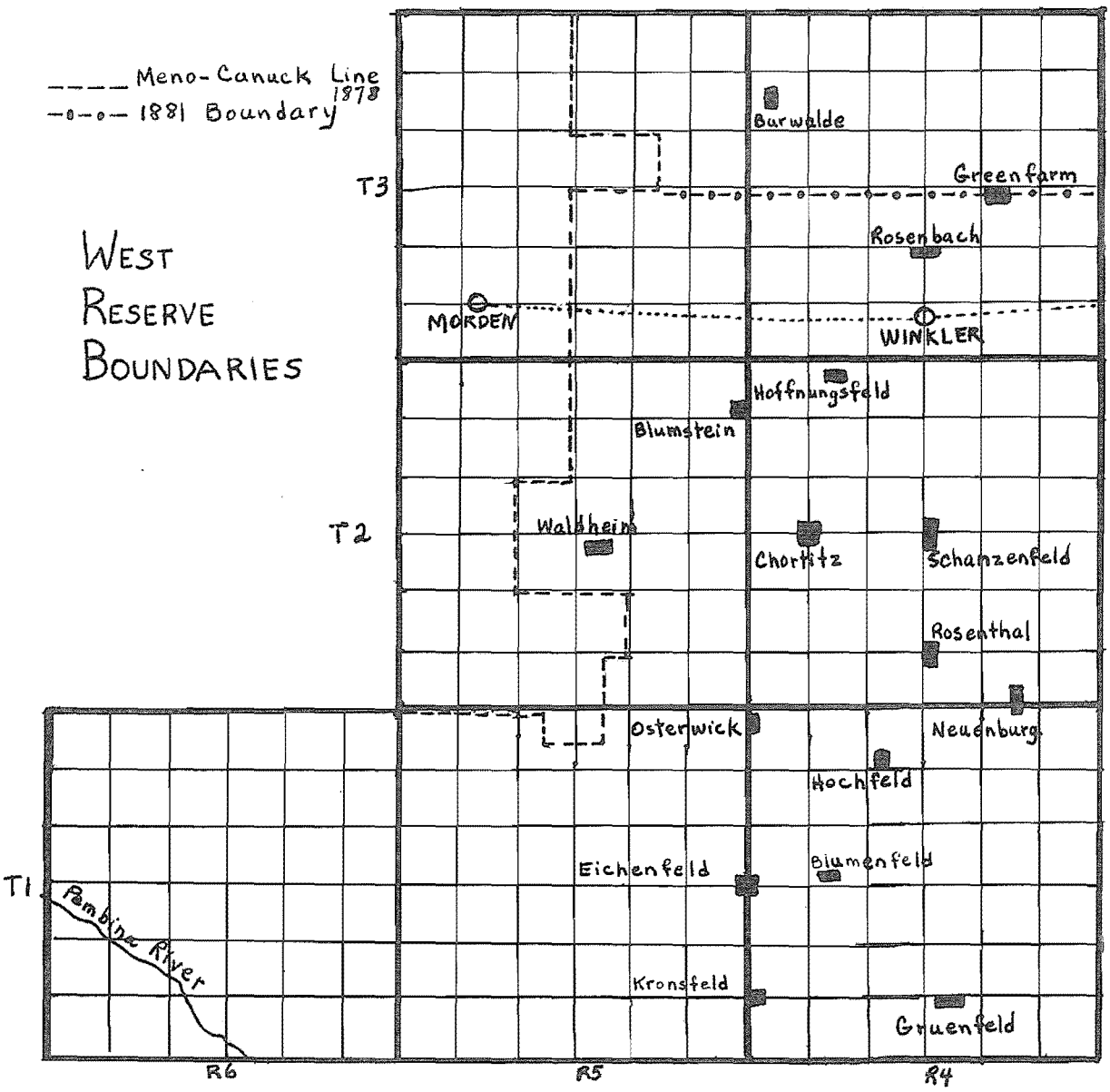
Commissioner of Dominion Lands.

matters became complicated because the boundaries of the reserve were not set until the spring of 1876. Settlers taking up land in 1875 were mere squatters until the completion of surveying in the spring of 1877.

In 1877, when the boundaries of the Reserve were clearly established and the rights of the squatters could be legally upheld, conflicts arose with British settlers from Ontario who had also squatted on the Reserve land.

The original boundaries of the West Reserve included townships 2 and 3 of Range 5, and townships 1 of Range 6. These lands were considered necessary as a supply of wood for building and fuel for the Mennonite colony.

British settlers from Ontario however, were occupying the treed lands in Range 5. As squatters, they prevented the Mennonites from cutting timber and firewood. Force was used on both sides.[42] The dispute was settled by a government decision in 1878 which excluded townships 2 and 3 of Range 5W. Townships 1-7 and 1-8 were added.



But squatters moved in on land in the added townships too, since the Reserve boundaries were never shown on official maps. The two new ones never really "belonged" and eventually were also excluded from the Mennonite Reserve.[43]

Relations between the Mennonites and the British farmers were never good. J. F. Galbraith, who was a neighbor of the Mennonites for many years, attributes the Anglo-Saxon prejudices to the "closeness" of the Mennonite community, their deliberate isolation, foreign tongue, communal system, and the curiousness of their abutting house and barn.[44] The Ontario settlers who even today are called *"de Englanda"* (the English), were regarded as worldly and condescending. On their occasional visits to the town of Nelsonville, and later Morden, the Mennonite farming people were the brunt of rude remarks and behaviour.

In 1880, in an effort to deal more quickly with land disputes, Isaak Mueller requested permission from the government to process land applications at a local Justice of the Peace rather than in Winnipeg or Emerson. But the government gave the responsibility to the Nelsonville office. "The inept service" and the condescending attitude of the Nelsonville Land Titles Office aggravated the situation and caused further alienation between the Mennonites and their English neighbours, forcing Mueller to complain to Prime Minister John A. MacDonald who was also Minister of the Interior.[45]

Financing the Venture

Mennonites in Ontario assisted the immigration by making travel arrangements, voluntary contributions and direct loans. These efforts were coordinated by the Russian Mennonite Aid Committee organized by Jacob Y. Schantz. A total of $26,000 was loaned to West Reserve settlers by the Ontario Mennonites, most of which was repaid by 1880.

The Canadian government, eager to establish these agrarian immigrants in the new western provice, provided $70,000 for travelling expenses and $190,000 for immigration expenses. Furthermore, the Liberal government of Alexander Mackenzie made a loan of $100,000 to pay for food, implements and provisions. Ontario Mennonites underwrote the loan by putting up their farms as a guarantee. The government loan was arranged and administered by Jacob Y. Schantz. This loan originally provided for a four-year interest-free period and six years at 6% interest. But by 1888, $33,986.53 had accumulated on interest alone and the Old Mennonites approached the government, on behalf of their Manitoba brothers and sisters, to renegotiate the terms. Thus in 1889 a law was passed which provided for 4% simple interest.

Bishop Johann Wiebe, aware that substantial reductions had been arranged by the Ontario Mennonites, urged his congregation to greater diligence in repaying their debt: "To strive with all one's will power to repay natural debts is an essential aspect of the Christian and God-pleasing way. Even more so with respect to our government debt, because she has taken us Mennonites into her land and given us protection and freedom of religion."

The two loans, referred to as the *"Brotschuld"* (loan for bread), made it possible for the Mennonite settlements to survive and to accelerate in economic growth and independance. The loan to the Canadian government was repaid by 1892. Government officials praised the faithfulness of this new society in fulfilling their obliga-



Jacob Y. Schantz coordinated the travel arrangements from Russia and the resettlement of Mennonites in Canada's newest province.

Hilfsgelder

Blumenfeld	Borrowed in 1888	Repaid in 1889
Isaak Dueck	20.00	
Johan Driedger	20.00	15.00
Peter Klassen	20.00	10.00
Corn. Fehr	15.00	5.00
Abram Martens	15.00	5.00
Peter Janzen	25.00	25.00
Franz Klassen	15.00	
Franz Guenter	15.00	
Peter Driedger	30.00	
Gerhard Klassen	15.00	
Jak. Schmidt	25.00	

tions. The reputation of Mennonites in Canada was established early by the sacrifices and diligence of the Ontario and Manitoba Mennonites.

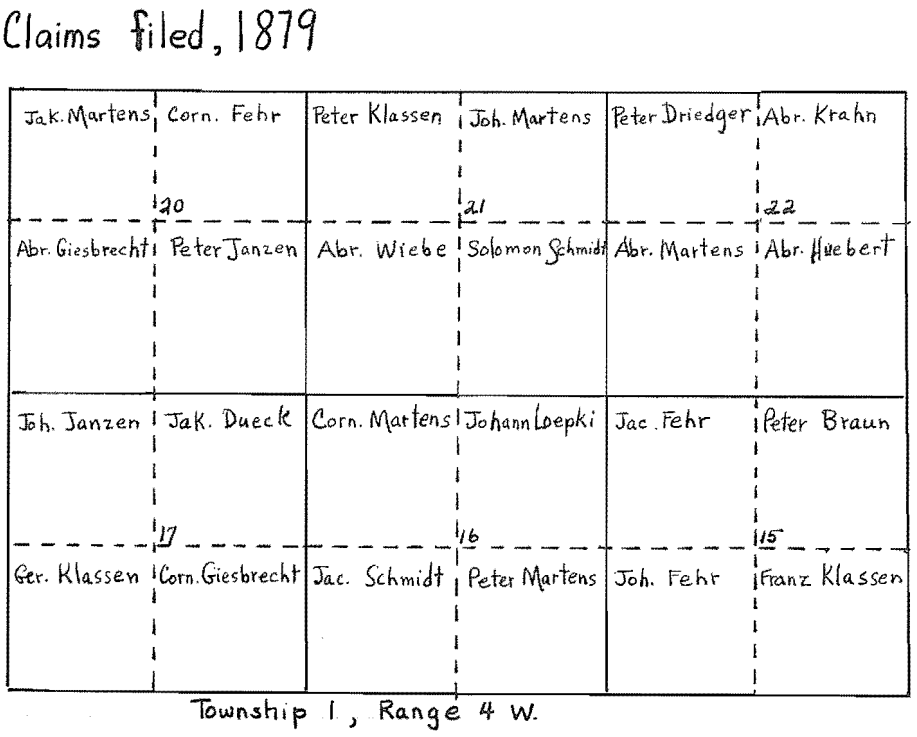
The administrators of the West Reserve tirelessly encouraged the immigrants to repay their debt. The village *Schults* were ordered by *Aevaschult* Isaak Mueller to see to it that those who had two cows or two oxen repay their debt so that the loan monies could be used to assist the more unfortunate. "If we do not do this, we can be accused that only the condition of the rich is improved through the bread loan from the east. Anyone who does not want to obey, shall give his second yoke of oxen to the church that the poor, who still have none, may be helped."[46]

Citizens and Land-Owners

Canadian citizenship (naturalization) was required in order to obtain title to the land on which a person had homesteaded. The Fuerstenland Mennonites resisted this for several reasons. They did not want to swear allegiance and they wanted the assurance that allegiance did not assume military service. The issue of faithfulness to the Mennonite principles regarding the oath prompted Peter A. Elias to write an article in the **Mitarbeiter,** March, 1908.

In 1882 Mennonites were assured that swearing allegiance did not endanger their status of military exemption, and that same year the Mennonite settlers began to obtain naturalization certificates and file for their homestead patents.

Prior to applying for homestead patents, farmers were obliged to clear their debt *(Brotschuld)* to the Ontario Mennonites and to the government. This prerequisite was initiated by Isaak Mueller who feared that Mennonites would mortgage their lands to Nelsonville loan sharks. In 1883, all but 190 homestead patents had been issued.



Map of homestead entries filed by Blumenfeld farmers.

A Register of Blumenfeld Pioneers

Three sources of information introduce us to Blumenfeld's first families. (a) The Church book of the Reinland Colony lists those who applied for homestead patents and the number of their quarter-section. (b) the same source records loans made by villagers as early as 1879, and thus introduces us to villagers who were not farm-owners. (c) The records at the Morden Land Titles Office indicate that farmers obtained the deed for their quarter-section as early as 1883 and as late as 1888.

An interesting detail is that the deeds to the quarter-sections 17ne-1-4 and 16nw-1-4 were registered in the name of Jacob Y. Schantz until 1887, although the colony records indicate that Jakob Dueck and Cornelius Martens homesteaded these quarter-sections. In 1889, Peter Klassen bought 17ne-1-4 for $1.00, and Franz Guenter, who had married the widow of Cornelius Martens, purchased 16nw-1-4 for $890.

On the basis of the sources mentioned above a sketchy register of Blumenfeld's pioneers can be compiled:



Katharina (Martens) Elias, 1846-1928, pioneered with her husband, Peter P. Elias. They spent a winter in Blumenfeld before making Hochfeld their permanent home. Her parents, Johannn and Maria Martens, were also Blumenfeld pioneers.

BLUMENFELD RESIDENTS
1875-1900

Name	Lifespan	Resided in Blumenfeld	Other Data
Bergen, Franz		1882-	
Blatz, Andres		1887*	
Blatz, Gerhard II	1874-		
Braun *Geschwister*		1879-1884*	
Braun, Peter	1847-	1875-1888*	heavily indebted + wife: Anna Guenther 1850-
Derksen, David		1894-1898*	
Dueck, Abraham		1880	
Dueck, Jakob	1825-	1875	heavily indebted
Dyck, Isaak		1883-1924	married widow Maria Loepki moved to Mexico.
Bishop Isaak M. Dyck			
Driedger, Johann	1859-1920	1881-1902	storeowner. Wife: Katherine Martens. Moved to Sask.
Driedger, Peter	1831-1919	1875-1904	village Schult. Moved to Sask.
Elias, Gerhard II	1913-192-	1883-1973	moved to Mexico
Fehr, Cornelius	1838-	1875	wife: Rachel Huebert 1835-
Fehr, David	1879-1965	1892-1927	businessman, moved to Haskett
Fehr, Jacob		1875	
Fehr, Johann	1847-	1875	wife: Elizabeth Giesbrecht
Friesen, Johann	1892-1960		
Froese, Heinrich	1857-		

Giesbrecht, Abraham	1846	1875	wife: Helena Martens 1848-
Giesbrecht, Cornelius	1844	1875	wife: Helena Fehr 1859-
Giesbrecht, Hein. K.	1877-1969	1900*	village Schult in 1920's
Guenter, Franz		1885*	married widow Corn. Martens
Harder, Isband		1888*	
Huebert, Abraham	1840-	1875-	
Janzen, Abraham II	1865-	1890*	
Janzen, Johann	1824-	1875	wife: Elizabeth Driedger 1819-
Janzen, Peter	1854-1920	1875	wife: Susana Martens 1859-1897
Kehler, Jakob	1875-	1894*	
Klassen, Franz	1853	1875	wife: Catharina Hoeppner
Klassen, Gerhard	1844-	1875	heavily indebted wife: Susanna Penner
Klassen, Gerhard	1858-	1890*	
Klassen, Peter	1845	1875-	wife: Anna Wiens
Krahn, Abraham	1847	1875-	wife: Maria Fehr 1849
Loepki, Johan	1850-1882	1875-1882	wife: Maria Martens son: Bishop Johan Loepki
Loewen, Bernhard		1893*	
Martens, Abraham	1836-1909	1875-1900	wife: Susanna Neudorf moved to Sask. 1900
Martens, Abram		1890*	heavily indebted
Martens, Cornelius	1832-1885	1875-	wife: Helena Wieler, remarried Franz Guenter
Martens, Jacob		1875-	
Martens, Johann	1812-1901	1875-	wife: Maria Harder
Martens, Peter	1848-	1875	wife: Maria Schmidt
Neudorf, Abraham	1864-	1890-1922*	moved to Mexico
Neudorf, Heinrich		1897*	
Neudorf, Jakob		1885*	
Neudorf, Widow Johan		1882*	
Quiring, Peter		1897*	
Penner, Martin	1873-	1893-1911*	moved to Sask.
Reimer, Jakob	1869-	1895-1904	
Schmidt, Jacob	1855-	1875-	
Schmidt, Solomon	1818-	1875-	wife: Maria Fehr 1824-
Wall, Abraham	1867-1954	1890*	
Wall, Cornelius		1897*	
Wall, Isaak		1890*	
Wiebe, Abram I		1875-1882*	minister, brother to Bishop Johann Wiebe, moved to Hochfeld
Wiebe, Jacob		1880-	
Wieler, David	1878-	1898-1920's*	moved to Mexico

Bold face indicates pioneer families
*approximate dates
+wives of pioneers are listed to show family relationships of first villagers.



Pioneers Franz and Catharina (Hoeppner) Klassen and their family.



Called To Be Separate

CHAPTER 2

Yes, our Church is not what it was years ago. Then it was a strong Church. But around fifteen years ago, because of the school problem, the Church decided to leave the country and to find a new home in a foreign land. The position of the leaders at that time was that the entire Church was to emigrate.

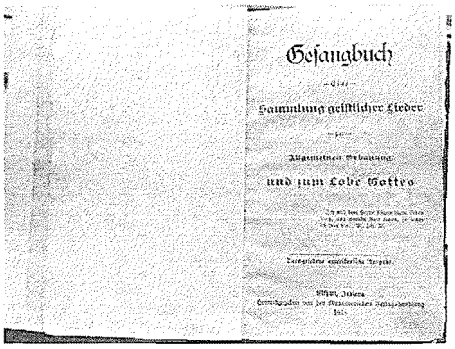
But through various hindrances numerous people stayed behind, while others could not decide so quickly to leave their beloved home in which they had lived so many years in peace and blessing. So they lingered though always with the idea of ultimately migrating to Mexico to join the Church. This was the reason why we did not immediately try to re-establish the remnant into a congregation here, since the majority continued to plan to move to Mexico. But with the years this desire to emigrate disappeared, especially through the disturbances that the Old Colony experienced in Mexico from the indigenous people. Their persecution included robbery, forceful entry into homes, and even murder. So that soon some families began to return. Then the question emerged here whether we could not raise up our Church again, and again conduct our services according to our old practices. Thus we began in all our weakness to hold meetings and consultations numerous times. . . The question of reviving the Church was followed with urgency in order that we could guide our children, so that they could be shielded as much as possible from the world, its fashions and pride. It was further hoped that we might all unite together in humility and heart before God. . .

Excerpts from the Ordination sermon of Bishop Jacob Froese following the re-organization of the Old Colony church in Manitoba in 1936.[1]

A Reformation Movement

The migration of thousands of Russian Mennonites to a new homeland on the other side of the world was motivated, primarily, by religious factors. The russification program threatened the education system which was seen as integral to maintaining the Mennonite values and way of life. Although many principles had been forgotten, Mennonites in Russia identified strongly with the pacifist stance of their Anabaptist ancestors. Compulsory military service, and even alternative service, were seen as incongruous with their identity as a church and a people. The adjustment to recent trends to modernize church life had been difficult. The introduction of new hymn melodies was a painful change to church members who had known only the old tunes ("die alte Weise") from the **Gesangbuch** that had neither notes nor metres.

Leadership to emigrate to Canada came from Gerhard Wiebe,



The *Gesangbuch* used by the Reinlaender Church of 1880 continues to be the hymnbook for the Old Colony, Reinlaender, Sommerfelder and Zion Mennonite churches.

bishop of the Bergthal Colony, and his nephew, Johann Wiebe, who was the bishop of the young Fuerstenland Colony.

The Bergthal group which settled on the East Reserve in Manitoba demonstrated a readiness to adapt to the Canadian system of farming, goverment and education. They were also willing to integrate new patterns into their church, and continued to use the new hymn melodies.

The Fuerstenlaender-Chortitzer group which settled the West Reserve showed very early their determination to maintain the village pattern of community living rather than living on isolated farms. They saw the communal village as essential for retaining the parochial school system and the form of local self-government which they had enjoyed in Russia.

Bishop Johann Wiebe called a brotherhood meeting at the Fort Dufferin immigration houses on the Red River prior to moving his flock onto the West Reserve. His sermon to the colonists was an attempt to establish unity and allegiance. Bishop Wiebe saw the immigration as a "reform" movement that would cleanse the church of modernizing influences and re-establish the traditional ways. His intention was to restore the New Testament church. "The form of the new church and the new social order to be established in the West Reserve were of primary importance to the elder."[2]

Bishop Wiebe's primary emphasis was on the question of church discipline. The ban, as practised according to Matthew 18 by Anabaptists in Switzerland and Holland, had fallen into disuse in Russia where wrong-doers, who were punished by secular authorities, remained in good standing in the church. Bishop Wiebe's vision for a religious society saw confession and forgiveness as important rites for the entire congregation, without which the wrong-doer could be excommunicated from the fellowship of the church, and shunned in the normal relations of family and community life.

Bishop Wiebe's second concern was to institute a church and an administrative body which would work together in all things. Convinced as he was of the rightness of the church he was forming, and aware of the differences to be overcome by diverse backgrounds from Russia, Bishop Wiebe called his flock to conform to the traditional ways and to obey the administration of the *Vorsteher* who would be enforcing the wishes of the church in the West Reserve. The strength of this church/government union was a formidable opponent for any dissident in the group. It also stood in contrast to the determination of sixteenth century Anabaptists to separate church and state in order to keep the work of the church untainted by the political biases inherent in any social structure. But Bishop Wiebe would have denied the paradox, claiming instead a desire to purify the church, even if this resulted in a theocracy which limited freedom of choice.

The third concern outlined by Bishop Wiebe was the separation of the church from the world and its values. This meant adhering to the traditional way of doing things, especially in the area of self-government, manner of dress, family life, and education. Personal contacts with persons outside the Mennonite reserve were minimized. School teachers were hired from within the community regardless of their qualifications. The schools were instructed according "to the old method as agreed upon by the *Lehrdienst*".[3] The schools were intended to prepare children, socially and spiritually, for the Mennonite village farming society.

The meeting at the Fort Dufferin immigration sheds established

the authority of Bishop Wiebe and *Vorsteher* Isaak Mueller. At the immigration offices, farmers applied for homesteads after having grouped themselves into villages according to ties of friendship and kinship. The first village *Schults* were elected here in order to facilitate the division of land upon their arrival at the village sites.

The first church building, dedicated on September 17, 1876 in Reinland, was the result of the cooperative efforts of all the villages under the supervision of *Vorsteher* Mueller who made Reinland his administrative headquarters.

Efforts to maintain a common church entity between the East



Interior of the Old Colony Church, Blumenfeld.

Reserve Bergthalers and the West Reserve *Altkolonier* (Old Colonists) became increasingly strained due to controversy over singing hymns, education and self-government. The Reinlaender Mennonite Church became an official and separate church body on October 5, 1880 when Johann Wiebe called a *Bruderschaft* (general meeting of male members) to discuss conditions in the Church. "It was decided that all those who were willing to adhere to the old practices and beliefs should renew their commitments; those who were not willing to conform to the old way were encouraged to join the Bergthalers."[4]

The Reinlaender Mennonite Church people were commonly known as *de Altkolonier,* in reference to their origin in the Chortitza Colony. We will use the more correct designation, *Reinlaender,* in reference to the church before it moved to Mexico in 1922. The term, "Old Colony" will designate the Old Colony Church in Canada after its reorganization in 1936.

Church Discipline

Swiss Anabaptists had attempted to correct immoral conduct and misguided thoughts by confronting the sinner according to the process outlined in Matthew 18:

> If your brother commits a sin, go and take the matter up with him, strictly between yourselves, and if he listens to you, you have won your brother over. If he will not listen, take one or two others with you, so that all facts may be duly established on the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, report the matter to the congregation; and if he will not listen even to the congregation, you must then treat him as you would a pagan or a tax-gatherer.
>
> I tell you this: whatever you forbid on earth shall be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you allow on earth shall be allowed in heaven.
>
> Matthew 18: 15-18 **New English Bible**



Jakob Elias wears the traditional baptism attire. The overcoat resembled the long coat of the *Ohms*. This traditional attire which had been used in Russia was used in Manitoba's Reinlaender Church in the early years.

When Bishop Johann Wiebe reintroduced the concepts of the ban and shunning to the West Reserve colonists, his intention was to restore the purity of the church. The practise soon became corrupted, not by any weakness in the ideology, but because the *Altkolonier* tended to categorize situations into black and white. The resulting legalism provided little space for responding in new ways to the world in which one lived.

Donnadach was the day of reckoning and discipline. *Donnadach* signified not only a day of the week (Thursday), but also the thunderous reproaches of the elders on the sinners of the colony. Every Thursday, the Reinlaender *Ohms* (bishop, ministers and deacons) would gather at the church in Reinland to enforce the strict code of behaviour and the rigid social order which determined the character of the Reinlaender villages on the West Reserve. The *Ohms* from Blumenfeld went too, as well as anyone else who had been summoned to appear.

"The conduct of the *Ohms* and the delinquents became equally *politsch* (cunning)"[6], according to one former Blumenfeld resident who, at an early age, gravitated to a more open community. The unbending legalism of the *Ohms* often engendered a disrespect

which made it difficult for the church to maintain its authority over the villagers. The rules multiplied to cover the minute details of daily life. The punishment of the bann was never truly upheld by all the villagers who continued to do business with the banned person. Families ate at the same table and life went on as usual. One elderly leader of the Old Colony church, reflected that the authority of the church would have carried more weight if the bann had been properly conducted according to Scriptures and if the *Ohms* had commanded more respect. In one year as many as seventy-one people had been banned."[7]

The common procedure for *Donnadoch* was that a delinquent person was summoned to appear before the *Ohms.* After the matter had been discussed, the accused was given an opportunity to confess and ask forgiveness. Failure to effect a reconciliation in being banned *(utjeschloten)* from the fellowship of the church. Reconciliation and restoration to membership in the church were only possible upon his/her confession.

Although many cases dealt with behaviour inconsistent with the teaching of the Scriptures, many other cases involved nonconformity to the traditions. Many elderly Blumenfeld residents speak with some bitterness of cases in which simple musical instruments, such as the harmonica or accordian, were forbidden within homes as well as in public places. The preoccupation with the appearance of things rather than with right attitudes and values undermined the *Ohms'* position of authority in the communities.

D. D. Fehr was a Blumenfeld businessman who was regarded as a black sheep because he did not believe that the traditional ways were always the best ways. He saw that the *Ohms* took pride in their appearance by wearing long coats and shiny shoes. Ordinary people, he thought, also had a right to take pride in their appearance, by driving a vehicle that was fine and handsome. Many democrat buggies were sold at his place of business in the village.

In the early 1920's, he bought an Overland Car, the first car in the village. But he did not drive it. It was stored in a shed on the yard.

One Thursday, while cleaning grain with his sons, David and Isaac, he received a visit from the *Ohms.* They requested his appearance at the Reinland church that evening, but he refused to go until they furnished a reason. Finally, after several weeks, the reason was given: "We hear that you have a car."

D. D. Fehr went to *Donnadach* and heard the arguments of the ministers. He agreed to get rid of the car. He did not tell them, though, that he fully intended to buy another one. Shortly thereafter, he became the owner of a 409 Chev. He was never accepted for his actions, but shortly after this incident many of the more conservative people in the church moved to Mexico. He moved to the Haskett area in 1927 and later joined the Sommerfelder Church.

The *Ohms* had other disputes with D. D. Fehr. When he bought a winter coat with the fur on the outside, they protested. Tradition dictated that the fur be worn on the inside of the coat.

In spite of these conflicts with the church leaders, D. D. Fehr enjoyed a friendly relationship with the villagers who depended on his business to introduce increasingly more efficient farm machinery.[8]

Dissidents gravitated to other churches such as the Bergthaler or Sommerfelder. Still others, seeking freedom from confinement in village communities, moved to Haskett or other towns. In 1902, Johann Driedger of Blumenfeld moved to the Hague-Osler area of Saskatchewan where a small Mennonite settlement had been established in 1890. He was followed a few years later by his father, Peter Driedger, a Blumenfeld businessman. The Driedger family had pioneered in Blumenfeld but personal ambitions and impatience with the Reinlaender leadership motivated their move.

Separation from the World

The Anabaptist view of separation from the world emphasized rejecting worldly values such as personal ambition, power and prestige, and the accumulation of wealth. Early Anabaptists attempted to rid themselves of the burdens of wealth — fine clothes, fine food, fine homes, many possessions. Freedom from these encumbrances was necessary for the spiritual attitude of *Gelassenheit* or self-giving in the ministry of proclaiming the Good News to the world in which they lived. They enjoyed an intense fellowship experience in the church because barriers to good relationships had been broken down.

In the history of Mennonites in Russia, separation from the world took on an entirely different meaning. Ambitious pursuits were accepted and approved. Church leaders supported an economic system which exploited the poor for the sake of the rich. Separation was regarded as cultural isolation from the Russian population, and not as avoidance of the capitalistic values of an unredeemed world.

Bishop Johann Wiebe, in emphasizing separation from the world, meant to establish a similar isolated cultural and religious community. The world was not only the territory outside the boundaries of the Reserve, but also the encroachments of provincial and federal governments into the spiritual affairs of the colony.
Efforts by the government to assimilate the German-speaking Mennonites into the Canadian mosaic met with stubborn resistance by this people who saw themselves as a church and a nationality.

The Church moves to Mexico

The leaders of the Reinlaender groups in Manitoba, Osler-Hague, and Swift Current reached the decision in 1919 to emigrate. In August 1919, the first of many land-seeking delegations (see chart) was sent to South and Central America. The motivation to seek a new homeland came from increased unrest about the future of military exemption privileges, the intrusion of the provincial government into the private village schools, and the breakdown of the village system of self-government.

In 1921 an agreement was reached with the government of Mexico granting all the religious, educational and cultural freedoms necessary to preserve the traditional way of life.

Bishop Johann Friesen of the Manitoba Reinlaender Church made it clear that only those who joined the church in its emigration would remain members of the church. The bishop, with the assistance of the village *Schult*, called a meeting in each village. Villagers had to indicate whether they were moving and how much land they wished reserved for them. Some villagers, unwilling to uproot themselves, registered for a token parcel of land in order to avoid the church's ban. Peter Elias claims that he was not the only one who registered for 5 acres in Mexico to make it "look good". Relations between the *"Trakash"* (those who were moving) and those who had not registered became strained and harsh judgments were made by both sides. Those who were joining the emigration were taking the "Church" with them. (Some even said that they were taking God with them.)

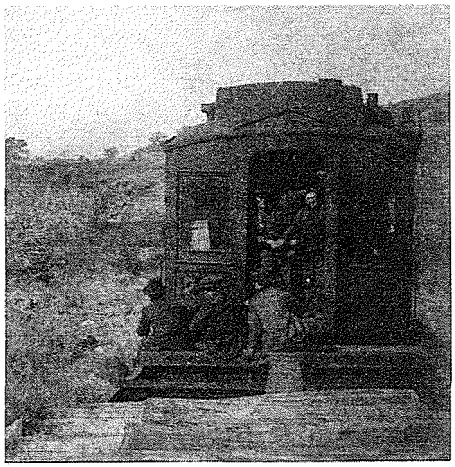
Reinlaender Land — Seeking Delegations 1919-1921 [9]

Date	Destination	Groups Represented
Aug.-Nov., 1919	Brazil	Manitoba
	Argentina	Hague
		Swift Current
Jan., 1920	Mississippi	Manitoba
		Hague
		Swift Current
April, 1920	Mississippi	Manitoba
		Hague
May, 1920	Mississippi	
August, 1920	Quebec	Manitoba
		Swift Current
Sept.-Oct., 1920	Mexico	Hague
Oct.-Dec., 1920	Paraguay	Hague
Nov.-Dec., 1920	Mexico	Hague
		Swift Current
Jan.-Mar., 1921	Mexico	Manitoba
		Hague
		Swift Current
Apr.-May, 1921	Mexico	Manitoba
		Hague
		Swift Current
July, 1921	Mexico	Manitoba
		Swift Current
Aug.-Sept., 1921	Mexico	Manitoba
		Swift Current

On March 1, 1922 the first train left Plum Coulee. Three more trains left from Haskett that summer. Between 1922 and 1925, some 3200 Reinlaender Mennonites from Manitoba emigrated to the Chihuahua settlement in Mexico.

About half of the residents of Blumenfeld joined the migration. The emigrants included the following:

Dyck, Isaac M. (Jr.), and Isaac (Sr.)
Fehr, Isaac, Jacob, Benjamin, Cornelius, Peter, Johan
Heide, Klaas
Wall, Abram
Janzen, Abram P.
Thiessen, Peter L.



Enroute to Mexico.



Train leaving for Mexico from the Haskett railway station.

It was a difficult time for families. Peter P. Elias, Blumenfeld's most senior resident in 1980, told this story:

> "I had married a girl whose parents were moving to Mexico. As a young couple, we felt pressured to go to Mexico as well. It was hard for us to stay back. Many families were broken up in this way. Friends were divided. The *Ohms* said it was too dangerous to stay in Manitoba because it was too worldly."

Bishop Friesen, one of the 1920 delegates, had surveyed the situation in Mexico and warned his people that it would be a difficult and dangerous move because the Mexicans were a thieving lot and worked on different ethical principles. Later, when Mexican Mennonites filtered back to Manitoba they said that Friesen had been right. They had not known how to integrate with the Mexican people who were so different in work habits, language and communication. The resulting hostility between the new residents and the native population made the immigration experience a particularly difficult one for the peace-loving Mennonites.

Exploitive land deals between relatives and friends became the seeds for bitter feelings when Mennonites drifted back from Mexico to take up roots once again in Manitoba. Land agents bought and sold the land of the emigrants, sometimes selling it to a "Russlaender" (recent immigrant to Canada from Russia) for only $10.00/acre. When the people returned from Mexico, destitute and unable to buy back their lands, feelings of betrayal by the Reinlaender leadership were misdirected at the *Russlaender* who had taken the places they had vacated in the villages.

Maria: Mother of Two Bishops

Maria Martens was the daughter of Abraham Martens (1836-1909) and Susanna Neudorf (1836-1917). Maria and her sister, Susanna, together with their young husbands joined their parents in pioneering the village of Blumenfeld. Maria (1858-1934) was married to Johann Loepki (1850-1882). Susanna (1859-1897) was married to Peter Janzen (1854-1920) whose mother was a Driedger. Another sister, Katharina, married Johann Driedger, Blumenfeld's first businessman.

Maria and Johann Loepki grieved over several children who died in infancy. In 1882, when Maria was again awaiting the birth of a child, her husband, Johann, was tragically killed in an accident. Her son, Johann Loepki, was born later that same year.

In 1883 Maria (Martens) Loepki entered a second marriage with Isaak Dyck, who was the son of Isaak Dyck and Susanna Fehr. Their marriage was blessed with seven children.

Her youngest son, Isaak M. (1889-1969), was a respected teacher in the village of Blumenfeld. In 1912, Isaak was elected as a minister of the Reinlaender Church. Isaak M. Dyck moved to Mexico in the early 1920's. He and his parents established new homes in the Manitoba Colony, where in 1935, he succeeded Johan Friesen as Bishop.

Maria's older son, Abraham (born 1885) was elected a minister in Mexico.

In the meantime, Maria's oldest child, Johann Loepki, had moved with his grandparents, the Martens, to Saskatchewan around 1900. The Driedger family of Blumenfeld followed around 1904. These

families settled in the Hague-Osler area. It was there that Johann Loeppky (change in spelling) was elected a minister in the Reinlaender Church. In 1921, he was a member of the delegation which, on behalf of three Reinlaender groups in Canada, negotiated a Privilegium with the Mexican government.

The Reinlaender Mennonites from the Hague area of Saskatchewan had purchased land near Patos. The colony, called Durango, was led by Bishop Jacob Wiens. Migration began in 1925, but due to the poverty and indebtedness of many farmers in the Hague-Osler region, 76% of the people stayed behind, pending financial arrangements. Two ministers, Johann Loeppky and Abram Wall remained in Saskatchewan to minister to the remnant. Every spring Bishop Jacob Wiens travelled from Mexico to serve the group with communion and baptism.[11]

Johann Loeppky moved to Mexico for a short period, where he settled not in the Durango colony, but in the Manitoba Colony. He made an attempt to set up a *Gemeinde* on the fringes of the Manitoba Colony where it bordered the Kleine Gemeinde land. Many farmers were attracted to move to Loeppky's area where they hoped to set up villages in the traditional manner. Isaac M. Dyck, however, excommunicated those who went to Loeppky's area. Discouraged, Loeppky moved back to Saskatchewan.[12]

In 1929, Bishop Jacob Wiens refused to serve the Hague-Osler group because "he believed that those who had remained in Canada had not demonstrated an earnest effort to join the Church"[13] in Mexico.



Maria Dyck with her husband, Isaak Dyck, in front of their home in Mexico.

Isaak M. Dyck. Drawing by Ruth Wiebe.



Bishop Johann Loeppky and his wife.



Since the remnant who had stayed needed a bishop, they agreed to elect one of their ministers. He was then ordained at Hague by the Bergthaler bishop, Cornelius Hamm. Thus the new bishop, Johan Loeppky, became the organizer of the Old Colony Church in Canada, which did not oppose government intervention as actively as the first church. He (Loeppky) had endured much mental and spiritual anguish related to those who went to Mexico.[14]

Da die Zuruekgebliebenen doch eines Aeltesten bedurften, wurden sie sich einig, von ihren Predigern einen als Aeltesten zu waehlen, welcher sich dann von dem Bergthaler Aeltesten Cornelius Hamm bei Hague ordinieren liesz. So wurde der neue Aelterste Johan Loeppky der Organisator der heutigen Altkolonier in Canada, welche sich nicht so aktiv der Obrigkeit widersetzten wie die ersteren. Er hat daher auch nachher im Geiste viel zu erdulden gehabt von denen in Mexico.

In 1946, Johan Loeppky led a group of 18 families from Saskatchewan and 116 families from Manitoba in cooperating with the Kleine Gemeinde in a move to Mexico.[15] But the Saskatchewan group became involved in a hopeless situation that caused most of them, including Johan Loeppky, to return to Canada.[16]

The Remnant in Canada

About one-third of the Reinlaender Mennonites in Manitoba chose to stay in this country. They were confronted with many new issues, but had few leaders to give direction to the shaping of their future.

> Since the decision to emigrate had been a corporate one, any decision to remain behind was a stance of greater individualism. That new individualism made it virtually impossible for these groups to act unitedly again until the crisis of World War II.
>
> The emigration broke any organized resistance to the public schools. For those who elected to remain in Canada the issues of private or district schools, German or English as the language of instruction, and of teacher qualifications were no longer debatable. One might deplore the resulting separation of church and school and hope for a reversal, but in practise the government control had been accepted.[17]

There was an exodus to the farms. The *koagel* system of landholding broke up and the villages became residential clusters. But the move to the farms and the breakup of the village system had begun before the emigration to Mexico. The departure of the strong conservative leaders to Mexico resulted in a slackening of discipline among those who remained in Canada. Villagers gradually bought cars and other conveniences which had been prohibited. The arrival of the *Russlaender* in 1927 opened new doors to self-expression in instrumental and vocal music.

The Old Colony Church Emerges

The Reinlaender people who remained in Manitoba, about 36% of the group, had no church to attend, no ministers to officiate at funerals, weddings, baptisms, and no focal point for Christian fellowship. The lack of spiritual leadership in the period of 1925 to 1936 can be compared to the spiritual vacuum of the first Mennonites to leave Prussia for Russia. Many families with young children attended the Sommerfelder Church in Reinland because they felt a duty to attend church and to give their children some religious instruction.

In 1936, a group of men attempted to rally the support of the remnant of Reinlaenders to reorganize the church. This initial organization was given leadership by Abram Hiebert, Hochfeld; Peter F. Klassen and George Elias, Blumenfeld; Johann Thiessen, Chortitz and others. They were supported and guided by Bishop Johann Loeppky of Warman, Saskatchewan (in the Hague-Osler settlement) who had come to Manitoba several times to serve communion and to officiate at baptisms and weddings.

Jacob Froese was elected leader of the new group in 1936. In January 1937, he was ordained bishop by Johann Loeppky, but only after the approval of the church leaders in Mexico had been sought. Froese's ordination sermon intimates how the Reinlaender Church in Mexico determined the self-image of those who had chosen to stay in Manitoba.

. . .Some families began to return (from Mexico). Then the question emerged here whether we could not raise up our Church again, and again conduct our services according to our old practices. Thus we began in all our weakness to hold meetings and consultations numerous times. The question was raised, "What will the Church in Mexico say if we re-establish our Church here?" This question concerned especially the ministers, for if and when we embarked on a selection and ordination of ministers, what would the Mexican ministers think of it? We were afraid of what they would think if we selected our preachers here and began to revive our congregational life. In the meantime the situation in Mexico worsened to the extent that a delegation from the Church in Mexico returned to Canada to search for an area where they could settle down in peace and quiet. Thereby the last reason fell for considering Mexico our home, and thus the question of the reviving of the Church was followed with greater urgency in order that we could guide our children, so that they could be shielded as much as possible from the world, its fashions and pride. It was further hoped that we might all unite together in humility and heart before God; for things happened which were not pleasing to the will of the Highest, and in fact were very displeasing to Him. Yes, the word in Proverbs 29:18 was true for us — Where there is no prophecy, the people perish.[19]

Bishop Froese began preaching at the church in Chortitz. Others were elected to the ministry.

Church services were conducted in Chortitz, Reinfeld, Rosenort and Blumenfeld. The decision to build a church in Blumenfeld was made in 1938.

A belief of the Old Colony people that influences all aspects of living is a fatalistic view that life is a trial to be endured until death

Old Colony Church, Blumenfeld.



grants eternal peace and rest. The unfaithful ones submit to the lures of the evil world. The faithful ones stoically resist all temptations and find assurance in knowing they are God's chosen and holy people. The following excerpt from a sermon is a typical view of living in the world:

> Just a little more courage, just a little more faithfulness to the eternal goal, just endure a little longer and we will reach home, where man will rest eternally. How wonderful it will be when we all meet before the Father. Therefore let us weigh the matter — it is well worth considering — what hinders us and what drags us down? World, you are too insignificant. We are marching into eternity through the suffering of Jesus. It shall be Jesus only. Amen.[20]

Like the Reinlaender Mennonite Church, the Old Colony Church uses the ban as a method of discipline, although with more descretion. "Deliberate violations of the laws of the Bible", such as marital infidelity or alcoholism might become subject to discipline.[21]

Rev. J. J. Elias, an Old Colony minister who farms in the Blumenfeld district believes that "traditions are to the glory of God." Upon ordination to the ministry, Old Colony ministers promise to obey the regulations (traditions) of the church to the glory of God.[22] The Old Colony Church ministers, like many Anglican and Roman Catholic priest, wear special apparel, particularly when exercising religious duties, to set them apart from ordinary people. It is believed that special status and power are conferred on a minister.

Conformity to the traditions of the Reinlaender-Old Colony heritage continues to be emphasized, although conformity can hardly be enforced in the present era of individualism. A gradual movement away from seeing themselves as God's Chosen or Elect contributes to a decreasing emphasis on the traditional way of life. But the battle against the world, continues in the form of resisting higher education and in remaining isolated from non-Mennonite people. The simple design of the church structure and worship format have changed little in the last one hundred years. An archaic form of High German is used in the life of the church. The simplicity of religious expression and social development is juxtaposed against a complex and highly developed farming community. Rev. Jacob P. Wiebe observed about the Old Colony Church:

> Experience teaches that the church follows the trends of society. A conservative element in the church does not acknowledge this and attempts to enforce the traditions on a younger generation. The same group encourages progressive methods of farming and increased mechanization in industry. It is difficult to deal with the paradox of people wanting to retain old methods in church, but endorsing modernization in daily life. Time does not stand still in the church. It is not possible to go in reverse. As long as Jesus is central, methods can change.[23]

The evangelical radio and television preachers have established their congregations in Southern Manitoba, thereby also making inroads into the pocketbooks and language of the Mennonite people. The Old Colony church, too, borrows English vocabulary from the evangelicals to verbalize its primary aim, "To preach salvation so that all are born again."[24] Evangelical activity, however, is limited to the pulpit on Sunday mornings. Supporting the work of the inter-Mennonite relief agency, Mennonite Central Committee, has been a cohesive force in the village communities. It has given the diverse denominations a common cause that is based on compassion and generosity.

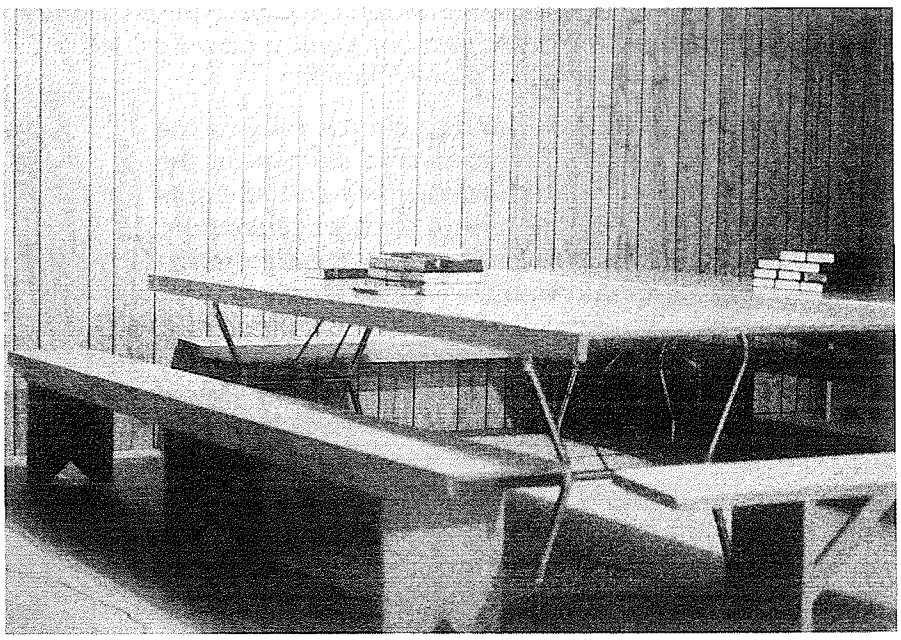
The Old Colony Church in Blumenfeld

Construction of the Old Colony Church began in the summer of 1938. The site was a lot donated by George Elias. The new building was built on an old basement that remained after D. D. Fehr had moved his home to the Haskett area. The voluntary assistance of the villagers was coordinated by two hired carpenters, J. W. Dyck of Blumenfeld and George Goertzen of Chortitz. Grandfathers and grandsons worked side by side in completing the church by October. The construction cost was about $800.[25]

A. A. Hiebert was commissioned to build the pulpit. On the day that he delivered it to the nearly completed church, the people remarked of the structure in the back of his buggy. *"Nu tjaemmt doat Schmaunkauntche."*

The decision in 1964 to begin a Sunday School required some basement renovations. A new basement, twenty feet longer and slightly higher, was constructed. Furnace heating and electrical lights were installed in the basement. In 1981, however, no electrical lights are used in the sanctuary on the main floor. Although other Old Colony churches use electrical lights, the more conservative Blumenfeld church waits for a future date when a consensus of church members permits the change.

Maintainance of the building is the responsibility of a local person hired for the task. For approximately twenty-five years before 1970, the caretaker resided in a small house south of the church.



Sunday School classroom in the Old Colony Church, Blumenfeld.

The Blumenfeld congregation is served by all of the elected ministers who itinerate to preach at the various places of worship. In December, 1955, after a particularly severe snowstorm. Rev. Jacob Wiebe had to walk to the church from the highway. On other occasions, the congregation would gather, but no preacher would come. Only two Old Colony ministers have been elected from the Blumenfeld district. John P. Wiebe was elected a minister in 1954. In 1975 he was elected bishop. He resides on a farm in the Blumenfeld district. J. J. Elias was elected a minister in 1964. He also farms outside the village of Blumenfeld.

The Blumenfeld Church has been served by the following Vorsaenger (song leaders): (1938) Abram P. Janzen, Peter F. Klassen, Peter P. Klassen
(1940) Diedrich S. Klassen
(1954) Jacob J. Elias
(1962) Isaac Elias, J. H. Klassen, John P. Klassen, John Janzen

In 1981 the congregation is served by Peter Wiebe, Hochfeld; Isaac Elias, Blumenfeld; Jake Friesen, Blumenfeld; Abe Driedger, Neuenburg; and Abe Janzen, Hochfeld. The song leaders meet regularly to practise and to choose songs for special occasions such as funerals and weddings.

The Blumenfeld Old Colony Church has given strong support to the teaching of German in the village public school. The ministers frequently visited the schools, even though the public schools were administered by inspectors from the Department of Education.

By 1964 most of the Old Colony Churches had initiated Sunday School programs for children and youth. In Blumenfeld, an interdenominational Sunday School, coordinated by Rev. George and Margaret Zacharias, had operated for a decade in the village school. The motivation to begin a Sunday School in the Blumenfeld Old Colony Church came from a need to keep the children and young people in their parents home church. Jacob J. Elias was appointed to organize the Sunday School which, in content and methodology, was similar to the German private school of the 1920's. The texts still used today are the Catechism and the *Biblischegeschichten* (Bible Stories). German is the language of instruction.

Blumenfeld Persons Baptized in the Old Colony Church

1941 - 1961

Year	Name	Father
1941	Bernhard Klassen	Peter Klassen
	Peter Janzen	Abram Janzen
	Anna Janzen	Abram Janzen
	Eva Giesbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
	Isaac Wolfe	Johann Wolfe
1942	Johann Friesen	Johann Friesen
	Elizabeth Friesen	Johann Friesen
	Maria Giesbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
1945	Susana Janzen	Abram Janzen
	Anna Giesbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
1946	Jacob Klassen	Diedrich Klassen
	Anna Wiebe	Martin Wiebe
	Susana Wiebe	Martin Wiebe
	Johann Klassen	Peter F. Klassen
	Helena Giesbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
1948	Aganetha Giesbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
	Margaretha Giesbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
	Johann Janzen	Abram Janzen
	Katharina Janzen	Abram Janzen
	Gerhard Friesen	Johann Friesen
	Isaac Elias	Peter Elias
1950	Johann Elias	Peter Elias
	Helena Klassen	Johann Klassen
	Katharina Friesen	Johann Friesen
	Margaretha Klassen	Diedrich Klassen
1951	Franz Geisbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
	Peter Elias	Johann Elias
	Peter Reimer	Wilhelm Reimer
1952	Ester Giesbrecht	Heinrich Giesbrecht
	Jacob Janzen	Abram Janzen
	Maria Janzen	Abram Janzen
	Heinrich Elias	Peter Elias
	Maria Friesen	Johann Friesen
1953	Maria Elias	Johann Elias
	Anna Reimer	Wilhelm Reimer
	Gerhard Wiebe	Peter Wiebe
1954	Wilhelm Elias	Peter Elias
	Elisabeth Reimer	Wilhelm Reimer
	Agatha Reimer	Wilhelm Reimer
1955	Helena Janzen	Abram Janzen
1956	Maria Elias	Peter Elias
	Helena Elias	Peter Elias
1957	Diedrich Klassen	Diedrich Klassen
1958	Tina Reimer	Wilhelm Reimer
1961	Wilhelm Reimer	Wilhelm Reimer

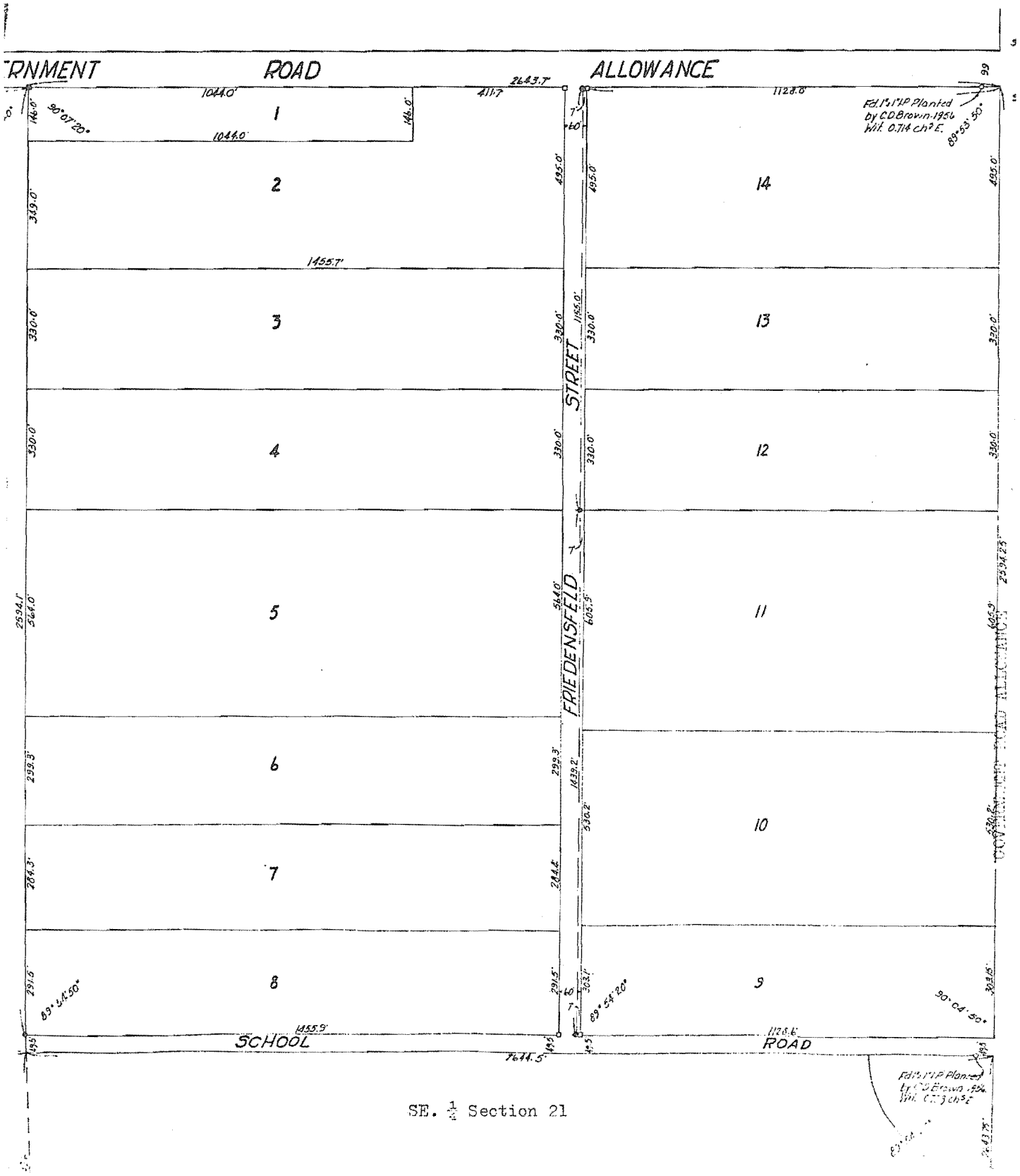
Source: Baptism List from 1937-1980 submitted by Rev. Jacob P. Wiebe.

Friedensfeld

In 1939 the leadership of the Old Colony Church in Manitoba responded to the urgent need of destitute families who were returning from Mexico without home, land or job. Those were the difficult post-Depression years. Many Mexican Mennonite families were forced to accept assistance from the government. The termination of the village system had eliminated housing for *Anwohner*, thus adding to the housing problem. The village of Friedensfeld, in the district of Blumenfeld, was established by the Old Colony Church in order to assist *de Mexicauna* (Mennonite migrants from Mexico).

A quarter section of land, purchased from a land-agency, was subdivided into village lots that were of adequate size to accommodate a small venture in livestock farming. Vorsteher A. A. Hiebert made arrangements that prospective residents could buy the lots from the church at cost.[26] The residents were encouraged to become self-sufficient in securing housing and other necessities.

Some Blumenfeld villagers recall the occupants of Friedensfeld as a quarrelsome lot living in abject poverty. Others remember the



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bushel baskets of garden produce brought to Friedensfeld to assist in feeding large families. Generous donations of clothing and household items from the Blumenfeld women made it possible for the residents of Friedensfeld to set up housekeeping and to send their children to the village school more than a mile away. The attic of the Old Colony Church in Blumenfeld was used by local farmers to store

donations of flour and other foods as well as livestock feed. This storehouse helped those in desperate need.

The housing problem was acute. One family had to sleep in a tent until a shelter, however inadequate for Manitoba winters, could be built. In one case an old box-car was moved onto a yard. It became the home for the Krahn family, and later for the Unger family. The Wiebe family lived in a stacked-wall home with only a sod floor.

The history of poverty is still evident in Friedensfeld today. Many residents are transient Mennonites moving from one Old Colony reserve to the next. Some of the families who have settled in the village more permanently are the Fehr and J. D. Klassen families.

No Place to Call Home

Many of the Mennonites who moved to Mexico in the early 1920's lost not only their homes and material possessions, but also their sense of belonging, their values, and the security of a stable family life. Elizabeth Wall, who with her husband, Jacob, and two children, were among the first residents of Friedensfeld tells this story:

> We moved from Tolstoi in the East Reserve to Dominion City, and then to Emerson. In 1941 we arrived in Friedensfeld. At that time it was just a bare field. The Peter Klassen family brought us a tent so that our family would not have to sleep under the stars. We had a few pigs, cows and chickens, but no pens.
>
> We registered with the Old Colony Church and *Vorsteher* Abram Hiebert of Hochfeld helped us in buying our twenty acres in Friedensfeld from the church. We built a small house for our family.
>
> In 1942, we sold the land and buildings and moved back to Mexico. In 1953, we came back to Canada, living for short periods of time in Blumenfeld (at John Wolfe's place), and in Osterwick; Schanzenfeld was our home for one month.
>
> Now I live in Winkler. I have lived here for about fifteen years.[27]

Zion Mennonite Church

A desire to generate new life and forms to the traditional structure of the Old Colony Church gained increasing support between 1976 and 1980. Some persons wished to provide Christian teaching in the Sunday School which would emphasize the practising as well as teaching of Christian values. The emerging group wished to find a leadership model which was flexible and democratic. There was a strong desire for a more evangelical emphasis in the spiritual nurture and witness of the church.

The Zion Mennonite Church, organized on November 16, 1980, is led by Rev. W. G. Thiessen and by Rev. Jakob P. Wiebe, both former ministers in the Old Colony Church. During the three months following mid-November, the membership of the Old Colony Church was open to allow members to make the transition to the new church. The Old Colony Church leadership allowed the new church to emerge, but claims that it "never really granted permission"[28]. Such ambivalence on the part of the mother church has contributed to nega-

tive feelings. At the time of writing the Old Colony Church does not formally recognize the Zion Mennonite Church, but recognition of the daughter church will occur "eventually", says Rev. J. J. Elias.[29]

Several families from Blumenfeld have been part of the birth of this church and continue to nurture it. John P. Klassen of Blumenfeld serves the congregation as one of the Vorsaenger.

The goals of Zion Mennonite Church are being met. Sunday School instruction uses an English curriculum. All youth activities use the English language. The emphasis in Sunday School and youth activities is to teach how Christian thinking can be lived out in daily living. An emphasis on the inner response to the Christian message through a changed life has resulted in spiritual growth which has been strengthening and joyful. Rev. W. G. Thiessen says of his congregation: "The love and unity that has been expressed among these members was something they had needed to express but had not been able to do in the past."[30] Thiessen acknowledges that the traditions of his church closely resemble those of the parent Old Colony Church. The difference lies in a joyful expression of the faith, and mutual support in living the faith in daily life. The desire to become more acquainted with the Scriptures is given leadership by the ministers who are free to consult biblical commentaries and books for sermon preparation.

The Zion Mennonite Church requested the assistance and resources of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church of Steinbach in establishing a structure and for providing support. The bishop of the Chortitzer Church assists with communion and baptism.

In March 1981, membership of the Zion Mennonite Church was 156, with approximately 30 members coming from the four Old Colony congregations in Blumenfeld, Chortitz, Rosenort and Reinfeld. The church has outgrown the Gnadenthal church building and is making plans to build a church near Schanzenfeld.

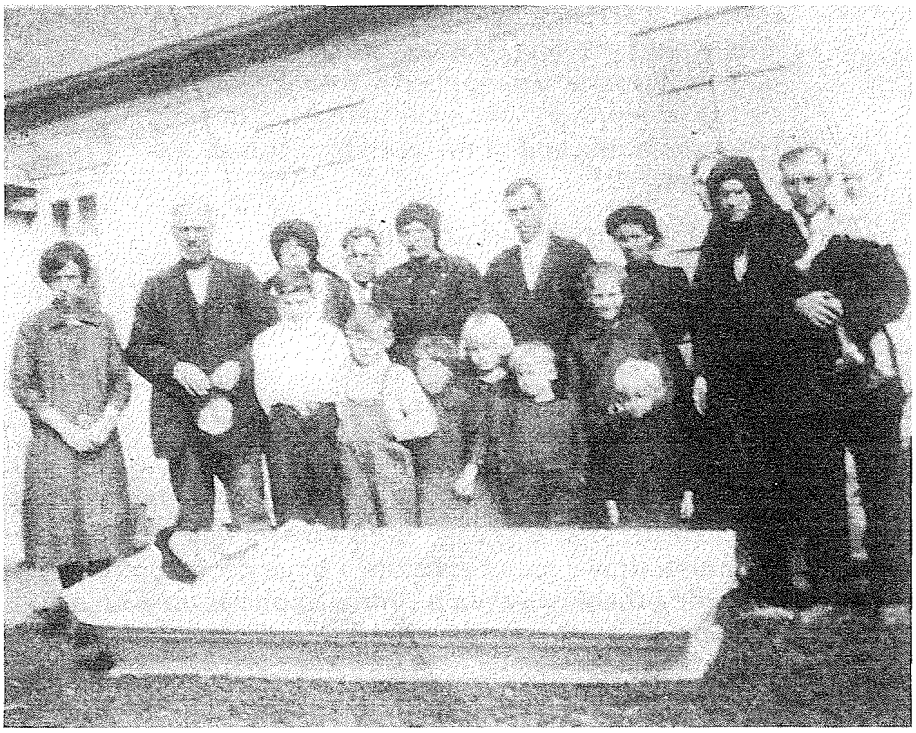
Baptized Members of Zion Mennonite Church
AGE ANALYSIS

Pre 1900	6
1901-1910	8
1911-1920	18
1921-1930	36
1931-1940	31
1941-1950	19
1951-1960	32
1961-1970	3
TOTAL	153

The Bergthalers

At a special meeting in the Reinland Church, on October 5, 1880, Bishop Johann Wiebe issued an ultimatum. The choice was to stay in the church, or to leave. To stay meant conforming to the teaching of the *Lehrdienst* concerning the singing of hymns, adherence to the church school, and obedience to the colony administration.[31] Church members who left generally sought the fellowship of the Bergthalers.

The Bergthalers on the West Reserve were drinking deeply of freedom: freedom to establish schools which taught English and a varied curriculum, freedom to live on farms rather than under the



Funeral of Mrs. Susanna Klassen, wife of Gerhard F. Klassen. This family was the only Blumenfeld family affiliated with the Bergthaler Church before 1925.

watchful eye of the *Ohms* in the villages, freedom to use new forms of worship, influenced by the evangelical preachers from the United States.

While Blumenfeld remained a stronghold of the Old Colony church, several Bergthaler influences in the surrounding area had their affect on the village. In 1894 a group of villagers from Eichenfeld invited the General Conference evangelist, N. F. Toews, to conduct evangelistic services. Following his work there, the Bergthaler *Lehrdienst* occasionally conducted Sunday morning and special evangelistic services in Haskett and neighbouring schools. By the 1920's and 1930's week-day and Sunday meetings were held intermittently in the Haskett School.

The first discussions regarding the founding of a Bergthaler Church in the area were begun in the 1940's but it was not until 1963 that a committee was formed to help create a new church. The Winkler Bergthaler Church gave financial and administrative assistance. On February 4, 1965 the Bethel Bergthaler church building on Highway 32 just outside the village of Hochfeld was dedicated.

It was particularly fitting that the church be established near Hochfeld, the first home of Jacob Hoeppner, teacher, minister and later bishop of the Bergthaler Church in Manitoba. Jacob Hoeppner's sister, Catharina (1853-1893), and her husband Franz Klassen (1853-), were among Blumenfeld's pioneer families. In 1876, Jacob Hoeppner began to teach in the village of Hochfeld.

> Hoeppner, educated in Chortitza schools and encouraged by deep religious experiences in Chortitza and Michaelsburg, began his teaching career with much enthusiasm. Hoeppner enjoyed singing and soon had his children (students) singing the gospel songs of *Der Saengerbote* and other hymnals. This did not go too well with the village fathers. They visited Hoeppner. He claimed he could not sing the old melodies

used there at that time. They allowed him to stay if he would not sing, but this did not please the parents. Pressure was applied to the village council and Hoeppner was again permitted to sing. However, at the end of the year, his contract was not renewed.[32]

The Bethal Bergthaler church has been served by the following leaders:

Peter Suderman, deacon
Isaak Buhler, deacon, minister
Otto Hamm, pastor, minister
Abe Banman, minister
Gus Kunkel, professional pastor

Several Blumenfeld families attend the church for worship and participate in its programs for children, youth and adults. Because English has been the first language used for worship and Sunday school, the church draws members from a large geographical area. From its beginning there has been a strong emphasis on evangelical faith and missionary work.

Sommerfelder Mennonite Church

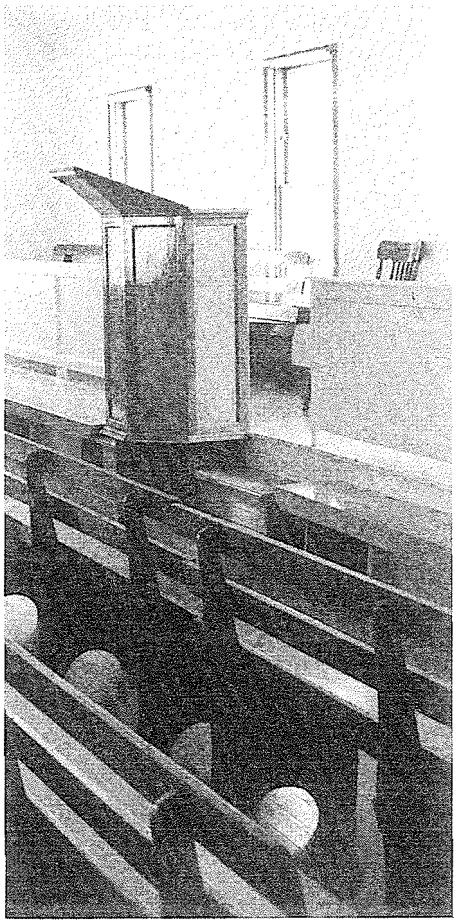
In 1892, Rev. Abraham Doerksen, who lived in the village of Sommerfeld, led three-quarters of the Bergthaler membership in forming a more conservative church which upheld traditional values regarding education. By 1903 the group was officially known as the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church. The remaining one-quarter supported Bishop Johann Funk's Bergthaler church and the teacher training institute at Gretna which he helped to found.

In the form of worship there were no differences between the Bergthaler and Sommerfelder following the split in 1892. Both groups used the new gospel melodies in the *Choralbuch*. The issue was education. The division was motivated by fear on the part of the Sommerfelder group that their children would be seduced away from the farms by *hohe Gelehrsamkeit* (higher education). The Bergthalers, on the other hand, desired to introduce new curriculum and to improve training for teachers.

Residents of Blumenfeld have been travelling to Reinland to worship at the Sommerfelder Church since the 1910's. The Reinland church also serves the villages of Reinland, Schoenwiese, Rosengart, Haskett and Neuenburg.

After the migration to Mexico in the 1920's, many formerly Reinlaender Church members attended the Sommerfelder church in order to provide religious instruction for their young families.

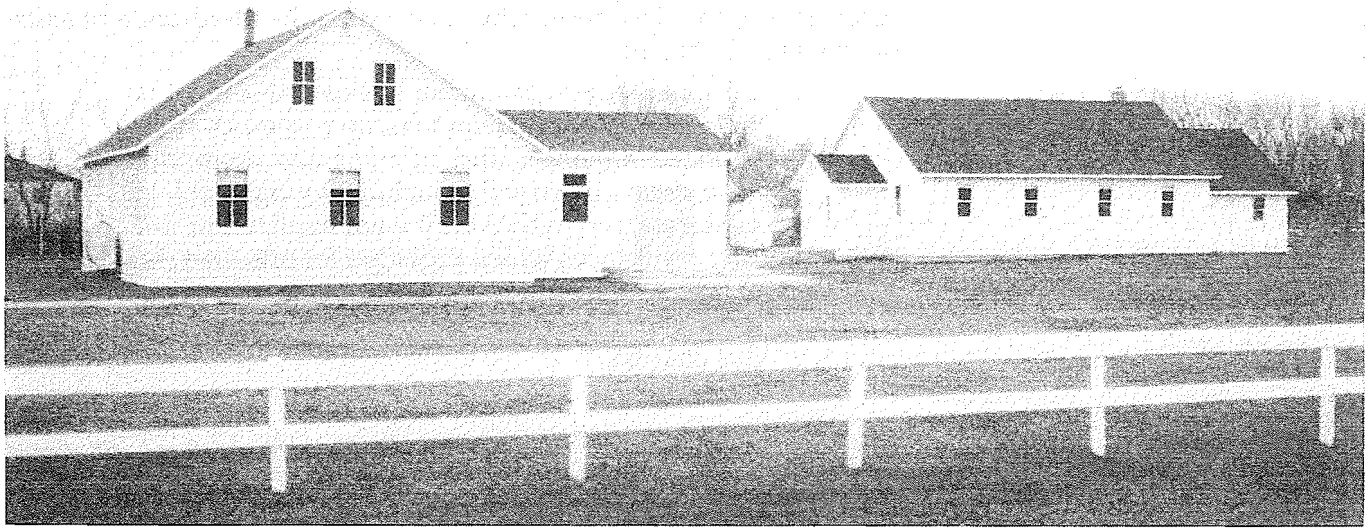
Interior, Reinlaender Church, Blumenfeld.



Reinlaender Mennonite Church

In 1958, twelve ministers left the Sommerfelder Church to form a new Mennonite church. In searching for a name for this church, a government official advised that they take the name of the Reinlaender Mennonite Church, established in the 1870's, which, when it had moved to Mexico, had never withdrawn its registration with the Manitoba Government. This advice was taken, primarily because the new church saw itself as a movement to re-establish the forms and traditions of worship and lifestyle as they had been.

In spite of the fact that electricity was used in most homes, the decision to install electricity into the Sommerfelder Church building



Reinlaender Mennonite Church, Blumenfeld, with the dining hall on the right.

was seen by the new Reinlaender group as a compromise of traditional values.

In its first year, the Reinlaender Church built houses of worship in Altona, Winkler and Blumenfeld. In later years, additional ones were established at Grunthal, Stuartburn and Austin.

Bishop Rempel, of Neuenberg, estimates that over the last twenty years, 150 members have been baptized. He sees that "It is good to remain conservative". A full church on a Sunday morning is a sign of spirituality. Language is seen as an issue for the future.[33]

Sunday School classes are conducted in High German or *Plattdeutsch,* using the content and methods of the former private schools. Respected adult male church members instruct the three classes in Testament, Bible Story and Cathechism.

Mr. and Mrs. Unger who live on the church yard are responsible for maintainance of the building and yard. Two *Vorsteher* handle the finances of the local church building. These men, Cornie J. Dyck and D. M. Klassen, were responsible for the new addition to the north side of the church which was completed in 1980.

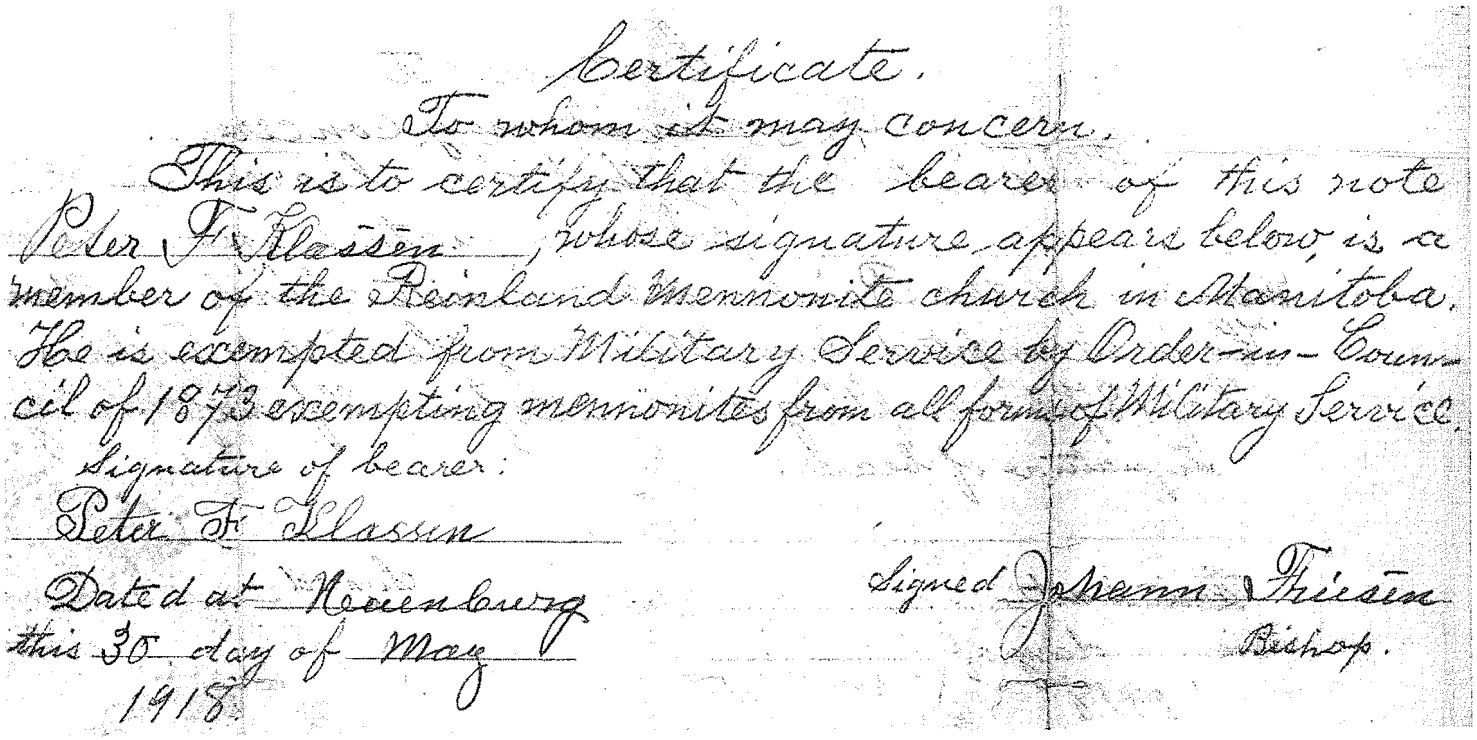
Mennonites in Two World Wars

When World War I broke out, the Mennonites in western Canada became uneasy. Under the War Measures Act, the government decided in 1917 to take an inventory of Canadian manpower. The Reinlaender Mennonite church resisted the government by refusing to fill out the national service cards. They felt that their privilege of military service exemption was being threatened. Even supporting the work of the Red Cross seemed a compromise of the pacifist stance, according to Isaak M. Dyck, a minister from Blumenfeld.[34] The Reinlaender joined other Mennonite denominations in making a special collection for widows, orphans and cripples caused by war. This money, $2,044.75, collected by the Reinlaender Mennonite Church of Manitoba, was sent to Ottawa as an expression of thanks for its considerate treatment of the Mennonites in regard to military exemption.[35]

In the following years, young men of draft age were required to register with the bishop, Johann Friesen of Neuenburg. He com-

pleted the paperwork which identified the young men as Mennonites. Many of the men had not yet been baptized into the church, and when their exemption was questioned by the authorities, Bishop Abraham Doerksen of the Sommerfelder Church and Bishop Jacob Hoeppner of the Bergthaler Church clarified the Mennonite practice of believer's baptism:

> 'Our *Gemeinschaft*' has always considered its children and young people its own as much as the baptized members and petitions for exemption have always intended to include young people of military age whether they were baptized or not. Any assurances which provided for less than that would never have persuaded us to accept the invitation of the Canadian government to settle in this country.[36]



Certificate.

To whom it may concern.

This is to certify that the bearer of this note Peter F. Klassen, whose signature appears below, is a member of the Reinland Mennonite church in Manitoba. He is excempted from Military Service by Order-in-Council of 1873 exempting mennonites from all forms of Military Service.

Signature of bearer:
Peter F. Klassen

Dated at Rosenberg
this 30 day of May
1918

Signed Johann Friesen
Bishop.

Bishop Johann Friesen helped young Mennonite men attain exemption from military service in World War I by completing a certificate like this one.

The purchase of Victory bonds, while representing a loan rather than a gift, clearly represented financial support for the war effort. Most of the Mennonite churches (excepting only the Bergthaler) agreed that they could not participate, but rather held special collections for the Red Cross. The Reinlaender Church contributed over $3,000 in this way.

In 1918 the government attempted to resolve the Mennonite objection to Victory bonds by promising to donate "an amount equivalent to the total subscriptions of your people to the loan, for relief purposes, namely convalescent homes and hospitals." This arrangement apparently was quite acceptable to most of the Mennonite groups. Within a year Manitoba Mennonites had purchased an estimated $600,000 to $700,000 worth of Victory Bonds.[37]

When World War II seemed imminent several conferences attempted to unite the Mennonite groups in their representation to the government on the war issue. But unity could not be reached. After war was declared a meeting was called for September 7, 1940 at which a committee of bishops was formed to represent the interest of the Mennonite churches to the government.

Committee of Ministers, World War II	
Peter A. Toews	Sommerfelder
Jacob Froese	Old Colony
David Schulz	Bergthaler
Wm. H. Falk	Rudnerweider
Peter S. Wiebe	Chortitzer
Jacob T. Wiebe	Church of God in Christ (Mennonite)
Jacob Kroeker	Kleine Gemeinde
Peter P. Reimer	Kleine Gemeinde
Johann P. Bueckert	Blumenorter
Heinrich S. Voth	Mennonite Brethren

The committee's efforts at unity were frustrated by the diversity of opinion regarding alternative service. The coming of Russian Mennonites in the 1920's had brought a different attitude. These Mennonites had been forced to offer alternative service in the Russian military, either as forestry workers or as Red Cross workers, and were quite willing to do the same for Canada. The Mennonites who had pioneered Western prairies from 1874 had demanded complete exemption in World War I and were opposed to all forms of alternative service. Two separate committees had to be formed and Elders Toews, Schulz and Barkman represented the Sommerfelder, Bergthaler, Old Colony and Rudnerweider of the West Reserve as well as the Kleine Gemeinde, Chortitzer, Church of God in Christ Mennonite and Bruderthaler churches of the East Reserve. "By the end of the war and after a great deal of experience, the two executives gravitated much closer towards a common point of view. Both had to make concessions; both eventually rejected all forms of service in uniform and under military command; both eventually accepted various forms of civilian alternative service."[38]

All young men had to perform alternative service if it could not be proved that their service was essential to the family farm. All young men wishing to register as conscientious objectors were required to attend court in Morden, where Judge Adams interrogated them regarding their motives for seeking CO (conscientious objector) status.

The young men had to fill out a form that assured the government that they were participants in the Mennonite church. Several forms of alternate service were permitted: (a) service on a farm, (b) Red Cross work, (c) reforestation, (d) or lumbering industry.

At the CO camps, the Mennonite men received pastoral care and support through representatives of the Mennonite Church who held worship services there. The Old Colony Church did not assign a representative to the camps, but supported the work of Bishops Schulz, Toews and Froese.

Some of the Blumenfelders who did alternative service were David Hiebert, Deacon Abr. Driedger, Jacob J. Elias, Barney Klassen and Peter A. Janzen. Those were difficult years for the young men of Blumenfeld whose world had been limited to the area surrounding their village.



Barney Klassen (top row, 8th from left) worked for two years at the CO camp at Clear Lake.

Henry Dyck served as a CO on the farm of Jake I. Hoeppner. But the arrangements were unsatisfactory, and he chose to evade the draft. He and two others went into hiding. His two friends returned from British Columbia that winter, but Henry remained there for some time and then moved to Alberta. His family had no knowledge of his whereabouts until the end of the war when he finally returned home. But one month after his return, he was arrested and required to do several weeks of alternate service at the Clear Lake camp.[39]

Peter P. Elias recounted this story of the war years:

> I had to take my sons to the Morden courthouse to secure CO status and to receive their alternate service assignments. One of my sons was assigned to a dairy farm near Winnipeg. But my son was not a strong person and found the work very taxing. I solicited the assistance of Bishop Toews, and together we went to a Winnipeg judge to have the assignment changed so that my son could be assigned to easier work that would also be closer to home. His next assignment took him to the Trinke farm near Winkler. But every Sunday he would come home pale. When we asked the reason for his palor, he explained that he was obliged to accompany the Trinke family to evangelistic services at the Mennonite Brethren Church every evening after a day's work. I understood that my son was burdened by a form of religious expression that is unfamiliar to our people. I approached Trinke to excuse my boy from going to church in the evenings. My son always insisted that Trinke was a good boss and the term of service was satisfactorily completed.[40]

The following story of a Blumenfeld resident[41] might be typical of many young men of his community:

> In April, 1943 I saw Dr. Warkentin for a medical examination that was required for registration for military duty. I was a Mennonite, though, and would refuse to participate in a war. My people were pacifists, that is, they believed that Christians should not use force, not even in defense of one's country. The government had granted the Mennonites the privilege of performing noncombatant duties during the war. This alternative service required that I appear in front of the Judge at the Morden Court in March, 1944, in order to prove that I was a Mennonite and that I objected to war. We were called CO's or conscientious objectors.

At the court hearing I was told to report to a farmer in Boissevain. I received my ticket on April 18, 1944. I had seldom been away from Blumenfeld. There had been the occasional trip to Winnipeg. And now I had to go to Boissevain. The distance from home was too great for me and so I asked for an assignment closer to home. At the end of April, I got a ticket to Cartwright.

I left on May 9th. It was hard to leave my family and my village. After a trip of four hours, I reached Cartwright, where I phoned Bill McKenzie. He picked me up and took me to his son's farm.

But at the Russel McKenzie farm everything was so strange. They spoke only English. The way they related to the family members, the food they ate, the way they dressed — all this was new. I could not understand what they got out of their church. The only thing that kept me going was being able to work on a Model D John Deere. But that novelty wore off too, and I was so full of homesickness that I couldn't stay. So one Sunday, I packed my bag and went home.

Of course that didn't go over well with the government officials. They sent orders that I should work at the Clear Lake CO Camp. But that was farther than Boissevain or Cartwright! I did not want to go at all. Finally, my father was able to make arrangements for me. I would be able to work at home, providing he would pay me $15.00 per month which would be forwarded to the Red Cross.

Those arrangements were most satisfactory, and to this day I am thankful to the government officials who where so accommodating in my case.

Sunday School

Students from the Winkler Bible School ran a Sunday School in Blumenfeld during the winter of 52-53. "We were unlearned people and didn't know how to initiate it", commented Rev. Geo. J. Zacharias. "So some people must have dropped a word here and there that the Bible School students became aware of the need in our community."

Jake Wolfe going to Sunday School, April 30, 1950.



The following year, George and Margaret Zacharias took over the leadership of the Sunday School and continued to give it guidance until 1963, when Mr. Zacharias' church, the EMMC in Reinland, asked him to start a Sunday School there.

The classes were timed so that the children could attend Sunday School at the schoolhouse and be home in time to attend their church with their families. Classes for the youth were in High German. The young children's classes were taught in Low German.



The senior Sunday School class, 1958.



Rev. George J. and Margaret Zacharias.

Some teachers were recruited from the village and surrounding area but they lasted only a very short time, sometime merely months, since the villagers demanded an impeccable moral standard from the Sunday School teachers. Once a teacher was seen walking the street on a Sunday evening she lost parental support. Teachers from the village community were often unacquainted with the Scriptures and found the teaching job a difficult one.

The Sunday School curriculum was German material ordered from Scripture Press. The Zacharias family, for many years, supplied the material, even though this meant exercising more frugality in running the household. "But", commented Mrs. Zacharias, "our family was made richer for the experience of packing bags for the students at Christmas, as well as teaching the students when they got older."

The emphasis of the Sunday School was to discern God's will and to know his expectations of Christians. "Being ready for heaven" was a recurring theme. This evangelical emphasis was taught with some

moderation because any pressure 'to be converted' would have resulted in an empty classroom.

The response from the children was overwhelming. Older students, who had at first been reserved, later returned their thanks to the Zacharias family. The work was rewarding, then, and continued to be so as church workers emerged from the group that met for instruction every Sunday.

At first, response from the village was hostile, but by 1955 the doors were beginning to open. In the later 50's the Sunday School prepared programs for Easter and Christmas. Verses for reciting were selected from the Gesangbuch which was familiar to the parents. When the children brought home their verses to be memorized, no need for a special announcement of the program was needed.

Music was a highlight. The Zacharias daughters played piano for the singing which the children enjoyed. Bags of peanuts and candy were prepared in the Zacharias home and handed out. At the program the villagers would slip money to Mr. Zacharias as a gesture of thankfulness and to help pay for the costs of running the Sunday School.

Collections from the Sunday School children every Sunday also assisted in financing this activity. Many people demonstrated their warm response to the Zacharias family by giving gifts.[42]

In 1958 Mrs. Nettie Warms coordinated the Sunday School while Mr. and Mrs. Zacharias attended Bible School in Altona.

In 1963 the Zacharias family terminated their Sunday School work in Blumenfeld because the Old Colony Church was planning to start their own Sunday School.

Evangelistic Meetings

In the late 1950's, J. J. Neufeld, popular radio minister who was commonly known as *Plaut-Dietsch Niefeld,* visited the village communities south of Winkler. He asked permission of the local school boards to hold services in the village school. He also held evangelistic meetings in the school basement in Blumenfeld. Many Blumenfeld people attended, as well as people from Wakeham, Mason, Haskett and Hochfeld. Some people from the Old Colony Church however, were uncomfortable with this kind of activity, and made a concerted effort to visit friends and relatives in other villages during the week that the meetings were held.

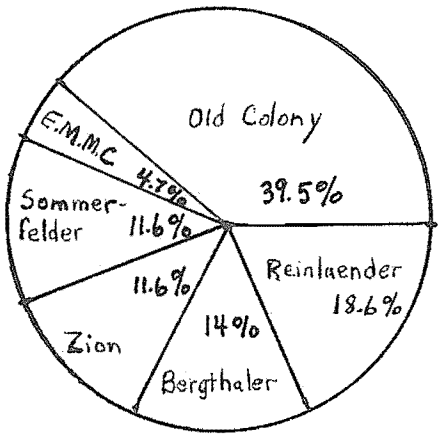
J. J. Neufeld stayed at the Albert and Nettie Warms home and preached in the Blumenfeld school every evening for a week. The service would include a story for the children and enthusiastic singing from the *Evangeliums Buch.* He was able to minister to the community for two consecutive years, but the third year he was unable to get permission to use the school since all the trustees were Old Colony Church members who did not approve.

Blumenfeld as a Religious Community

A survey of Blumenfeld residents[43] and their involvement in area churches provided data for the following observations:

1. The Bethel Bergthaler and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church have youth groups. Although the Old Colony Church in Reinland has an active youth group, no youth organization has been founded in the Old Colony Church in Blumenfeld.

Church Affiliation of Blumenfeld Families, 1981



2. The Old Colony, Zion Mennonite, Reinlaender and Sommerfelder Churches baptize marrying age adults. Baptism has become a pre-marriage rite. The Bergthaler and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church baptize people upon their request, usually in late adolescence, and do not make baptism a pre-requisite for marriage.
3. The survey of Blumenfeld families indicated that the Bergthaler and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church have a structure and program which requires more leadership and participation from the people. In these churches, an average of three persons per family per year are involved in the work of the church. The Old Colony and Sommerfelder Church involve two persons per family per year. The Reinlaender Church requires only half a person per family per year to operate its structure.
4. People from all denominations regard ministers and parents as models and leaders in Christian living. Moral behaviour and formulation of religious beliefs are influenced primarily by the church.
5. Most Blumenfeld residents, regardless of church affiliation, consider that Christian living is the most significant emphasis of the church at present. The absence of a clear understanding of the issues and ideas which shaped the Mennonite church in the past point to a new task for the churches of today. That task is to educate people about their identity as Mennonites and to teach the scriptural foundation for our faith and way of life.

What has determined the religious climate in Blumenfeld? What are the forces which have resisted change over the last century? We can only speculate.

First, there is the consideration of geographical location. Situated off the travel route of the Post Road, and undisturbed by the railway connecting Haskett to Morden, the village of Blumenfeld was able to remain isolated from influences of the outside world.

Secondly, the village of Reinland became a meeting place for people from various villages when business matters brought them to the administrative and church centre of the West Reserve. The interchange of ideas produced a climate for experimentation in that village. In reaction, the village of Blumenfeld, only four miles west, countered any innovative ideas with stricter enforcement of the traditional ways. The relationship of Blumenfeld to Reinland continues to be reactionary to this day.

Thirdly, the influence of the Reinlaender Church in Mexico remains strong, even among families who never moved to Mexico. The allegiance can be attributed to ties of kinship or to a need to justify one's own sojourn in that country. The fact that Isaak M. Dyck, Bishop of the Reinlaender Church in Mexico from 1933 to 1958, was born and raised in Blumenfeld, and that he was elected to the ministry while resident in the village, elevates the village to a special stature that becomes evident in the conversations of Blumenfeld's senior residents. That *Ohm Isaak* is so fondly remembered is ironical in light of the fact that his half-brother, Bishop Johann Loeppky, of Hague, Saskatchewan, also born and raised in Blumenfeld, was the organizer of the Old Colony Church.

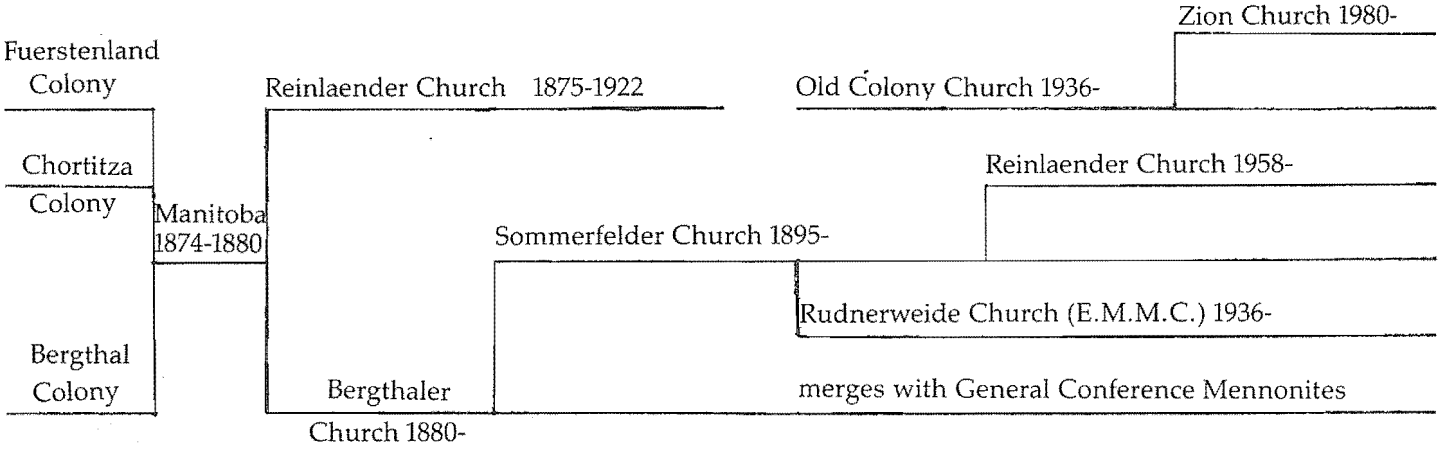
Fourthly, the Old Colony Church in Blumenfeld has taken pride in holding to the traditional ways, even after other Old Colony Churches have made changes. The consequence of this more conservative character of Blumenfeld is demonstrated, not in a deeper religious experience or in a more simple lifestyle, but in a firmer resistance to education which exposes their children to the world

outside the village community. Resistance to higher education is based on the religious notion that innocence is better than the pride of those who know too much. Only the most determined and courageous youth pursue high school or professional education. Few have returned to make Blumenfeld their home.

How have the conservative forces overpowered the naturally energetic, curious and creative aspects of youth? The answer does not lie in the legalism of the Old Colony Church which, on the outside, permits its people to determine their own way of life. But the church supports an unwritten set of rules which are enforced by social attitudes and actions. People who break these unwritten rules may be subjected to mockery and gossip, then rejection. For some people, the vagueness or ambiguity of the rules creates feelings of insecurity and fear. How long will the community accept them if "they are different"? For others, the unwritten code of behaviour is understood and accepted because it provides the security of knowing what is expected. This security is lost if they move outside the Mennonite village communities.

The suspicious attitude toward education which exists in Blumenfeld limits the freedom for curious youth to develop their minds, for artistic youth to be creative and for youthful leaders to set new directions. These are the people who have left Blumenfeld to make new homes where their gifts and talents are welcome. For Blumenfeld, the loss of these talented youth has produced a lack of strong leadership. It has reinforced the conservative nature of the community. The influence of the two churches situated in the village, the Reinlaender Church and the Old Colony Church, is evident in the attitudes and activities that describe the people of Blumenfeld.

Mennonite Churches Founded Since 1874, West Reserve





Building A Community

CHAPTER 3

> In the past Mennonites tended to retire into the background whenever any community project had to be undertaken. There was no sense of community responsibility apart from participating in the affairs of the church and a few of its subsidiary organizations. Few Mennonites took part in municipal affairs and provisions for any recreational facilities for the young folk was unheard of. The cooperative movement was the first endeavour which really demanded civic thinking and action from the great majority of the farmers. At first it was run by strong-willed men, some of the group participation that might have been desired was lacking. But this situation improved.[1]

The district of Blumenfeld enjoys a sense of community that goes much deeper that 'being neighbors'. Blumenfeld is 'home' because of special relations to others which assume cooperation and friendship. The strength of this family-type of relationship is not in the coincidental grouping of people who happen to like each other. The strength lies in the understanding that the village is an autonomous unit, a world unto itself, in which people have to like each other in order to make life enjoyable. Harmony depends, not on avoiding conflict, but on the willingness to resolve grievances as they arise.

In this chapter we will discover how village organization functioned in the early years. We will study the influences from outside the community which shaped the life of Blumenfeld and the whole West Reserve. We will be introduced to the personalities from within the community who gave leadership to new movements, new organizations, new activities. Finally, we will identify the unique culture which characterizes the people of Blumenfeld.



The Village Units are Established

Mennonites in Russia had perfected a system of local government. This system and its supporting institutions were transplanted to the new colonies in Manitoba with few changes.

Villages accommodating approximately thirty families were laid out, and the surrounding land was distributed equally among the farmers. One representative of each farm sat at the village meeting called *Schultenbot,* where a *Schult* (mayor) and two *Biesetta* (assistants) were elected to administer the village affairs. Their responsibilities were to levy taxes, hire teachers and herdsmen and assign farmers their strips of land. The *Schult* was the local judicial officer, responsible for maintaining peace and order, industry and morale, roads and bridges. The *Biesetta* functioned as *Braunt Schult* (fire-chief), and as *Hoad Schult* (herd-chief).[2]

The village *Schults* formed the district assembly, called *Gebietsamt,* which elected an *Obervorsteher* to administer the affairs of the entire region. Isaak Mueller had been the *Obervorsteher* of the Fuerstenland Colony in Russia, and continued to serve in that capacity from the beginning of Mennonite settlement on the West Reserve. It must be supposed that his leadership was endorsed by the new immigrants who organized themselves into villages at Fort Dufferin immigration sheds prior to moving their families and possessions to their new homes. Although he wished to avoid osten-

tatiousness and the implications of worldly authority, Isaak Mueller was nevertheless nicknamed Kaiser Mueller. This name was so widely used that government officials mistook the nickname for his official title.[3]

It is assumed that Mueller divided the West Reserve into administrative districts. The Rosenort and Reinland Village Documents contain directives from Mueller which govern the affairs of the villages Neuhorst, Rosenort, Neuendorf, Schoenwiese, Reinland, Neuenburg, Ebenfeld and Blumengart.

Directive #9
An die Schulzenaemter

Es sind sofort 200 Saecke Mehl angekommen. Die kennen gleich abgeholt werden, nach jedem Dorf 20 Saecke: Neuhorst, Rosenort, Neuendorf, Schoenwiese, Reinland, Neuenberg, Ebenfeld, Blumengart. Es muss ein jeder eine Schrift von Winkler bringen.
Neuhorst an 7ten Maerz, 1876

Isaak Mueller[4]

Directive #9
To the Mayors

200 sacks of flour have just arrived. They should be picked up immediately, 20 sacks for each village: Neuhorst, Rosenort, Neuendorf, Schoenwiese, Reinland, Neuenburg, Ebenfeld, Blumengart. You should bring a written notice from Winkler.
Neuhorst, March 7, 1876

Isaak Mueller

The villages of Blumenfeld, Eichenfeld, Hochfeld, Osterwick, Chortitz, Schanzenfeld and Hoffnungsfeld were probably part of another administrative district for which a complete set of Mueller directives has not yet been located. A file of notices sent to the Reinland area villages includes the following:

An die Schulzenaemter Befehl
Die Schulzenaemter haben folgendes bekannt zu machen, erstens Gerhard Klassen von Blumenfeld will durch einen . . . Ausruf sein Wohnhaus von . . . 32 Fuss lang, 22 Fuss breit gegen . . . bezahlung Donnerstag, den 26ten, Juli, 1877 verkaufen.
Abraham Knelson, Schanzenfeld hat seine gelben.
23 Juli, 1877 Vorsteher Mueller[5]

Directions to the Mayors:

Mayors should publicize the following: First Gerhard Klassen of Blumenfeld would like to sell his house by auction on Thursday, July 26, 1877. The house is 32' x 22'. Terms: Cash. Secondly, Abraham Knelson Schanzenfeld, has his yellow cow which he had been looking for.
July 23, 1877 Isaak Mueller

The system of self-government described above underwent some changes in the early years. A municipal form of self-government was imposed on the Reinlaender area by 1885. This eliminated the position of *Obervorsteher.* The municipal reeve did not have the wide — sweeping powers of Isaak Mueller whose responsibilities encompassed agriculture, education, care of the poor, roads and justice, among other duties. Many of the institutions and functions of the *Gebietsamt* continued to exist, largely due to the strong leadership of the Reinlaender Mennonite Church. The *Waisenamt* was administered by the church. Provisions for *Anwohner* (landless people) and for fire insurance continued on a village basis. The form of self-government in the village continued, and the *Schults* eventually felt comfortable in co-operating with the municipal offices.

Some of the *Schults* who served the village of Blumenfeld in the pre-1920 era were:

Peter Driedger
Peter Janzen
Johann Klassen
Abram Wall, Sr.

Blumenfeld was administered by the *Schult* — system of self-government well after the migration to Mexico in 1922-24. Henry K.

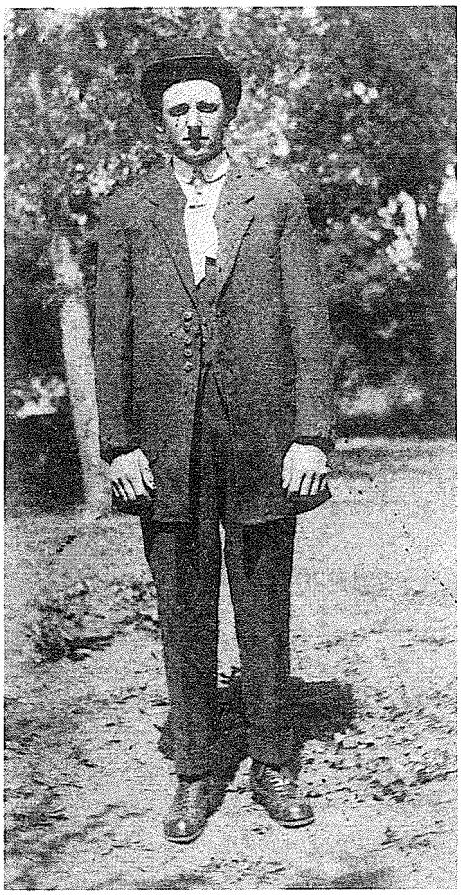
Giesbrecht was the *Schult* who attempted to provide a sense of order in the community in the difficult years when the *Koagel* or *Gewann* system of land ownership was breaking down. The *Schult*— system of village organization was abandoned around 1935 when villagers encountered difficulties in herding cattle and holding land titles cooperatively.

Some of the *Schults* who served Blumenfeld in the post-1920 era were:

H. K. Giesbrecht
J. V. Neufeld
Peter F. Klassen
Abram Neudorf
John F. Klassen

Heinrich K. and Katharina Giesbrecht in their home. He was one of the last *Schults* to be elected in the village.

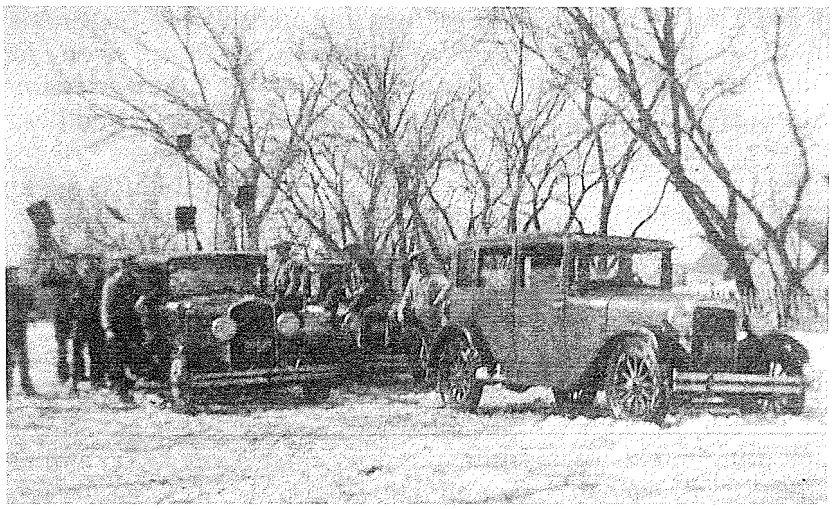




J. V. Neufeld served as *Schult* for a number of years.

Snow-removal was a task that required a cooperative effort of all villagers. The men of the village joined forces to keep the village street clear of snow in winters. During the winter the runners of the sleds packed the snow, and the tracks hardened with continued use and more snowfall. But by spring driving on the street became difficult and dangerous as the snow began to thaw and collapse. A shovelling gang was organized to clean the street in the village. In the 50's, a snow blower, purchased by George P. Klassen, kept the street cleared for cars.

Shovels raised high in celebration of a task completed. Peter F. Klassen supplied drinks afterwards.





Some years the road was covered with eight foot drifts.

Institutions Serving the Community

The *Gebietsamt* coordinated the institutions and social systems which protected the rights of the poor. It established patterns of village organization that were consistantly followed by the Reinlaender villagers, even after municipal governments were established.

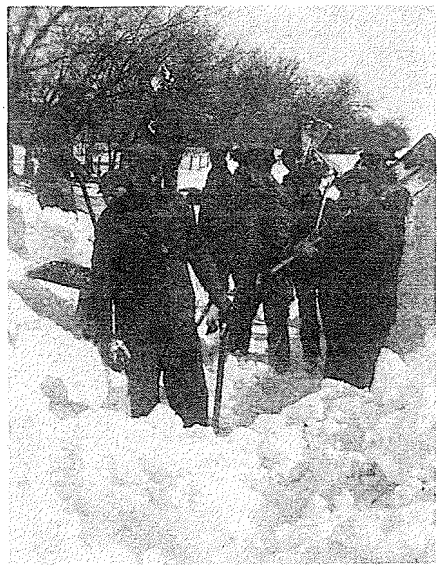
A few lots at the end of the village were used to build houses for married children of farmers living in the village, for small businessmen like shoemakers, and for herdsmen. The houses in the *Anwohner* section were not constructed of the same quality as the farmers' stacked-wall homes, and could be called cottages. The *Anwohner* owned no other property then their lot with a small garden. They were responsible, like any other citizen of the village, for paying taxes on the village and municipal level. These could be paid in cash or in statute labour.

All villagers were taxed for services related directly to the village: school operation, teacher's wages, wells, ditches, roads, herdsman, and relief of the poor. The villagers worked together for big jobs such as transporting grain to be ground for flour and for gathering timber and firewood in the Pembina Hills. Cooperation took the form of doing tasks as a group. The villages did not practice the type of economic sharing which is typical of a Hutterite commune. Farms were considered private property and could be sold and inherited.

> On the other hand, ownership, though free on principle, was strictly controlled by the community. The layout of each farm within the village area was determined collectively, and could only be changed by collective decision and for all in the same way. As far as real estate was concerned, it was indivisible and sale to outsiders was prohibited.[6]

The *Waisenamt* (orphans' office) was modelled after the institution in the Mennonite colonies of Russia. Its main business was to act as the executor of the estates of deceased people, and to protect the rights and inheritances of children who were considered minors. It later took on the functions of a savings bank and lending agency for church members.

How did the *Waisenamt* handle the estate of a deceased person?



Before the time when Stanley Municipality plowed the village street volunteer help shovelled the road open after a blizzard and drained the runoff water to the creek in spring.

It had a law of inheritance that was applied to all members of the colony regardless of wealth, age, or sex. When the head of a family died, the whole estate was immediately assessed by *Waisenamt* officials, usually in the presence of the *Schult* who acted as guardian of the community's interests. It was divided so that the surviving parent received half, and the other half was divided equally among all the children. Property such as animals, furniture, and household effects was divided according to an elaborate system. Immobile property such as buildings and land were sold by public auction, or retained by one of the surviving family members. If the widow or one of the children kept the farm, he/she would pay out cash shares to the other heirs. An estate had to be settled before the surviving parent entered a new marriage. No marriage was performed by any minister without a written permit issued by the *Waisenamt.*



Ausruf!

Sonnabend, den 26. März, 1927
beginnend um 10 Uhr vormittags,
sollen die Sachen des verstorbenen
Jacob N. Neufeld, Blumenfeld
durch „The Sommerfelder Waisenamt,"
durch öffentlichen Ausruf versteigert werden.
Imbiß frei.

Wirtschaftsgebäude mit 2½ Acker
Land; part Weideland am Dorfe
ungefähr 12 Acker auf N W ¼ 20-1-4
40 Acker auf S ¼ auf N ½ 19-1-4
Schmiede 10x14; Kochhaus 10x20
Hühnerstall 16x50
Schweinestall 10x16
2 Pferde; 3 Kühe; 2 Schweine
Ungefähr 125 Hühner
Wagen mit Doppelt-Box
Heureck; 1 Trukwagen; 1 Buggy
Buggygeschirr; Buggydeichsel
2 Paar Arbeitsgeschirre; 1 Sattel
1 Paar Pferdedecken; gr. Schlitten
Wageschale; 100 Säcke; Schleifstein
5 Ton Heu; Zistern u. Pumpe

Hobelbank mit Gerätschaft
gr. Grapen; 4 Bütten
Waschmaschine mit Wringer
Badewanne; 2 Abrahmer
2 Buttermaschinen; Sparherd
Waffeleisen; 2 Bettgestelle
Schlafbank; 2 Nuhbänken
2 Kommoden; 2 Kleiderschränke
2 Glas- u. 1 Eßschrank; Bank
11 Stühle; 4 Tische; Nähmaschine
Mangel; Kochofen; Waschtisch
Wand- und Taschenuhren; Pelz
4 Lampen; 50 Bushel Kartoffeln
Heumesser; Mistkarre; Forken
Schaufeln; Kochgeschirr, Trunk
2 Handkoffer

Und noch verschiedene Sachen mehr.

Bedingungen werden am Tage des Ausrufs bekannt gemacht.

Auction sales have been popular among the Mennonite people. This auction bill announces the sale of the Jacob N. Neufeld estate. The sale will be conducted by the Sommerfelder Waisenamt, executors of the estate.

When the migration to Mexico took place, the church had, at first, intended to leave behind the unsettled accounts and to take the entire *Waisenamt* to Mexico. Instead, they gave the books to Lawyer Black in Morden so that outstanding bills could be collected and the money sent to Mexico. The Mennonites who chose to stay in Manitoba resisted this. Much ill will was created by the way in which the fund was handled. This affected the group morale and discipline of those who had chosen to stay in Manitoba.[7]

Another institution which benefitted the community was the fire insurance which was operated on a village basis. As it became more difficult to enforce payment from every village resident, the institu-

tion evolved into a mutual fire insurance association with a voluntary membership. One of the *Biesetta* acted as *Braunt Schult* (fire-chief) and administered the insurance agreement. "Premiums were collected from each of the other insurees only after damage had occurred and the sums due were divided among them in proportion to the assessed value of their insured property.[8] Two insurance companies eventually were created. The Red River Valley Mutual Insurance Company and the Manitoba Mennonite Mutual Insurance Company locate their offices in Altona. For many years, J. J. Elias, Blumenfeld, was an agent for the Red River Valley Insurance company, serving about 100 clients in the Mennonite villages west of Highway #32. The village did not own a modern fire truck. Fires were put out by bucket brigades which required every strong arm in the village. Around 1935 a fire occurred at the Peter Zacharias yard.

> One Sunday morning, the Zacharias and Janzen boys were smoking in the barn while their parents were in church. Blowing smoke rings at the young kittens in the manger kept the boys occupied. A fire started in the manger. The flames were spreading quickly just as church was over. Peter P. Elias, driving along the village street in his Model T Ford, saw the flames. He stood on the seat of his car and shouted as he drove through Blumenfeld, "*Fia, Fia, bie Peeta Zachariesen!*" (Fire! Fire! At Peter Zacharias) Everyone in the village ran for a bucket and soon a fire brigade was working. They were successful in containing the fire to one wall of the barn. In the loft, the straw was untouched.[9]

General opinion claims that this is the only family dwelling to have burned in the history of Blumenfeld.[10]

Municipality Versus Gebietsamt

In 1879 the Manitoba government passed the Municipal Act which divided the settled parts of the province into proposed municipal units which were to have elected councils. The establishment of the boundaries was left to local intitiative. Many Mennonites in the West Reserve were opposed to this interference by the government. They regarded the new law as an imposition of a form of government which would undermine the control of the *Gebietsamt,* and therefore the Church, over the Mennonite colony. It would violate the Mennonite understanding of the separation of church and state and their concept of not being "unequally yoked with unbelievers."[11]

The Bergthaler settlers on the East Reserve and on the eastern fringes of the West Reserve welcomed municipal government for it promised freedom from the *Gebiesamt* which worked hand in hand with the Reinlaender Church. The Bergthalers saw municipal government as a way of resisting the power of *Obervorsteher* Isaak Mueller who controlled the West Reserve.

In 1880, when six councillors from Mennonite villages were appointed and sworn in, a local person protested that it was "*Plat gegen die evangelische Lehr.*"[12] (In 1883, Mennonite councillors were not sworn in but "declared into office").[13] In spite of the appointment of the municipal council, Mueller continued to assert authority over the region until the new council, in March, 1885, used force to take

over the office of the Reinland Mennonite Colony, located in Reinland.[14] During the period between 1880 and 1885, Mueller had proceeded to administer the region. He gathered statistics about each village. These records of land holdings, livestock and implements are compiled in the Reinland *Gemeinde Buch*[15] which also held records pertaining to the *Brotschuld*.

About 1881, the West Reserve unofficially became the Municipality of Rhineland. In 1884 two municipalities were formed. The eastern townships, predominantly Bergthaler, became the Douglas municipality with Otto Schulz as its first reeve. The western townships retained the name, Rhineland Municipality. Jarvis Mott was its first reeve. The municipal council of Rhineland was composed of dissidents who were willing to challenge the power of the Reinlaender Church. Members in good standing of the Reinlaender Mennonite Church did not accept public office.

> The *Altkolonier,* who with considerable justification, saw the imposition of the municipality as a threat to the prevailing social, economic and religious order were not about to surrender the vision of a restored commonwealth, a vision that they had fostored in the 1875 migration from Russia. It resembled too much the imposition of the kind of worldly authority that in Elder Johann Wiebe's eyes had gone too far in Russia. It ran counter to the new order he wished to create in America. The municipality also seemed to be a foreign imposition — one Altkolonier referred to it as "the English municipality".[16]

The Reinlaender Church leaders did not want to see disputes between members settled by secular courts. They wished to avoid the municipality's impersonal and inflexible methods of dealing with persons who were in arrears in their financial obligations. In the municipality, delinquent tax payers were turned over to the courts which would collect the taxes by selling the land.

> Such a thing would not happen if the office were handled in accordance with apostolic teaching, wrote one observer. Instead, a careful investigation would reveal whether or not the person was capable of paying these back taxes. If he were found incapable, then voluntary contributions would be gathered in the church to pay such debts.[17]

Fear of the unknown consequences of leaving the traditional ways, and determination to resist government interference made the church elders unbending in their opposition to the municipal government. The division that occurred between the Reinlander church and those who participated in municipal government was based on principles and a battle for power over the future of the village farming communities. Reinlaender members who took municipal positions were excommunicated.

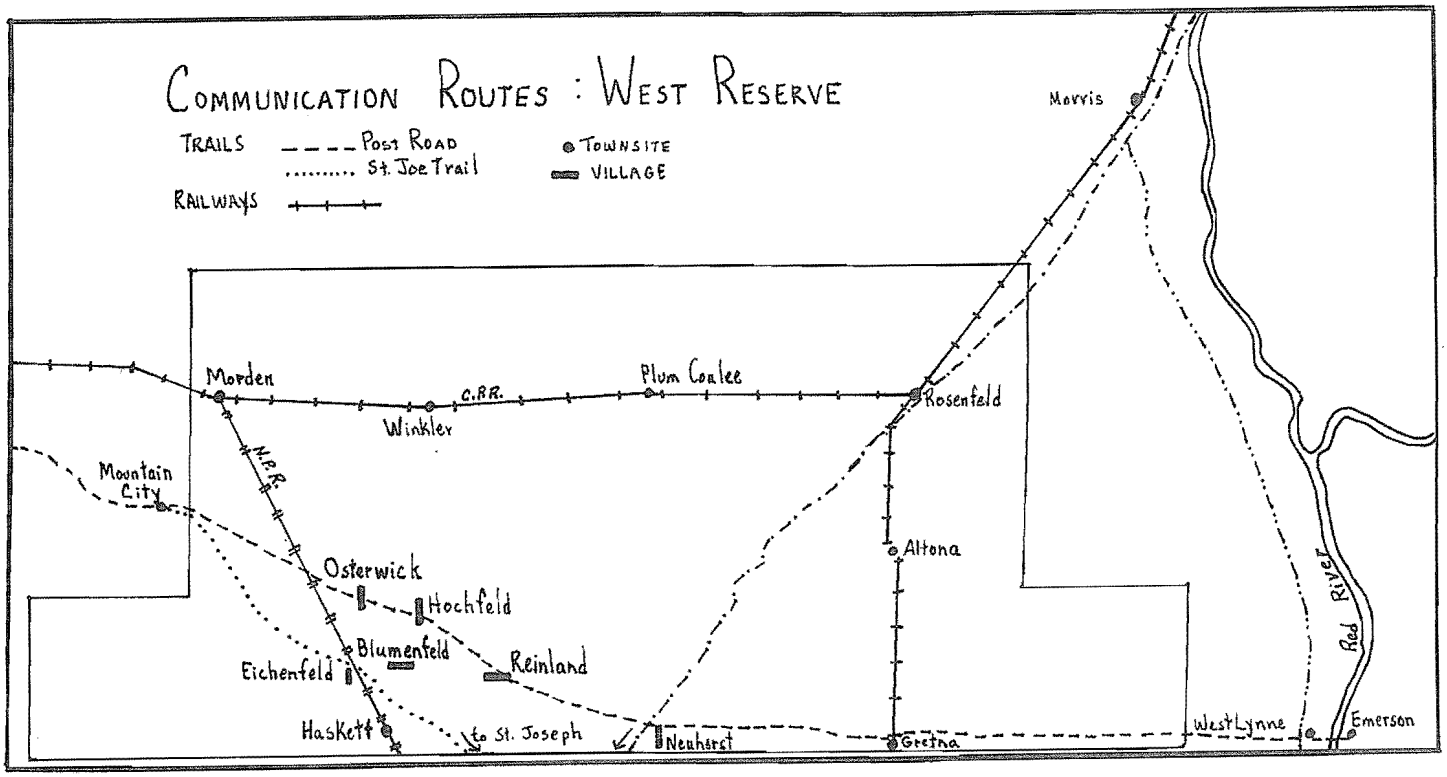
The Bergthaler church was not opposed to the municipal government. Consequently Reinlaenders who had an interest in municipal government drifted to the Bergthaler church. For several years Reinlaender members were forbidden to have contact with the Bergthaler people.

After 1885 the municipality was in to stay. It's function was to assist in the maintenance of destitute and handicapped people. Many of these people were being cared for through the *Waisēnamt*. The main task left to the municipality was the building of roads and bridges.

The Colonization Trail, commonly known as the Post Road, had transported many immigrants from Emerson to points west. The Post Road served the West reserve as an important market-route as long as Emerson was the trade centre. Merely an ox-cart route, the Post Road cut through the village of Reinland and then took a north-west direction through the villages of Hochfeld and Osterwick to Mountain City. It bypassed Blumenfeld, like the trail from St. Joe (Walhalla today) to Mountain City. This trail, then, joined the Missouri Trail which was the principle route to Fort Garry (now Winnipeg).[18]

New ideas and new information flow along a major transportation route. Blumenfeld, however, remained isolated from most of the influences of the outside. The villagers came to accept and prefer their isolation. They valued the peace of their village. To this day, Blumenfeld residents exhibit a determination to shelter themselves and their children from certain modernizing influences. This determination to retain the parochial nature of their village is probably the dominant and most widely acknowledged trait of the village.





The road from Winkler to the United States boundary was built by 1920. The speed limit was set at 25 m.p.h. in 1920. By 1940, principal sideroads had been improved to make them free of snowdrifts in winter. The Winkler/Walhalla highway however, was buried under banks of snow which made travel to Winkler impossible. A group of citizens, with spokesman W. M. Elias, petitioned the Stanley Municipality in 1941 for snow removal on Highway #32. John Dueck and Peter Dueck represented Blumenfeld in this concern.

The condition of the road from Blumenfeld to Highway #32 had

Top

Farm boys enjoy catching gophers, but when the pests got out of control, the municipalities initiated a gopher control program by distributing gopher poison free of charge to farmers.

deteriorated. In 1978 the Blumenfeld Centennial Committee petitioned the Stanley Municipality to improve the road, but to no avail. The road to the village and the village street was paved as a result of a special provincial grant later that year. At the Centennial celebrations, Harry Enns, Minister of Highways, and Arnold Brown, M.L.A. received credit for the project. The road is maintained by provincial maintenance equipment.

The municipality installed the lights on the village street which they still maintain. Other contributions to the community such as the services of the poundkeeper and weed and pest controls are discussed in the next chapter.

The municipality's policy in dealing with delinquent taxpayers, particularly through the difficult depression years, was to provide the alternative of statute labour in lieu of cash payments. Diedrich S. Klassen, Blumenfeld, who worked for many years with a bridge-building gang, recalled the road crews. In the 1920's a crew of delinquent taxpayers completed the road from the end of Reinland to the three-mile corner (Junction of Hwy. #3 and #14). Up to 20 four-horse dirt-scoops were used. The workers received credit against the debt at the rate of 70¢ per hour. No cash was paid out. Once the farmer had worked off his taxes, he could take his team of horses and go home.

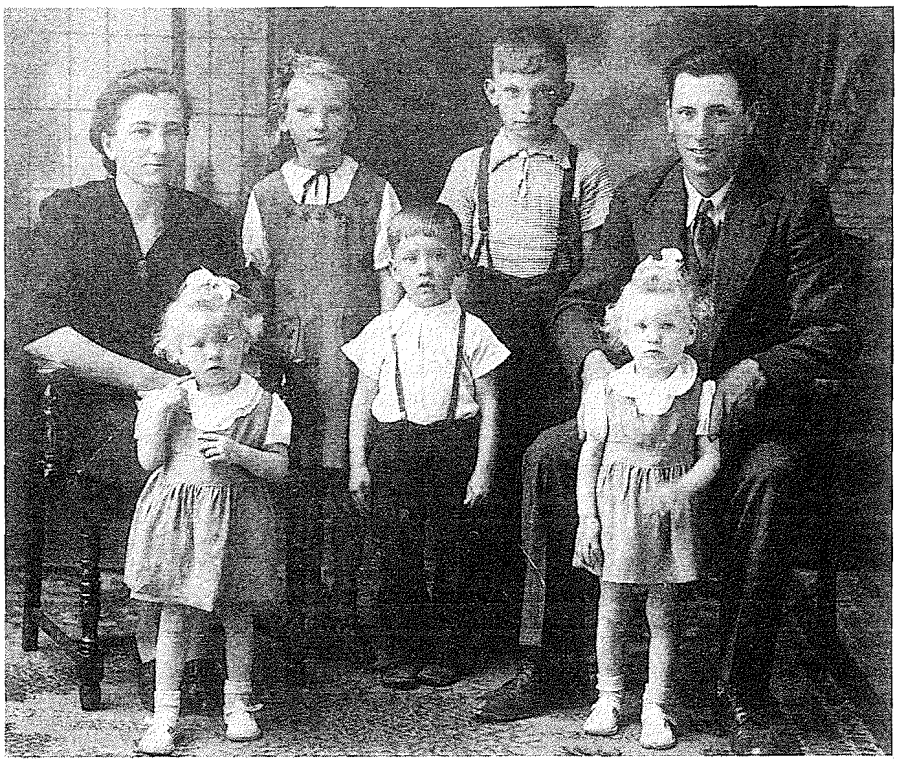
Election-time did not elicit a strong response of voters. The low turnout at the polls was related to the traditional reticence of Old Colony Mennonites to vote. In the private school era, polls were located in Haskett at the W. M. Elias machine shop, or at Peter Elias' blacksmith shop.

The Cooperative Movement

The cooperative movement had experienced a strong beginning with positive results in the Altona area, where the Rhineland Agricultural Society had been organized by teachers and progressive farmers. The farming background in Stanley Municipality was different. The Reinlaender farmers were more conservative and initially would have nothing to do with cooperative enterprises. There was a distinct division between a few large landholders who were innovative in their farming methods and the small landholders who barely eked out a living from their land. Nevertheless, the big farmers in Stanley Municipality were able to show by example what could be done to overcome drought, depression, grasshoppers and rust.[19] The Stanley Agricultural Society was established in 1947, 17 years after the Rhineland group.

During his tenure as a teacher in Blumenfeld (1944-1946), Jim Hamm acted as manager of the Winkler Cooperative Bureau of Education whose aim was to organize study groups. Jim Hamm organized groups in twenty villages. Most often, local teachers assumed leadership and led discussions of the groups which met weekly to learn about practical ways in which farmers could work together for their mutual benefit. In Blumenfeld, Jim Hamm gave leadership to the weekly study group. He was also a guest speaker at other groups. He was paid $5.00 per meeting for a slide presentation and talk.[20]

Jim Hamm dedicated many years to the cooperative movement in Stanley Municipality. Hamm cut short his teaching career in Blumenfeld to become manager of the Winkler Cooperative Creamery. He was president of the board of Pembina Co-op Canners in Reinland in 1945. He was instrumental in founding the Blumenfeld Credit Union. In an interview 35 years after his experience, Jim Hamm described his feelings of disillustionment when it became



The Peter Dueck family. Peter Dueck and his brother, John Dueck, were popular community leaders in the 1940's. L-R.: Back Row: Mrs. Dueck, Helen, Jake, Mr. Dueck, Marge, Johnny, Anne.

clear that profit was a more powerful motivater than fair dealing and cooperation. "In our world today, I don't see how the cooperatives can exist unless they put emphasis on education of the consumer," he said.

The farmer's cooperatives south of Winkler were encouraged by Dr. Charlie Walkof of the Morden Research Station to develop a vegetable cannery. Walkof believed the soil in that area was suitable for vegetable crops like corn, beans, peas and tomatoes. A cannery would provide a market for local farmers. Pembina Co-op Canners was organized in February, 1945. Peter Dueck and John Dueck represented Blumenfeld on the first board. Although some members of the board preferred a Winkler location because it was more centralized, the majority of the farmers of Reinland wanted the cannery to be located in their village. Financial assistance from Co-op Vegetable Oils in Altona and from the three other co-ops in Reinland made it possible to have the cannery in operation by the summer of 1945. The first two years were successful, but heavy losses in 1948 caused the cannery to close. The success of a Pembina Co-op Canners had not gone unnoticed. A private firm built a cannery in Winkler in 1948. Because it had a firmer economic base, it could weather the fluctuating market and crop conditions.[21]

Blumenfeld Credit Union

Across the country, the cooperative movement was giving birth to credit unions which permitted local shareholders to control their investments and interest rates. The credit union was a complex organization which included executive officers, a board of directors, a supervisory committee and a credit committee. The first credit unions were dependant on the voluntary and responsible leadership of shareholders rather than a hired staff.

Citizens of the Blumenfeld community were motivated to begin a credit union by the local teacher, Jim Hamm. No minutes of the

organizational meetings and first year of operation were available.

Besides his responsibility as secretary of the credit union board until May, 1946, Jim Hamm filled the position of manager for the first year. At the second annual meeting on January 20, 1945, John Dueck, was appointed manager. He was be paid 1% of the loans issued. At a board meeting, not a week later, he had taken inventory of his new task and made proposals to facilitate record keeping and to improve the efficiency of the operation. The minutes of that meeting read:

> The manager, John Dueck, told the directors that he was running short of the following materials: Member's application cards, application for loan forms, financial statements, and cash disbursement vouchers. He also said that the credit union should have proper minute books, check books for the Supervisory Committee and minute sheets for the Credit Committee.[22]

John Dueck made the necessary changes. In May, 1945, Jake E. Neufeld who operated the store in Blumenfeld, was appointed assistant manager. This appointment probably came because of the availability of Neufeld's time and location at the store. The arrangement permitted members to make small deposits when they went to the store on business. It was exacting however, to keep record of all the small deposits which were paid into the till. Maintaining a set of balanced books became increasingly difficult, so the arrangement at the store was terminated.[23] John P. Klassen was appointed manager in April, 1946.

Another issue which required ongoing discussion was repayment of overdue loans. The board took measures in February, 1946, to penalize overdue loans by ½¢ per dollar per week. But by the next month, the credit committee found that "the loans situation had turned worse."[24] A move was made in July 1946, to decrease the loan limit to $100.00, but by November of the same year, loans were being granted for amounts of $200.00 and $250.00.[25] Most of the small loans were for farm operations such as purchasing livestock, feed, or implements. In some cases, loans were made for living costs such as fuel and housing.

The issues of management and loans contributed to a weakened financial situation. The loss was borne by members of the board: John Dueck, Peter Dueck, Cornie Wieler, Jake E. Neufeld, George Klassen, John P. Klassen, Peter G. Elias, and others. Each had to contribute $51.00.

Henry P. Giesbrecht, teacher, had replaced Jim Hamm as secretary in May, 1946.

Because membership in the Blumenfeld Credit Union was restricted to the Blumenfeld area residents the credit union grew slowly. In 1944, there were 46 members. By 1945, the credit union had almost tripled its membership to 115 members.[26] Because the increase included women, children and youth, there was not a corresponding increase in assets.

The difficulties of securing a qualified manager and of paying the manager an adequate salary for his work were among the reasons for considering an amalgamation with the Winkler Credit Union. The decision to amalgamate came at a special members' meeting on July 14, 1947 when it appeared that the management question could not be resolved. Dave Loeppky of the Winkler Credit Union attended the meeting to discuss the advantages of uniting all the small credit unions into one centralized credit union which would have an office

Third Annual Meeting (cont.)

The intervals, during which the scrutineers counted ballots, were enjoyably filled by musical interludes: The male quartette, consisting of George and John Klassen, John Friesen and Corny Dyk sang three selections, "Co-Operation Marches On", "The Credit Union Song" and "A Smile is a Funny Thing".

Violinists Peter Elias and John Klassen, accompanied by George Klassen, favored us with "Listen to the Mockingbird".

H. P. Giesbrecht gave a short address emphasizing the need of a study group for the purpose of training prospective committee members.

Minutes, Blumenfeld Credit Union.

Officers of the Blumenfeld Credit Union

1945	1946	1947
Board of Directors		
Peter R. Elias (Pres.)	John Dueck (Pres.)	John Dueck (Pres.)
Geo. W. Elias (V.P.)	* (V.P.)	John P. Klassen
M. J. Hamm (Sec.)	M. J. Hamm (Sec.)	M. J. Hamm (Sec.) (May)
		H. P. Giesbrecht (Sec.)
Peter Dueck	John P. Klassen	Frank P. Klassen
*	Corny Wieler	Peter Dueck
*	Jake E. Neufeld	*
Manager		
John Dueck	John P. Klassen (April)	
Jake E. Neufeld (May)	**Supervisory Committee**	
Isaak Warkentin	Isaak Warkentin	Peter Dyck
Jake Wieler	Jake Wieler	Jake Wieler
H. P. Giesbrecht	H. P. Giesbrecht	Jake E. Neufeld
Credit Committee		
John Dueck	J. P. Klassen	John P. Elias
Peter Dueck	Peter Dueck	George P. Klassen
J. E. Neufeld	Peter G. Elias	Peter G. Elias
Annual Meeting		
Jan. 20, 1945	Jan. 19, 1946	Jan. 18, 1947
Attendance at Annual Meetings		
44 of 46 members (*incomplete)	37 of 115 members	unrecorded

and steady employed management.[27]

The Blumenfeld Credit Union provided a community service that was in many ways similar to the functions of the Waisenamt. In spite of the fact that the Waisenamt had failed, the Old Colony leadership supported the credit unions.[28] The credit union was successful in strengthening the community because its philosophy and operation was independant of church ties. It renewed the sense of community which had been weakened by the change from the *Gewann*-village to the farm-operator village. The credit union accomplished the feat of pulling together the various individuals and groups within the village to work for a common benefit. Valuable experience in running a complex organization was gained. This experience provided the encouragement and confidence to attempt other community projects. In his study of the Mennonite settlements in Manitoba, Dr. John Warkentin credited the cooperative movement, of which the credit unions are a part, for developing positive attitudes and skills in community organization.

> Many Mennonites still look askance at the way in which the cooperatives have emphasized education, but full credit must be given to the cooperatives for finally making almost the entire Mennonite community realize that it is impossible to retreat from the larger Canadian society. And the cooperatives have amply demonstrated that it is possible to participate in Canadian society without necessarily abandoning the Mennonite social traditions, as many were afraid would happen.[29]

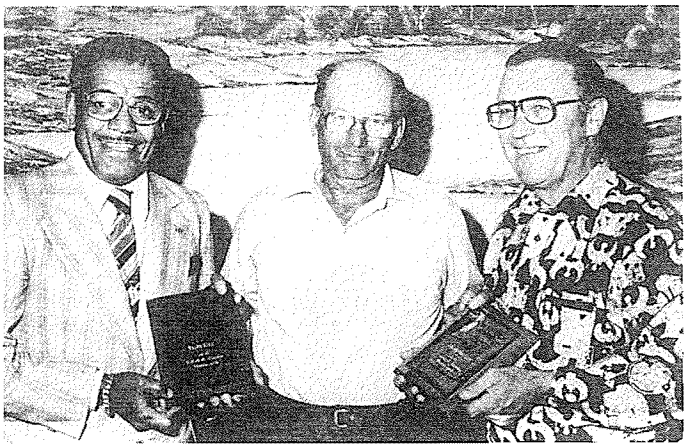
A Distinctive Culture

Many scholars, including E. K. Francis, Leonard Sawatzky and Carl Redekop, have described the social habits which set the Mennonites apart as an ethnic group, a nationality within the Canadian Mosaic. In the following pages we will describe the social activities of the village community with a particular sensitivity to Blumenfeld.

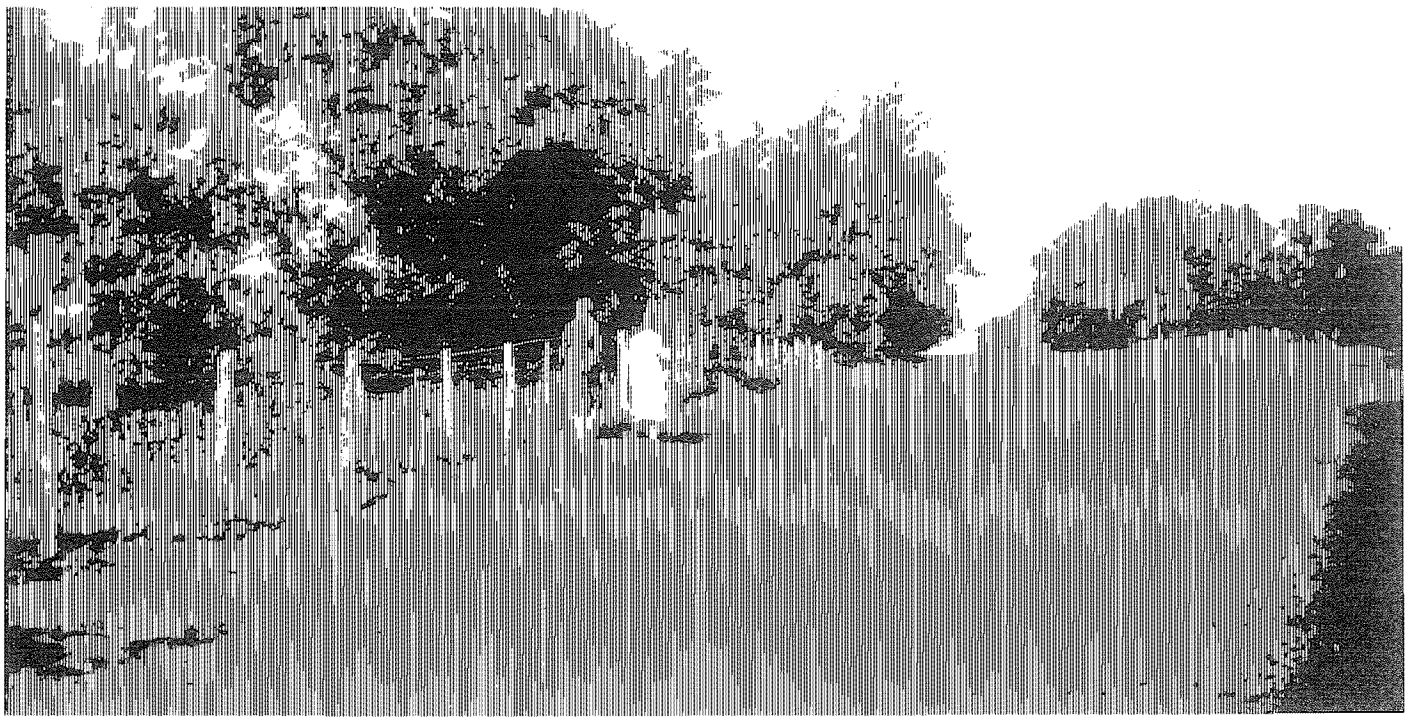
The most popular social activity of the Mennonite people is visiting. Generous hospitality and the willingness to overlook differences of church affiliation have given the village of Blumenfeld a sense of community that is based on friendship. Blumenfeld hospitality has always been associated with good food. The ethnic foods of the Mennonites are probably still more popular than the hot dogs, hamburgers, french fries and macaroni of the modern age of fast-food.

The first language of the majority of Blumenfelders, including the youngest generation, is Low German. The villagers regard anyone who does not speak their dialect as *Englaenda*. School teacher Sharon Loeppky recalls how it took several months before some of her students and their parents believed that a person with a name like hers could not speak Low German. They believed she was stubbornly refusing to speak it.

The activities that occupy the young people of the village point to the values embraced by their parents. For many youths, the clubs and choirs of the cooperative era provided a positive recreational alternative. For others, the village street remained the hub of social activity.



George P. Klassen presented plaques of appreciation to Ralph King and Jim McSweeney for their efforts in the Valley Rehab Fund Raising Telethon. George P. Klassen has been a tireless fund raiser and organizer



Wie Singen Von Een Darp, Darp Blomenfeld

1. Onse Foadasch de kaumen von
   Jantzied daut groote Meah,
   Sochten noh Frieheit en noh mea Laund.
   En die Pembina Dreeajk
   Doa laeden see Darpa aun.
   Doa licht daut Blomenfeld, doa sen ejk tues.

   Chorus
   Von de Leacht, bet die Dwaegaus
   Von de Weidschtap bet Kjoikenhoff,
   Nich' wiet von de Rieh woa daut Fahrjoasch
   Woata rahnt
   Woa daut Graus so fehl greena sit
   Woata fehl scheena schmajt
   Hia en dit Blomenfeld, hia feehl ejk tues.

2. En daut Darp Blomenfeld wausen Papel en Socka Beem
   Plumen en Kjoaschen Beem, Olbassem Stued'
   Uck Reboaba en Suearum Stued' Kresbea en Hinbea Struck
   Waust en daut Blomenfeld. Hia sen ejk tues.

3. En daut Darp Blomenfeld
   Woa de True Duev en Rotbuck singt,
   Buet hia met Spoaling en Schwaulen sien Nahst.
   Woa de Bee scheene Blome fingt
   En Fahrjoa de Aumsel singt,
   Hia en dit Blomenfeld, hia es mien tues.

4. En daut Darp Blomenfeld woa de Enwohna frindlich sent,
   Hia jeit de Jahst daut Spazieren so scheen,
   Woa daut Faspa fehl scheene schmajkt,
   Hia woa Noaba sien Noaba tjant,
   Hia en daut Blomenfeld, hia blift mien tues.


M. Warkentine

Koamt Moal Spazieren

Spazieren is the favorite pastime of Blumenfeld people. Over the centuries, this popular social activity has been perfected to an art. Gracious hospitality is shown in making conversation and in preparing a *Faspa* (lunch) that provides a taster's choice in home-baking.

The invitation, extended informally to all friends, expresses the anticipation of sitting down in the living room for a long visit.

Je send aul lang nich noh ons jekoame.
Wie wieren latst bie juent. Nu as it juen
turn no uns te koamen.

Friends and family are warmly greeted and made to feel at ease. The welcome is hospitable, and best expressed in Low German.

Welkoam hia
Koamt 'neen
Wel wie uns enna groata Stov doal satten enn ve'tallen.

The conversation quickly gets underway after the preliminaries of the weather.

Woat hast du dann enn disse latste Weajk gedone?
Met waut hast du doat Drock gehoat?
De Mensche saien du vest enn nean Schtoal bujen?

Faspa is served at 3:00. *O'enkost (supper) is eaten at 6:00. The invitation to a modest meal is given.*

De koffe as reed. Koamt saht juent bie.
Joa, koamt noam Desch.

The guests are amazed. The invitation is not to share merely a cup of coffee, but to a table laden with home-made buns, cheese and meat, jams and pickles, cakes and cookies. This is the pride of the Blumenfeld hostess and she responds warmly to the compliments.

Wie hauden jistern Jast, und ejk haud nich fehl Tiet reed tu'mojken.
Halpt juent selvst. Wie habben mea enna Koama.
Noch mea Koffe?

When appetites are satisfied and the children demand attention, it is time to leave. The words of farewell indicate that there is indeed a bond of friendship that ties neighbours together.

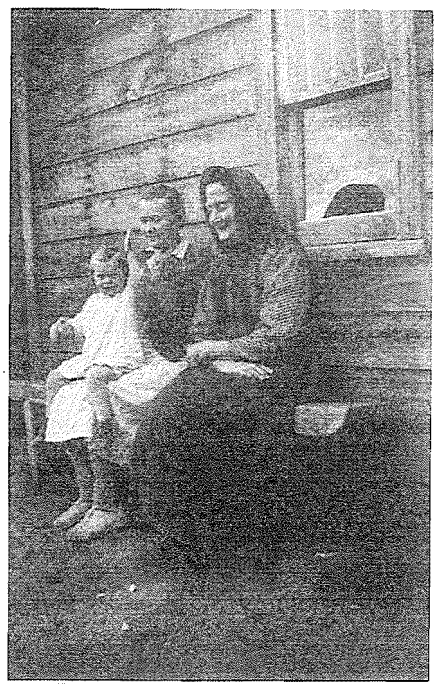
Addee.
Op wada se'en.
Koamt moal wada.
Gleckliche Reise (if the trip is long, or the weather is bad)

On Monday morning, two neighbours chat *aeva den tuen* (over the fence) about the pleasures of their Sunday visits.

Wie wieren jistern bie Pannash. Doa hav wie sure scheen spaziet.
Bie de Wieben haben wie j'nobat bet daut so loat wea de Kinja hoaden upjeheat met schlaemmen en wieren oala enjeschloeppen.
De Pannashe hoad so'en feinen Desch geschpreedt. See kaun sea scheenen Aupple Pay backen.
Enn dann t' latst must ejk noch de Geschicht vetallen von donn aus ejk und de Darps Junges. . .

Spazieren is a family activity for evenings and Sundays. It is not unusual to visit at three different homes in one Sunday. Children become well acquainted with cousins and other relatives. Adults socialize with married brothers and sisters (*Geschwista*), thus making the extended family a strong social unit. On weekends there is a concerted effort to visit *de Ellern* (parents). Grandmothers prepare an extra large pot of soup and *Plumen Moos* for Sundays when most of the children and grandchildren come to visit. Fathers and grand-

Mrs. John Dueck and her daughter, Linda, visit with Mrs. John Wolfe.





Typical village scene, 1950.

fathers take advantage of Sunday afternoons to have a nap (*Noamedachschloap*) while mothers and grandmothers clear the table, inspect the garden and care for the children.

A survey of Blumenfeld families demonstrated that visiting remains an important social activity. Families visit other homes 1-3 times per week, and receive guests in their homes as frequently. The majority of the visits are between relatives.

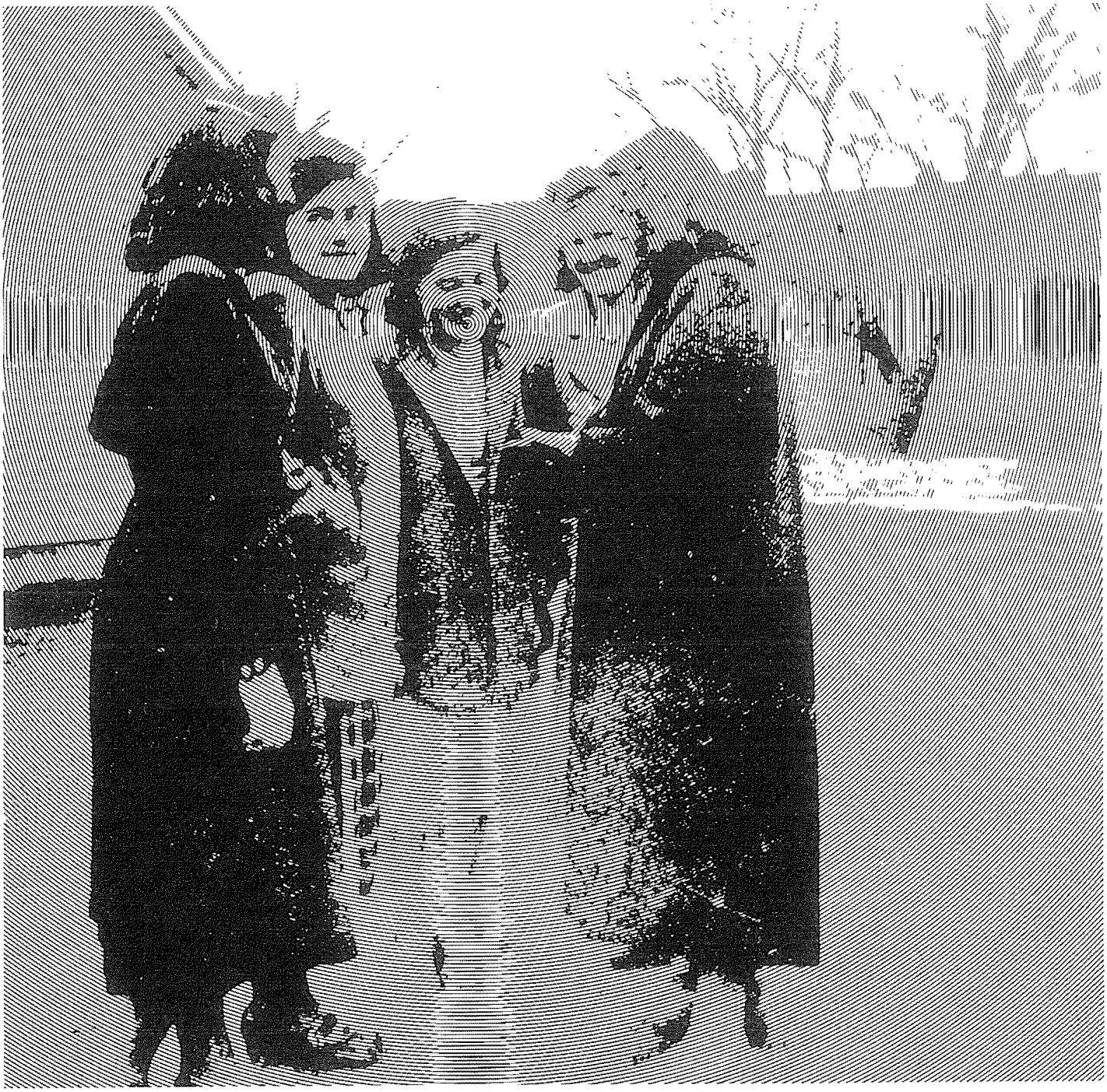
Nobern is another pleasant way of socializing. While *spazieren* describes the planned and somewhat formal visits of families and relatives, *nobern* (roughly translated as "neighbouring") describes the pleasure of coincidental meetings that become long chats. *Nobern* is what draws Blumenfeld men to the coffee shops in Winkler and what transforms a short errand to the village store into an all-morning excursion. *Nobern* keeps telephones busy and fence-lines functional. *Nobern* makes it difficult for a chairperson to call a meeting to order and provides a convenient excuse for coffee and dainties afterwards.

The Winkler coffee shops and the Blumenfeld store are popular meeting places for the men of the village. It is not as acceptable for women to go visiting by themselves. Certainly they would be out of place in the coffee shops. It is more common for women to visit a sister or other close relative. The regular meetings of the Blumenfeld Ladies Auxiliary meets some of the social needs of women.



The local store is an informal meeting place for the men of the village.

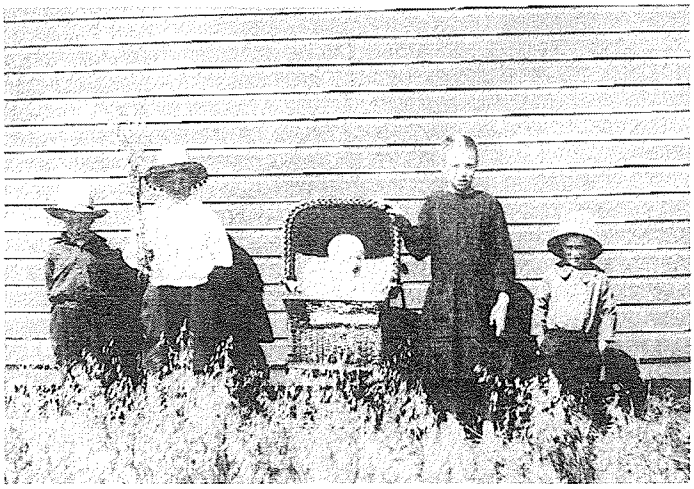
Visiting is an adult activity. Children and youth, unlike adults, have a restless energy that makes sofa conversations intolerable after half an hour. What are the social activities, organized or informal, which have occupied the younger generation?



The Village Street: Meeting Place for Youth

For nearly three-quarters of a century, it was expected that children could entertain themselves by visiting, as adults did. Recreational activities, organized clubs were non-existant. It appears that this was done deliberately. Why would the community of Blumenfeld choose to limit organized social opportunities for children and youth?

Firstly, it was assumed that there should be enough work at home to keep children busy. Children today, as in the past, are taught at an early age to be responsible for household and farming tasks. Because families were large, children had to become self-reliant. At an early age they were responsible for clothing and washing themselves. Older children had to care for younger brothers and sisters, as



Children of Cornelius and Katherine Wall, circa 1926, L-R: Corny, Abe, Susan (in carriage) Katherina and John.



George Klassen is seen feeding the chickens.



Tina Peters, Susan Janzen and Anne Janzen walking along the village street.

well as assume responsibility for the many tasks of operating the farm. Secondly, there was resistance to introducing children to new ways. There was a concerted effort to keep the children bound to the farms and villages. It was not uncommon for children to be totallly unfamiliar with the village 3 miles away. Isaac M. Dyck stated the issue simply, *"Wie sendt Formash Volk"*[31] Thirdly, the traditional ways were enforced by the *Ohms*. Haskett, a village only 3 miles away, had no church and no *Ohm*, so a variety of activities for children, youth and adults were introduced, primarily by the teachers of the public school located there. The Blumenfeld youth were kept isolated from this kind of "worldly activity".



Blumenfeld young people, L-R: John Wolfe, Sara Wolfe, Elizabeth Wolfe, Miss Friesen, Margaret Friesen, Tina Wolfe, Henry Elias.

Due to these circumstances, the young people had to make their own entertainment. They proved that, pressed by necessity, they could be ingenious in creating good times. The village street became the centre of social life for the youth. Gangs of *Darps Junges* (village boys) roamed the village street in search of adventure. Groups of girls walked the *Foutstich* (footpath) or stood along the *Gaussentuen* (fenceline).

The cooperative movement of the 1940's had initiated a new era characterized by a willingness to change and an awareness of the benefits that came from working together. Out of these fresh attitudes came a greater openness to organize activities for youth and children. The 4-H programs were supported by the Agricultural Societies. Sports and music became popular organized youth activities.



Young women, L-R: Annie Janzen, Eva Giesbrecht, Tina Elias, Mary Neufeld, Mary Giesbrecht, Anne Giesbrecht, Susie Janzen. Circa 1945.





Young women enjoying a summer day, L-R: Helena Elias, Katherine Elias, Mary Neufeld, Annie Reimer, Annie Dyck, Katharina Wall.

Darps' Junges

Throughout the history of Blumenfeld, the village street has been the meeting place for the *Darps' Junges*. This social centre has been the place where deep and lasting friendships have formed. To this day, the comradely relationship of adult men, established in childhood, is strong enough to overlook differences of wealth, power and family ties. The network of supportive friends can be relied upon in times of crisis. These relationships contribute to the atmosphere of informality in group meetings.

There are some factors which might seriously threaten the solidarity of these youthful friendships. A transfer of church affiliation or pursuit of higher education would be regarded as attempts to acquire status. Such action would be rejected as "being proud."

The lack of recreational facilities forced the youth to depend on their own resources. Many times, a noisy baseball game provided a release for pent-up energies. Other times, the youthful energy combined with adolescent defiance resulted in pranks and escapades which made fathers' hair turn grey and mothers hold their young more closely. When men visit with men these tales of adventure are told and retold until they acquire the proportions of legends. These are the tales of the *Darps' Schlingels* (village rascals).

> *Derjk Klaussen goaded his horses to a run and then crouched down in the wagon. The team and wagon tore down the village street. Peter Elias ran out to the street, yelling "Schrugen fleehen wajch".*
>
> Soon others were running too, yelling "*Schrugen fleehen wajch*".
>
> Finally the young man pulled in his horses, stood up in the wagon and calmly asked those who had gathered, "*Wea well woat von Winkla bestallen?*"[32]



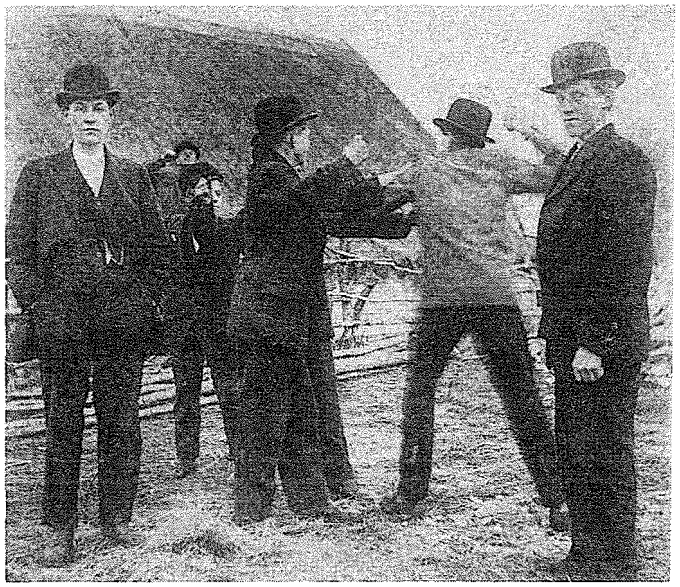
L-R: George Friesen, George P. Klassen and Peter Neufeld.



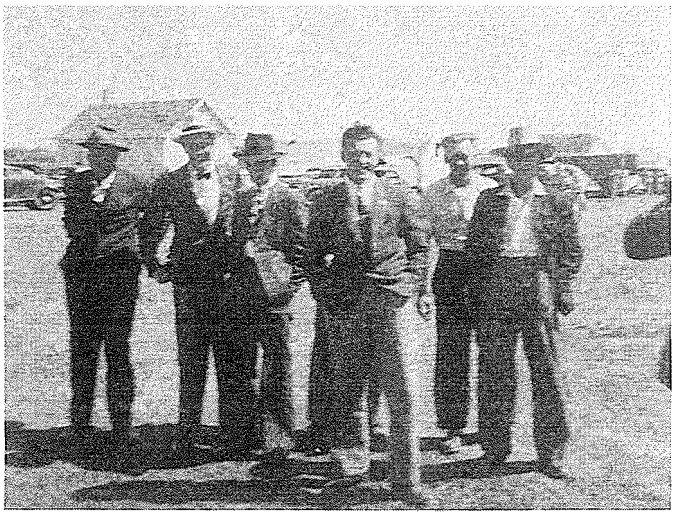
Blumenfeld youth L-R: C. P. Reimer, Jacob Neudorf, Abraham Wall, John Schlamp, Henry Wall.



Jacob Neufeld, H. P. Elias, ?, A. P. Janzen. Circa 1910.



These *Darps Junges* found the pacifist principles of the Mennonites difficult to apply to everyday relationships. The photo includes C. C. Reimer, D. Wieler and A. F. Janzen (light jacket). The thatched roof of a barn is visible in the background.

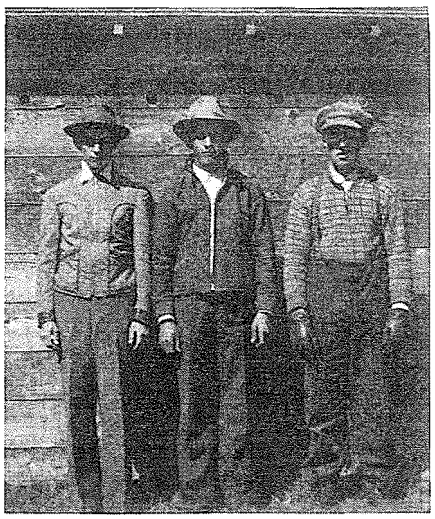


Young men at the W. M. Elias yard on the occasion of the wedding of Annie Elias and D. A. Fehr. L-R: Isaac Elias, Henry Dyck, Jake Neufeld, Isaac Friesen, Dan Klassen, John Friesen.

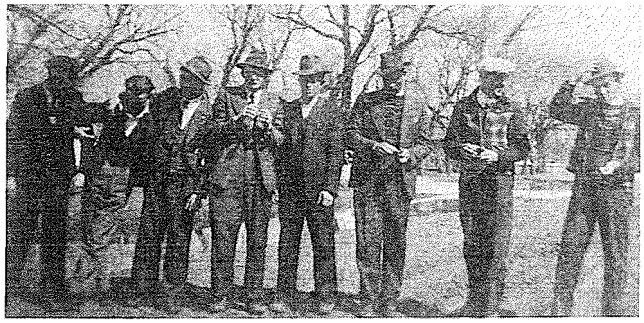
There was a meanness that was accepted and expected. Big boys picked on little boys.

My friends and I had to stay out of the way of the *Groote Junges* (big boys). One summer evening some of us dared to bother the older boys by teasing them. My friends were John J. Klassen, Henry Dueck, Isaak Dueck, John Friesen, Peter Friesen, Frank Reimer and George Reimer.

The older boys started chasing us. We led them onto the J. F. Klassen yard where we had strung baler-twine across the driveway. My friends and I knew where it was and could run over it, but the older boys did not see it and got tripped up. Some of the bigger boys, including Henry Zacharias, Cornie and Abe Giesbrecht and Isaac Friesen, looked for us young rascals, but they could not find us hiding behind the *Kreibuzzahs* (tumbleweeds). We sneaked away on them that time.[33]



L-R: Jake Neufeld, Peter Elias, J. D. Klassen.



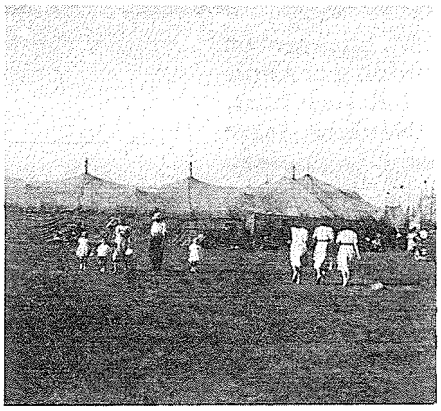
The older group of boys included (L-R): Dan Klassen, Jake Neufeld, Peter Friesen, Peter Neufeld, John Friesen, Isaac Dyck, Isaac Friesen, John J. Klassen.



A meeting of cousins, L-R: John J. Klassen, Peter Janzen, John Janzen, John R. Friesen, John Wall and John Klassen. All but the latter are cousins of John R. Friesen.



Blumenfeld young men on a lazy Sunday afternoon.

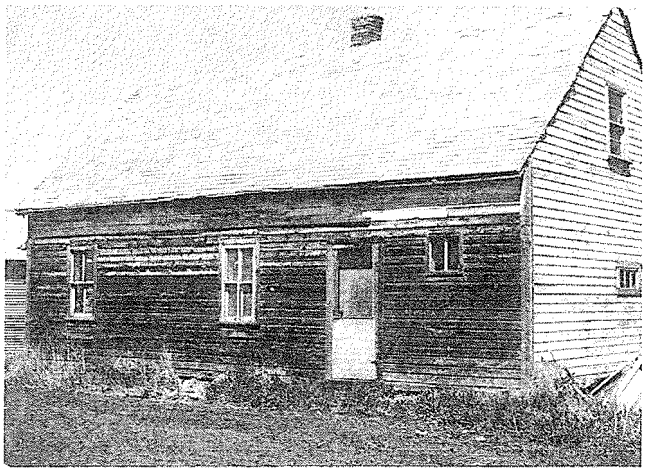


Blumenfeld young ladies at the circus in Morden.

As youths, the boys walked to the neighbouring villages of Haskett or Hochfeld. After a night out, the boys would meet for a rendez-vous behind John F. Klassen's barn. Here the evening's escapades were discussed in minute detail before the boys returned home.

In the gangs of older boys, nicknames originated for many of the people of the village. Halloween was a time for pranks, and it was not unusual for buggies to be found on rooftops or for straw bales to be scattered.

The code of ethics accepted by the closed communities was so restricting that it only whetted adolescent appetites for freedom. The youth of the 1940's were curious about "worldly pleasures", particularly dancing. But inhibitions regarding language and manners prevented the young men and women from frequenting the dances in the town of Morden. Instead, the youth attempted to create local "dance-halls" which were really abandoned houses. The former Krahn house in Blumenfeld became a favorite week-end haunt. Another "dance-hall" was the *Juedenkluben* in Chortitz.[34]



This house was used as a dance hall while it stood vacant in Blumenfeld. Today it serves as a granary at a farm north of Schanzenfeld.



Movies, too, were forbidden entertainment. The disapproval of the elders did not prevent these young people from catching a ride to Winkler with George D. Klassen to see "Gone With The Wind."

George and John Klassen regularly provided the music for the dances. On their way to Chortitz one evening, their car ran into a cow. The boys had the cow slaughtered by a local butcher and borrowed another car. This one had a flat tire. Finally the Klassen boys arrived at the dance and everyone had a good time.[35]

The beauty of soft music and graceful movement fascinated the youth. They were only beginning to sieze the freedom to own musical instruments and to play popular music. The movement of dance was appealing to the senses of this generation. But where could they attain the inner resources to respond appropriately and with dignity? Dancing, as a form of recreation, could not become a wholesome alternative to a group that was culturally repressed in the area of the arts.

Irate parents made several attempts to intervene by boarding up the entrances to the Blumenfeld dance-hall. The youth could not be stopped. Finally someone gave the dance-floor a liberal sprinkling of red pepper. Shortly thereafter the building was moved out of the village.[36]



In search of adventure, these men left Blumenfeld to find winter employment in the lumber camps of northern Ontario. They are picture upon their return in May, 1949, L-R: David Klassen, John Klassen, Isaac Dyck.

Musical Expression

Good music brightens a lonely spirit; it soothes a troubled heart; it moves happy people to clap their hands and tap their feet. But for all these wonderful qualities of music, the Blumenfeld people have only begun to discover the joy of music-making in the last 25 years. The freedom to enjoy many types of music has been won with some struggle. The Reinlaender Church, until its move to Mexico, placed severe limitations on instrumental music and singing. It did not permit its members to play musical instruments of any sort. The old melodies of the *Gesangbuch* were the only music used for singing. Limited musical expression was observed to some extent by the Old Colony Church in its early years.

But how can a child resist the pleasure of new sounds and harmonies? D. A. Fehr, former mayor of the town of Morden, spent his childhood years in Blumenfeld. He tells the following story:

My mother and I were going to town (Haskett) with the horse and buggy. The horse was going at a very leisurely pace. I was sitting in the buggy with my feet dangling over the sides, drinking in the warm sunshine. Suddenly I spotted something shiny on the road. I jumped out of the moving buggy to retrieve it. To my delight, it was a harmonica! I begged my mother to allow me to keep it. She consented, but warned me to keep it out of sight. When we arrived home, I hid it carefully in the *Raechakoama* (smokehouse) so that the *Ohms* would not hear of it.

Ohm Isaac Dyck, my uncle, had an adopted son, Peter Suderman, who was my good friend. Would I be able to trust him to keep this secret from his father? Peter was astonished when I whispered to him, "I have a harmonica!" Of course he wanted to play the forbidden instrument. We took it from its hiding place and began to play. Our mouths were red and sore when we put it back and went home for supper.

Many families have a story to tell about the restrictions on making music.

Abram P. Janzen owned an accordion which he played inside the house for the children's enjoyment in the evenings. But someone, hardly a friend, informed the *Ohms*. When Abram P. Janzen appeared before the *Ohms* on *Donnadach*, he satisfied them with a promise never to play the instrument again. He kept that promise, much to the dismay of his family.[37]

By the 1940's, the horizons and experiences of youth had broadened to such an extent that it was impossible to repress the drives to

discover and experiment with new ways of self-expression. Peter G. Elias took fiddle lessons from teacher John K. Friesen of Haskett. At the age of 18 years, he began a choir in the village of Blumenfeld. Not all the residents approved, but even the very vocal disapproval of Mrs. Abram P. Janzen could not prevent 25 or more young people from gathering at the school for *Singstund* (choir rehearsal). Most of those who came were not able to read music, but they sang in harmony with the help of the *Russlaender* whose churches in Russia, and later in Canada, enjoyed singing in four-part harmony. Choir leader Peter G. Elias taught each section its part as there was no piano accompianment to lead the voices. The choir rehearsed special numbers for the school Christmas program and for other occasions. They chose their music from the *Evangelium Buch, Zions Buch* and *Silberklaengen.*

In later years, the choir was directed by the local teacher. Phil Giesbrecht is remembered as one of the choir leaders.

> All the others had gone to *Singstund.* John Janzen wanted to go too, but his parents' disapproval kept him away for a while. Finally he decided that he would go secretly. At the Christmas program, John Janzen was part of the choir. That evening there was *Donnadach* at home and John had to promise not to go again.

The choir enjoyed helping in the preparation for the Christmas program by filling the children's bags and by decorating the school.

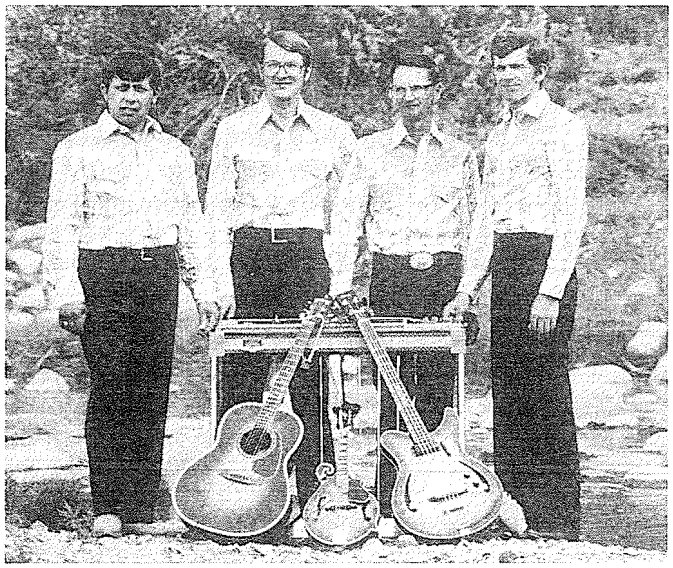
In the early 1970's, a girls' choir was directed by Grace Zacharias, daughter of Rev. George J. and Margaret Zacharias, who was then a teacher at the village school. This choir was later conducted by Karen Zacharias. The short drama productions complimented an evening of singing.

Marilynn Zacharias was probably the first piano teacher in the village. Around 1960 she gave piano lessons at 25¢ a lesson to village children who were so eager to learn that they took turns using the school piano for practising. At that time, no family owned a piano. Only Tina Thiessen's family had an organ. Today, at least half the Blumenfeld families own a piano or organ. Martha Klassen of Friedensfeld is a teacher for many of the younger students of organ and piano. In the last 15 to 20 years, families have acquired a variety of instruments including accordion, bass guitar, mandolin, and violin.



George D. Klassen, better known as "Bargin Centre" Klassen.

The Western Gentlemen entertain at local social gatherings including Winkler's "Old Time Value Days". These Blumenfeld musicians, (L-R): Peter Stoesz, Peter Klassen, Henry Wiebe and Jake Elias, enjoy bluegrass and country gospel music.



"The Country Gentlemen" is a local musical group which performs country gospel music as well as bluegrass and western music. An album, entitled "Country Gospel", was cut in 1980 with the assistance of Century 21 studios. This album features Pete Klassen, Henry Wiebe, Peter Stoesz and Jake Elias in vocal and instrumental music. Instruments played by the group include mandolin, banjo, guitar, bass guitar and steel guitar. Each person in the group claims to be a self-taught musician. Reading music is still an unfamiliar skill. The group continues to learn new music for their many performances at wedding receptions, Old Time Value Days, mission sales, and other events. It might be said that their choice of music reflects the musical taste of the people in the Blumenfeld community.



Enjoying nature's ice rink are William Reimer and Mary Reimer.

Sports

Improved transportation and an easing of the church's restrictions on competitive sports led to increased interaction between village baseball and hockey teams.

Around 1945, interest in competitive sports took young people to Walhalla, Altona, Emerson and Letellier to watch baseball games.

> Sunday August 1, 1946. Cloudy and cool. We all went to Letellier to see the ball game. We ate dinner and Altona played against the Indians. We went back through Emerson.[38]

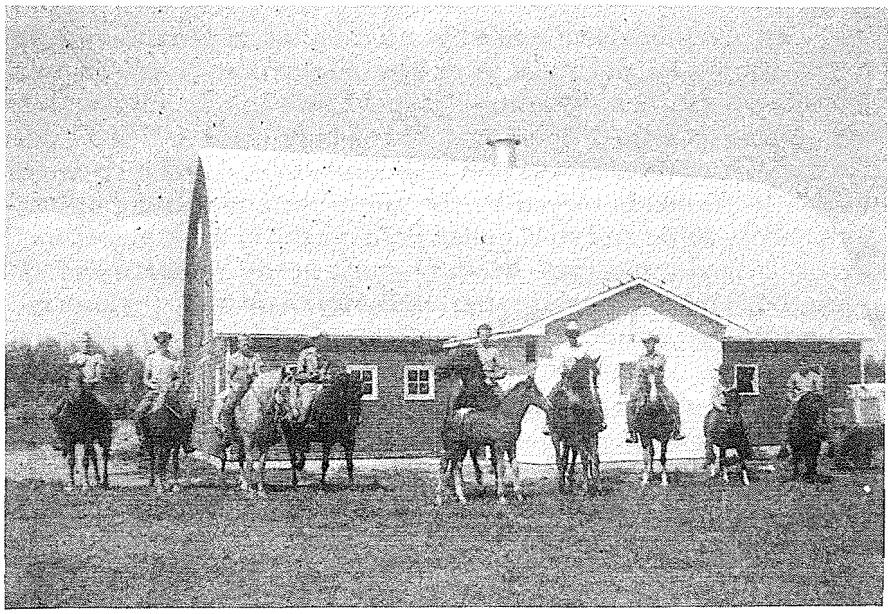
Hockey teams from various villages had formed a type of league in 1950. Mason and Wakeham schools were represented in the league as well. In the winter of 1980-81, Blumenfeld had a hockey team, coached by teacher Dave Goertzen, in the Morden Linament League.



A hard-ball team from Blumenfeld, circa 1925. (L-R): Front Row: Henry Elias, Frank Klassen, David A. Fehr, Peter Wiebe and Abe Wiebe. Back Row: George Krahn, Frank Driedger, Peter Giesbrecht, J. Wolfe, Henry Neufeld, Abe Neufeld, B. Krahn and J. Elias.



Ball Team, (L-R): Front Row: Dan Klassen, George Zacharias, Abe Klassen. Back Row: Barney Klassen, Isaac Wolfe, Will Dyck and Herman Klassen.



Blumenfeld Riders at the J. J. Elias farm, 1970, L-R: Aron Heide, Jake Heide, John Dyck, Jake Elias, Isaac Elias, Peter Elias, John Janzen.

New Patterns

The arrival of the *Russlaender* between 1922 and 1927 filled the vacuum left by the Mennonites who had moved to Mexico. Many of the Russian Mennonite immigrants came without money or possessions. The *Kornelson* and Albrecht families moved into the house at the west end of Blumenfeld village and lived together for a year until other housing arrangements could be afforded. The men hired out to local farmers to help with the threshing.

Although they came impoverished, the *Russlaender* brought with them the determination to re-establish their farms, their culture, and their churches as they had enjoyed them prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. Their influence speeded up the process of acculturation and of following the values and customs of Canadian society. But because the *Russlaender* supported a progressive school system and because they sought the fellowship of the more liberal churches, they did not fit into the accepted patterns of village life. Their confidence in establishing new patterns soon made them a separate group within the larger Mennonite Community of Manitoba.

The *Russlaenders* who made their first Canadian homes in Blumenfeld stayed for short periods and then moved. Today there is no family of *Russlaender* background living in the village.

Women Working Together

The women of Blumenfeld frequently visited over the fence or across the street. Anne Reimer, made these observations:

> If there was sickness in a house, neighbours looked in on each other and brought baking. If the cream-separator broke down, we picked up the milk and went to the neighbours. There was probably more communication then than there is today in spite of the fact that the telephone and the car made communication easier. People are more selective in making friends today. Privacy is guarded.[39]

The village women assisted destitute people moving into the community. They helped the Russian Mennonite families in the 1920's. They helped the Mexican Mennonites who started moving back in the 1930's and continue to come in a steady stream. The first residents of Friedensfeld were assisted with donations of clothing, furniture and dishes.

In the spring of 1950, the whole community contributed articles

for the Red Cross Sale whose proceeds helped the victims of the flood in the Red River Valley. Mothers and grandmothers contributed articles to the Red Cross Sales that were organized annually by Blumenfeld school teachers.

A group of single young women formed a sewing circle (*Naehverein*) in 1954. This group met at the school and did handwork. Their reason for organizing was to provide an opportunity for young women working in their parents' homes, to visit. In 1957 this group produced a drama. "The Little Red Schoolhouse", a drama prepared by the young men in the village was presented that same evening. The latter drama was a popular home-made play which poked fun at the school.

The adult women of Blumenfeld first organized a *Naehverein* in 1955. The first leader was Margaret Zacharias. A mission sale was organized in 1957. The identity of the group was associated with sewing.

Meetings were held weekly, in the afternoons, during the winter months. At first, the meetings were held in homes, but undue competition between hostesses in preparing *Faspa,* created a need for some rules. From 1958-1961 meetings were held in the school. Sewing was done at home. For unknown reasons, the group disbanded from 1961 to 1965 when it was reorganized at the initiative of Mary Klassen. Since 1972, group officers have been elected and records of meetings have been kept.

The emphasis of the group continues to be on friendship and mission. Mothers of young children consider *Naehverein* as a 'night off'. Older members are more conscious of the charitable work that is being done for Mennonite Central Committee and for local needs. For newcomers to the village, attendance at the *Naehverein* is a way of feeling that one belongs to the community.[40]



The first ladies sewing group in Blumenfeld was composed of single young women. Photo May 1950.

Some of the projects undertaken by the Blumenfeld *Naehverein* include:

— sewing blankets for raffle contests. The proceeds, as high as $1,000 per blanket, are designated for the poor.[41]

— sewing layettes for hospitals in Mexico and Belize.

— catering to funerals, community suppers, etc.

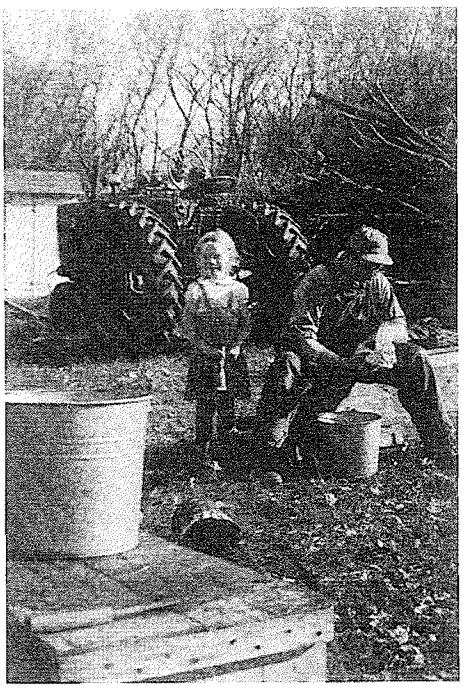
— organizing activities for the Blumenfeld Centennial.



Mary Elias, age 13 years, was the winner of the quilt raffled by the Blumenfeld ladies. The quilt had been a project of the Blumenfeld school children.



Mrs. C. J. Dyck at the *Worschtstoppa* (sausage maker) used to turn out the well known farmer's sausage.



Cleaning pig's feet after slaughtering pigs. Bernard Penner is watched by his daughter.

Pig Slaughtering Bees

An important social event was the *Schween Schlachten,* (pig slaughtering bee). Each family had to secure a winter's supply of meat. When the temperatures dropped in autumn, friends and relatives were invited to help slaughter the pig, and to enjoy the meals prepared by the hosts. John P. Elias recalls how his family had set a date for a *Schween Schlacten,* and had invited relatives from Hochfeld and Neuenburg. But bad weather was predicted for the date. As predicted, the family awoke to a severe storm that day. Mrs. Elias prepared breakfast for the family and the expected guests. But no guests came. While eating breakfast, the family decided to get some neighbours to help. "Noba Klassen" had 5 sons. As the sun came up, Mr. Elias went to his neighbour to find out if the boys were available. Mr. Klassen gave his permission if the boys were willing. Mr. Elias went upstairs to wake the boys and to present his proposition. The boys agreed and soon joined the Elias family at the breakfast table. Soon everyone was at work.

One of the Klassen boys was handed a rifle to shoot the second pig. But in spite of several shots the pig was still alive. The boy's nerves could take no more and he handed the rifle over to John Elias. The pig was 'finished off' and the work proceeded.



Mrs. Jake Heide from Hochfeld rendering lard at Bishop John P. Wiebe's of Blumenfeld.

A New Year's wish from the Brummtupp

The *Brummtupp* is a unique group which combined drama and music to add a lively touch to the Christmas and New Year's season. The singers and actors were young unmarried men who donned masks and costumes before making brief visits to all the homes in the village.[43]

The Cast:

(a) Policeman: His role was to keep order in the group that tended to become unruly in their merrymaking. He would knock on the door to

say that a group of people wanted to present a New Year's Wish. If the group was welcomed, he ushered in his troupe. He was the steward of the evening's collection. The policeman was uniformed and wore a red stripe on his trousers.
(b) Clown: The clown's attempts to add humour to the performance were hilarious and ridiculous. But everyone loves a clown! His costume can be imagined.
(c) The Couple: The man and woman tried to pose as a hen-pecked husband and a nagging wife. They were dressed in styles typical of that year.
(d) The Singers: The group of approximately 15 young men sang the song of New Year's wishes. They were dressed in white costumes sewn from flour sacks. They had black stripes on their trouser legs and wore white flathats. All were masked.
(e) The Brummtupp Player: He was dressed like the singers. Upon entering the house, he would find a place in the room that was close to an inside wall or near a china cupboard.

The Brummtupp Song[46]

1. Einen schoenen guten Abend, eine froehliche Zeit,
   Den Brummtup haben wir uns selbst bereit.
2. Wir wuenschen dem Herren einen goldenen Tisch,
   Auf alle vier Ecken ein gebratnen Fisch.
3. In der Mitte, in der Mitte, eine Kanne mit Wein
   Dabei unser Herr kann lustig sein.
4. Wir wuenschen der Frau ein goldene Kron
   Auf's andere Jahr einen huebsch-jungen Sohn.
5. Wir wuenschen der Tochter eine silberne Kann
   Auf's andere Jahr einen huebsch-jungen Mann.
6. Wir wuenschen dem Maedchen einen lichtroten Rock.
   Aufs andere Jahr mit den Besenstock.
7. Wir wuenschen der Magd eine hoelzerne Kann
   Auf's andere Jahr einen pucklichen Mann.
8. Wir wuenschen dem Sohn ein gesatteltes Pferd
   Ein paar Pistolen und ein blankes Schwert.
9. Wir wuenschen dem Knecht eine Scher' und eine Schrapp
   Dasz er kann putzen des Herren Pferd,
10. Wir wuenschen dem Schweinjung eine Knutte in der Hand
    dass er kann treiben die Kujels ins Land.
11. Wir hoeren dem Bauer mit der Schluessel klingen
    Und wir dachten er wuerde uns ein Goldstueck bringen.
12. Wir ziehen die Schnur wohl ueber's Haus,
    Da sprangen drei schwarzbraune Jungfern heraus.

1. A beautiful evening and a jolly good time,
   Our brummtupp is of our own design (construction).
2. We wish the master a golden table
   On all four corners a fried fish.
3. In the centre of it a jug of wine
   To induce the Master to jollity.
4. We wish the Mistress a golden crown
   and the coming year a pretty young son.
5. We wish the daughter a silver jug
   And the coming year a handsome young man.
6. We wish the maid a light-red skirt
   and the coming year a broomstick treat.
7. We wish the Old Maid a wooden jug,
   And the coming year a broomstick treat.
8. We wish the son a saddled horse
   A pair of pistols and a bright polished sword.
9. We wish the servant a curry comb and shears
   with which to groom his master's horse.
10. We wish the swineherd a cudgel in his hand
    with which to drive the boars from the land.
11. We now hear the master tinkling with a dish
    by dropping silver coins. He'll grant us our wish!
12. We draw a golden band over the house,
    and three darkbrown maidens are coming out.

The Props:

The *Brummtupp* was the most important piece of stage equipment. An apple barrel with the bottom removed became the frame for the instrument. A thin calf leather was stretched over the barrel and tied with a rope. A 3-4 foot length of horsetail hair, well-treated with resin, was pulled through a hole in the middle of the calf skin. It produced an awful racket. The player, by situating the drum against a wall, could cause sympathetic vibrations which sometimes shook the china from the shelves. The singers had to shout their song in order to be heard over the racket of the brummtupp.

The group stayed for about 15 minutes and presented their act and song. Then a hat was passed for a donation to cover their expenses. The village of Gnadenthal was known for its generous responses. Sometimes the hostess provided a snack. The *Brummtupp* group toured the villages in the vicinity of Blumenfeld. They would travel by truck or car to the edge of the village, and walk to the homes. They were received with pleasure, particularily by children. One year the group obtained a permit from the RCMP to tour the town of Morden. The proximity of the houses and the generous response of the townpeople made the experience a memorable one.[43]

The *Brummtupp* tradition is centuries old, and was probably known to Mennonites in the Danzig area of Prussia where it was still practiced until the second World War.[44] Mennonites from the East Reserve and the Bergthaler villages of the West Reserve have also kept the tradition.[45] It is not clear whether it was primarily a Bergthaler tradition or how it became part of the history of Blumenfeld. The *Brummtupp* song sung in a peculiar mixture of Low and High German, has changed very little over the years. A comparison of the song sung by the Danzig citizens, by the East Reserve Mennonites and by the Blumenfeld youth indicates that the lyrics have undergone few changes. Some of the Blumenfeld youth who participated in the *Brummtupp* traditions are Barney Klassen, George P. Klassen, John P. Klassen, Isaac Dyck, Henry Dyck, Jake E. Neufeld, Pete Neufeld.

As far as can be ascertained, the *Brummtupp* tradition was an anticipated event for about ten years following the Depression.

Health Services

The pioneers of the West Reserve depended on good nutrition and home remedies to prevent minor illnesses from becoming major problems. Medical help was not only expensive, but virtually unattainable. Until 1935, villagers relied on the out-patient services at Winkler and Walhalla. The sacrificial service of Winkler's Dr. C. W. Wiebe, Dr. McGavin, Plum Coulee, and Dr. Menzies of Morden are remembered by Blumenfeld's senior citizens.

Local funds and volunteer labour permitted the building of Bethel Hospital in Winkler in 1935. Women in the villages assisted by sewing linens and preserving food. Blumenfeld women contributed food to the hospital pantry until quite recently when regulations of the Food and Drug Act prohibited it.

Dr. C. W. Wiebe was dedicated to decreasing the high rate of infant/mother deaths at childbirth. The hospital built in 1935 was primarily a maternity hospital with a few beds available for other patients. That year, Blumenfeld women began travelling to Winkler to give birth to their babies. Up to that time, childbirth at home had been assisted by midwives and, if necessary, a doctor.[47] The midwives who



Doctor Menzies, Morden.

served Blumenfeld mothers were: Mrs. Jacob Friesen, Hochfeld, Mrs. Toews, Schanzenfeld, and Mrs. Jacob Fehr, Pembina Hills area.

More than one epidemic raged through the village community, leaving several freshly dug graves in the cemetery. During the 1919 flu epidemic, Dr. Landry from Walhalla came to doctor the sick. Peter F. Klassen accompanied the doctor when he made his rounds in the village. Nearly every home had to be quarantined. Many people died. On one occasion a grave, narrow at the opening and widening at the bottom, was dug to hold three coffins. More than once a family lost Mother as well as one or two children.[48]

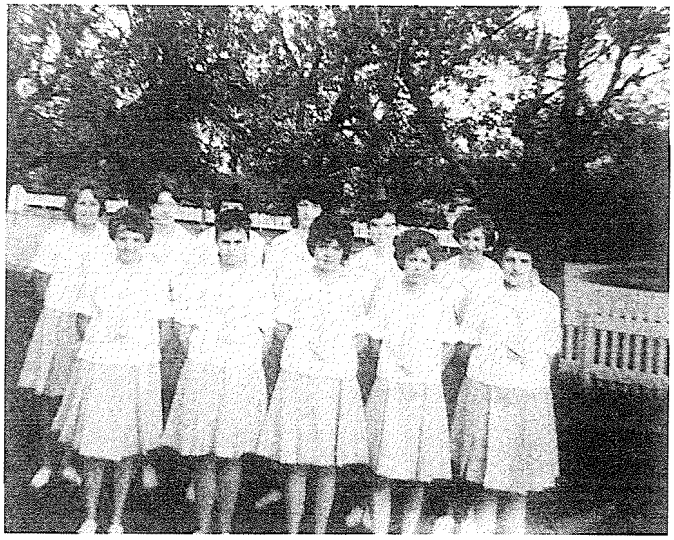
The polio epidemic of 1937 struck many people, but only Anne Reimer and Martin P. Wiebe were permanently handicapped. That year, Dr. C. W. Wiebe began a series of innoculations for polio and other diseases among school children. The program of innoculations for children continues to the present day in an effort to prevent a reoccurence the dreadful crisis experienced by most of the village grandparents. A second polio epidemic in the early 1950's claimed the life of one child.

The Medical Services available in Winkler can easily be taken for granted by the present generation. The diversity of health services is credited to the tireless energy and dedication of Dr. C. W. Wiebe who is widely recognized for his contribution to the health of the Mennonite Communities in the Winkler area.

4-H Trains Community Leaders

The 4-H organization strengthened Blumenfeld by training young people to be leaders. The 4-H clubs provided experience in running an organization by emphasizing record-keeping and teamwork. Demonstrations and speech-making were important steps in developing leadership skills. Most important, the clubs earned a solid reputation within the community by contributing to agricultural development.

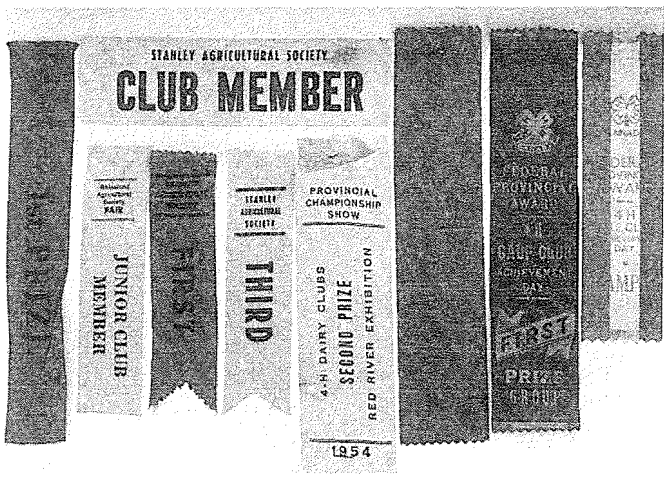
Participants in the 4-H Clubs enjoyed the weekly meetings and benefitted from the structured social activities organized by the clubs. Opportunities to meet young people from other communities were provided.



4-H girls in uniform for Achievement



4-H girls enjoying a light moment.



Some of the ribbons collected by Caroline Elias for her entries in local fairs and 4-H Achievement rallies.



Participants in the Gardenland Dairy and Calf Club entered this float at rallies and parades in 1958.

Caroline Elias and her Grand Champion Holstein



Caroline Elias of the Gardenland Dairy Calf Club was awarded the grand championship for exhibiting this fine artifically bred dairy calf. All calves exhibited were judged high — a direct result of the fine breeding made possible through the Stanley and Reinland Artificial Breeding Association.

Newspaper clipping honors Caroline Elias, daughter of W. V. Elias.

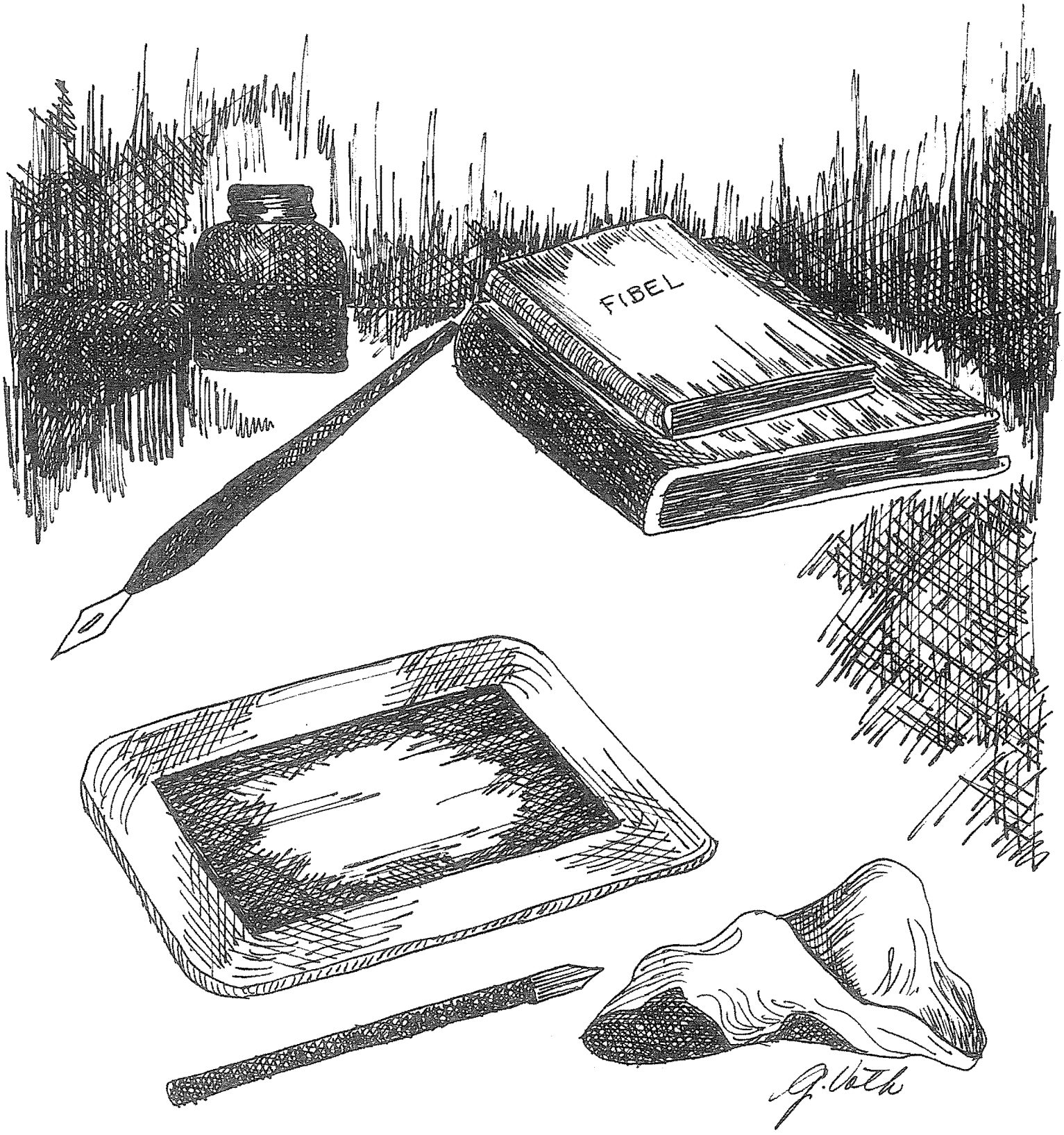
A Garden Club was organized by a local teacher as early as 1935. In that year, John P. Klassen won first prize at the Stanley Fair in Winkler for his entry of an early six-week maturing variety of potatoes. His prize was a sack of flour.

In the 1950's, W. V. Elias was joined by A. W. Friesen of Morden (formerly of Reinland) in giving leadership to the Gardenland Club. The Dairy and Calf Club which they organized received numerous prizes and commendations at local fairs and at the Red River Exhibition. There were also Garden, Sewing and Seed Clubs.

Alvina Dueck joined the 4-H Wheat Club and seeded a one-acre plot of wheat. It came up so full of weeds that people discouraged the young girl. They said that it would yield nothing. One farmer offered to re-seed the plot for Alvina, but she rather took her father's advice and harrowed the plot. It rained shortly afterwards. The result amazed everyone in the village. Alvina won first prize for her sample of wheat that year, and also demonstrated a useful agricultural practice to the local farmers.

The Sewing Clubs of 1965-67 attracted young girls from Hochfeld, Blumenfeld, Osterwick and Haskett. Some of the 4-H leaders of the 1960's included Anne Reimer, Mary Reimer, Mrs. Martha Elias, Mary Ann Schroeder, Mrs. Margaret Elias, Mrs. Mary Klassen and Anne Peters.

Since 1968, the clubs have organized only intermittently. They depend on local initiative and the interest of youth and parents.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The Village School

CHAPTER 4

An Ongoing Controversy

Issues related to the education of children have probably caused more controversy than any other issue in the village communities rooted in the Reinlaender tradition.

The first part of this chapter will discuss the question: who controls education? For one hundred years, the community of Blumenfeld has spent tremendous emotional energy in the battle of retaining control over what happens within the walls of the classroom. But the battle has been a losing one. The village private school was replaced by the public school half a century later. The village relinquished its control over the public school, although unwillingly, to the board of the Garden Valley School Division. The local school committee assigned to oversee local matters has further been diminished to one person. What will the village have to forfeit next?

Part II of this chapter deals with the methods used to teach, as well as with the relationship of teachers, parents and students. Although the parents of Blumenfeld lost the right to determine which textbooks would be used and what methods of instruction would be employed, they nevertheless have been fortunate in maintaining a relationship of cooperation with the village teachers, who have, for the most part, responded sympathetically to the concerns of the parents by making appropriate adjustments.

The desire of parents to have some input into the content and methodology of education is a prevailing one throughout our nation. In Blumenfeld, however, the issue has been approached by the Old Colony and Reinleader families who compose the majority in the school district. Their attitudes to education today reflect the values of isolation from the world and of separation from secular influences that characterized the Reinlaender Mennonite Church prior to its move to Mexico. The clarity of the education issue has been lost over the years. This began with the compromise of accepting the public school system and government control. Old Colony and Reinlaender parents in this decade find it difficult to state clearly what the real issues are. Their ambiguous language, more than anything else, reflects a fear of the world outside the closed communities. There is an insecurity similar to that of a young child who must leave its

parents' shelter to become an independent person. One hears a recurring theme of "homesickness" and of seeing the village as "home". Education is distrusted when it arouses a person's curiosity about the world outside the village home. Consequently, many parents of the Old Colony and Reinlaender Churches plan their children's education to terminate at 14 to 16 years of age. These children graduate from Grade 8 to the family kitchen or tractor. Families must then resume the school's task of preparing children for the responsibilities of adulthood. Children are taught the duties and roles of the traditional family in the village setting. But if job opportunities or marriage should take a young adult outside the Mennonite village community, where would he/she find the resources and skills to deal with the new environment?

A final part of this chapter describes the buildings that have housed the students of Blumenfeld.

Part I: Who Controls Education?

Attitudes to Education are Shaped

The first Mennonites to settle at Chortitza in Russia were poor people with little experience in farming. A previous chapter described the inadequate religious leadership in the early years of the settlement. Similarly, there was a need for educational initiative. But there was little time for schooling. All family members capable of helping were needed to establish farms. In spite of their meagre schooling, however, this generation of Mennonites, like all others, acquired the basic literary skills necessary for reading the Bible, catechism and *Gesangbuch*.

It was not until Johann Cornies reported the inadequacies of the Mennonite schools to the Russian authorities that some effort was made to wrest the control of education from the hands of the church leaders and place it under the control of the Agricultural Assocation administered by Cornies. Under his leadership, the quality of instruction gradually improved. Teaching standards were raised. Teacher training was provided.[1] A revised curriculum was introduced. These reforms were initiated first in the Molotschna Colony in 1843, then in the Chortitza Colony and its daughter colonies.

The Fuerstenland Colony, established only ten years prior to the exodus to Canada, did not place a high value on education[2] and resisted the innovations of Johann Cornies. The attitudes of the Fuerstenland immigrants determined the course of education in the West Reserve in Manitoba, particularly in the villages west of Highway #32.

Reinlaender Schools Affirm Tradition

The educational system prescribed by the church in the West Reserve incorporated none of the reforms of Johann Cornies. The church, in its resistance to modernizing influences, chose to re-establish the old school system familiar to the majority of the pioneers.[3] The schools, concerned with preparing children for village life and farming, were designed by the *Lehrdienst* to provide basic mathematical, reading and writing skills. Curiousity, imaginative thinking and philosophical questioning were considered dangerous. "It is not good to know too much" was the typical response to a child who asked too many questions. The *Lehrdienst* strategically dis-



Undated photo of students of the private school. The building in the background is an older building than the one which burned in the fire of 1927.

couraged *hohe Gelehrsamkeit* (higher education) for it was believed that too much knowledge would pervert the mind and cause the soul to wander from God.[4] The common saying, *De Veleeda, de Vetjeeda,* (the more you know, the more you are lost) suggests disdain as well as caution for pursuing an education past the traditional limits. Advanced knowledge carried the weight of greater responsibility.

Education was seen as a duty shared by the family and the church. The Reinlaender group strongly resisted any government interference in this task which was seen as the religious responsibility of shaping young soûls.[5]

Vorsteher Isaak Mueller addressed a memo to all the village *Schulten* in the fall of 1876, compelling them to erect schools in each village by November 2, 1876 when an inspection by the *Lehrdienst* would be carried out.[7] The method of instruction was to follow the traditional ways, as approved by the *Lehrdienst.*

Mueller's directive to the *Schulten* demonstrated a determination to exercise the privilege granted by the tenth clause of the Privilegium:

> That the Mennonites will have the fullest privilege of exercising their religious principle, and educating their children in schools, as provided by law, without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever.

(This privilege was not included in the final draft of the Privilegium,

> Unsere einfache und schlichte Lehrmethode ist aber, insofern wir diesselbe nich vernachlaessen, hinreichend, dem Versprechen wounter unsere Vaeter in Canada einwanderten, gerecht zu werden, naemlich als ein stilles, ackerbautreibendes Volk dem Lande nutzbringend zu dienen. Sollten wir dagegen unsere Kinder den weltlichen Pflanzstatten uebergeben, so wuerde nicht allein das einfache Bauern leben und damit die Fruechte des Ackerbaues, eine Einbusse zu erleiden haben, sondern es ist leicht einzusehen, wo es in solchem Falle mit unserer Religion, bezwecks mit unsere Gemeinde in wenige Jahren hinkommen wuerde, naemlich zuer Welt.[6]

ratified by the Privy Council, probably because it violated the constitutional division of powers which granted provincial governments jurisdiction over educational matters. Mennonites were not informed of this deletion until the school crisis of 1907.)[8]

The Bergthalers of the East Reserve had accepted government grants in order to improve their schools. They sought to implement a school system that embodied some of the reforms initiated by Johann Cornies. The Bergthalers in the West Reserve were responsible for opening the first public school at Reinland around 1883. The Reinlaender Church opposed the move and excommunicated its members who sent their children to this school.

The Public Schools Act of 1881 asked municipalities to establish school districts within their boundaries. In 1885, provision was made for 22 school districts, provided the rate-payers petitioned for them. By 1891, there were only 8 district schools open on the West Reserve,[9] most of these in the Bergthaler area near Altona and Gretna. By 1915, enrollment in Manitoba's Mennonite district schools was nearly 2,600. There were however, still at least a thousand children in the Mennonite private schools who were getting little or no English teaching. This included all of the Reinlaender schools on the West Reserve and all or most of the Chortitzer schools on the East Reserve.[10]

A few people from Gruenfeld, Kronsfeld and Eichenfeld agitated for a public school in their area. The public school at Kronsfeld opened in 1905. In 1909 it was renamed "Haskett" after the name of the growing railway centre. John R. Walkof and Joe S. Walkof were two teachers who contributed to the Haskett community and to local politics.[11] By 1924 the school had two classrooms. The only student from Blumenfeld to have attended the Haskett school was Jacob P. Elias. His interest in learning earned him the nickname, "Professor Jake".

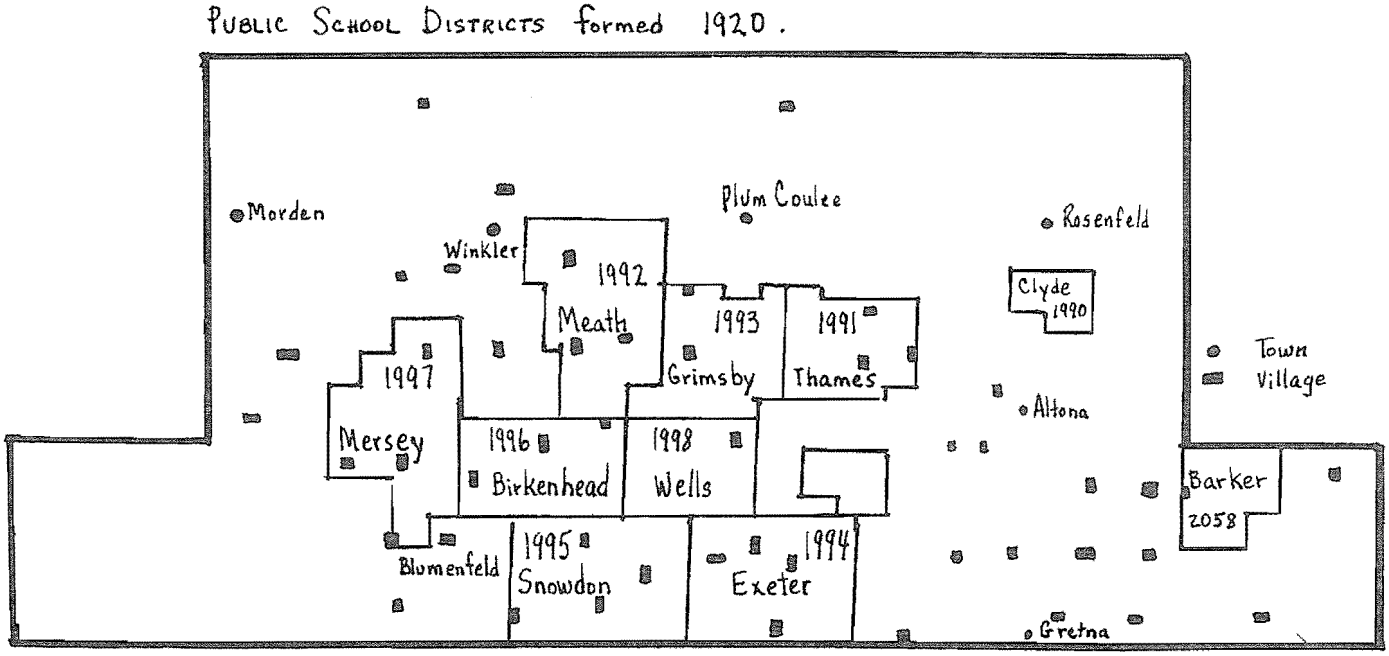
Many of the district schools relinquished the government subsidy and reverted to private schools in 1907 rather than comply with the new government policy that all Manitoba schools were to fly the Union Jack. The national flag was regarded as a symbol of militarism.

The outbreak of World War I caused Canadians to react against pacifists and German-speaking people. Military organizations and newspapers pressured the government to suppress the teaching of the German language. At a delegation of Mennonites to the government, Benjamin Ewert of the Bergthaler Church pointed out that the majority of Mennonite children were still in private schools because the group felt that they could "discharge their Christian obligation to their children only by maintaining complete control over education. Should they no longer be left 'unmolested and unrestricted' in this, as has been promised by the Dominion government, they would emigrate."[12] The government gave the assurance that the private schools would remain unmolested, but remained uncommitted on the issue of the public schools. Many Sommerfelder and Bergthaler communities chose to revert back to private status in order to resist further government interference. But the government countered this move by keeping some district schools open by Order-in-Council.[13]

The Reinlaender Churches had opposed district schools so steadfastly that not a single one had appeared in their midst.[14] The first sign of trouble for the Reinlaender came in June, 1916, when Inspector Weidenhammer (who later anglicized his name to Willows), reported on the private schools: "Not a word of English is

taught in them and very little of anything else."[15] A report to the Manitoba Legislature in 1919 said, "There will still remain to be dealt with the areas where only private schools have so far existed and we are asking, in the Public School Act amendments, for authority to create public school areas, so that we can proceed to put the public school within reach."[16]

In February 1920, ten new school districts were created in the Reinlaender church area in the municipalities of Rhineland and Stanley. English names were given to the new districts which included three or four existing private schools.[17] The Reinlaender com-



Source: Adolf Ens, Mennonite Relations with Governments: Western Canada 1870-1925, p. 223.

munities responded to this legislation by boycotting the new schools. Mennonites refused to sell land or building materials to Inspector Greenway, thus forcing the Department of Education to expropriate land and to bring in building supplies from Winnipeg. In view of this opposition and of the announced emigration of the Reinlaender Mennonites which would probably result in the breakup the existing villages, the department decided in 1920 to defer the location of school sites in these districts. In the spring of 1922, the Reinlaender emigration to Mexico began. Many Reinlaender members maintained their boycott of the public schools to the end of their stay in Canada.[18] The people who did not move to Mexico were, indirectly, endorsing the government schools.

A glance at a map of public school districts in the Reinlaender area shows that the village of Blumenfeld is not included in any of the proposed districts. Initially, one assumes that the government thought that all Blumenfeld area students would be served by the school in Haskett. However, the petition to form a school district in

1925 indicates that the lands of the present Blumenfeld district had been absorbed by three school districts: Birkenhead, Mersey and Haskett.[19]

Blumenfeld School District #2137

At a July 11, 1925 meeting of the Stanley Municipality, representatives from the villages of Blumenfeld, Hochfeld and Osterwick appeared regarding the forming of school districts. The Stanley Council advised these representatives that they "get together to work out district boundaries satisfactory to each other and bring in petitions to the next council meeting."[20] The petition for the formation of the Blumenfeld school district was made by B. B. Krahn. The proposed district included "lands from the union school districts of Birkenhead, and the school districts of Kronsfeld and Mersey."[21] Although the petition was approved by Stanley Council on August 8, 1925, Blumenfeld Public School #2137, did not open until a year later. Johann Wolfe, the last teacher of the private school, conceded his teacher's desk to Agatha Dyck in the fall of 1926. Miss Dyck was the first female teacher in the history of the Blumenfeld school. She had the difficult task of introducing a new school system, new textbooks, new methods, and a new language to a community that was still somewhat distrustful of government control.

Financial records for the operation of the school in its first year indicate the following income and disbursements:

EXPENSES	School operation	$1,840.92
INCOME	Legislative grant, first half 1926	74.00
	second half 1926	46.07
	Municipality of Stanley taxes 1926	500.00
	1927	550.00
	TOTAL	1,170.07

The deficit balance was covered by a special government grant received July 19, 1927.[22]

In April 1942, H. D. Fehr petitioned the Stanley council to form a new school district by detaching lands from Kronsfeld, Blumenfeld, Reinland and Rosengart. No action was taken.[23]

In 1961, the trustees of the Haskett school petitioned for a revision of school boundaries and had their petition approved. Under the revised plan, an enlarged Haskett district would include parts of Gruenfeld, Kronsfeld, Eichenfeld and Blumenfeld. The Blumenfeld district, already operating on a small tax base, was further diminished. Realizing that their tax base had been drastically cut, the school district of Blumenfeld attempted to retrieve some of the lost area. At a meeting between the Haskett school board, with spokesman W. M. Elias and the Blumenfeld school board, with spokesman Ed Elias (son of W. M. Elias), both villages presented briefs. The appointed arbitraters, William Grayford of Schanzenfeld and John W. Giesbrecht of Plum Coulee, decided to uphold the revised boundaries as petitioned by Haskett.[24]

In the same decade, the issue of consolidation absorbed much political energy of the village school boards. The Garden Valley School Division was formed in 1963 in order to centralize high-school education. The highschool classroom at Reinland was discontinued in 1964. Rural students South of Winkler went to Winkler for Grades 9-12. A petition, circulated in March 1964, in the villages of Blumenfeld, Hochfeld and Osterwick, requested that a high school be built on the highway.[25] The need for a local high school was based on the

The Council of the Rural Municipality of Stanley held their regular meeting on Saturday July 11th, 1925 at 10 a.m.
Present were the Reeve J. S. Gillis and Councillors, Ami Olafson, J. H. Martens, Peter Reimer, G. G. Wiebe, Elliot Emerson and J. D. South.
The minutes of last regular meeting were read and approved.
Representatives from the Villages of Blumenfeld, Hochfeld and Osterwick appeared before the Council regarding the forming of School Districts. The Council advised their representatives to all get together and see if they could not work out Districts satisfactory to each other and bring in petitions to the Next Council Meeting.
Mr Wolf of Osterwick Village waited on the Council, stating that for the past eight years he had been keeping Jacob Hildebrand who was more or less of an invalid and that up until two months ago the Old Colony Church people had paid for his maintenance, but as this people had recently left for Mexico he now had to keep Mr Hildebrand at his own expense.
Moved By Councillor J. H. Martens
Seconded " " G. G. Wiebe
That we pay Jacob Wolf of Osterwick the sum of $100.00/100 per year for the Maintenance of Jacob Hildebrand, Commencing the first day of July 1925 to be paid half-yearly
(Carried)

desire to keep the youth close to home and away from the 'sins that were rampant in the high school in town.' The high school in Winkler, having outgrown its walls, was anxious to rebuild. The citizens of the town of Winkler wooed the support of the village communities in constructing a large composite high school with improved facilities and a diversified program to meet the needs of the community. No action was taken on the petition, although the issue remained alive for several years.

In 1966, a by-law regarding the proposed composite high school in Winkler was brought to the voters. Rev. J. J. Elias of Blumenfeld contributed a letter to the editor of the local newspaper which attempted to clarify the wishes of the population south of Winkler.

The Editor,
Pembina Triangle Progress,
Dear Sir:

We are approaching another vote on a money by-law in Garden Valley School Division which if it is favored, shall build us a million dollar High School in Winkler. Most of us would surely believe that the room is needed if our children are supposed to go to High School and as the present facilities are inadequate. But this does not influence us all to vote in favor of this money by-law. As we know from the last time such a vote was held, the defeating votes came from Plum Coulee and the rural people south of Winkler which shows us a very clear picture. This shows that we want to have three schools built, as was planned when the Division was formed. That would mean one in Plum Coulee, one south of Winkler and one in town. We have good reasons for this request too. We read so much about juvenile delinquency, liquor offences, sexual crimes and unwed mothers these days. . . Children are left too much on their own when they are young, and so they have very little or no respect for their parents when they are older. . . This problem will become much more serious if we, the parents, will not do our utmost (with the help of the Lord) to keep our children in our midst as much as possible when they are young, and teach them how to become true Christians.

The Government wants our Division Board to build one large school and we know too, that they want to train our children to their taste, and not to our religious beliefs. We should all agree with this when we read what the students have to learn these days. For example, if we study the Science books . . . which teach them about evolution and tell our children that man was gradually formed from the apes. Everybody who reads the Bible will know that this is definitely wrong so if we don't want our children to become Atheists, we will have to work hard, and pray to God to help us before it is too late.

We all know that a group of children very often plan on doing something they should not do. The larger the group the more ideas, no matter how foolish the ideas are. But let's not put the blame on the children alone, because Satan makes use of every chance he has to destroy obedience, even among adults.

Our board of trustees told us that a private survey had been made in our present high school and it showed that the teachers had more trouble with the rural students than with the town students. At first I couldn't quite agree, but after thinking it over it was quite clear, because we all know the saying: "When the cat's away, the mice will play." This should be true here too, for the rural students feel they are so far away from their parents, they can really enjoy life and go to town. They start smoking, drinking, dating and almost anything that may turn up. If we could have three schools built we would have three groups of students which could be kept under control much better than one group, and they would all be closer to home.

So let us think it over carefully and vote the way our conscience tells us to. We must not only think of the tax-money or any other financial viewpoint but we must consider the one most important point and that is to help our children to become spiritually successful. You, the town people, also have a good chance here to keep the rural juveniles out of your school by voting against this money by-law, and after it is defeated, recommend to the board that they draw up plans for three schools and they can be sure to have such a by-law favored. . .

Yours truly,
Jacob Elias[26]

Letters from other readers favored the by-law and appealed to the rural population. They argued that the community deserved a modern facility which would attract well-qualified teachers. The need for a gymnasium and a science laboratory was particularly emphasized. The new "million-dollar school" was intended to present a variety of options to the students, including business education, auto-mechanics, drafting, and other courses to meet the need for industrial workers in the Winkler area.

The new collegiate in Winkler was completed in 1968, but Blumenfeld students desiring to further their education frequently preferred to attend the private Mennonite high school in Gretna. Anne Elias, daughter of Rev. Jacob and Susan Elias attended Mennonite Collegiate Institute for Grade 9. She completed her high school education through evening classes and correspondence courses and went on to study at the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Some other Blumenfeld area young people who attended Mennonite Collegiate Institute were Harold Elias, Lloyd Elias, Linda Dueck, Peter Janzen, Peter R. Elias and Caroline Elias.

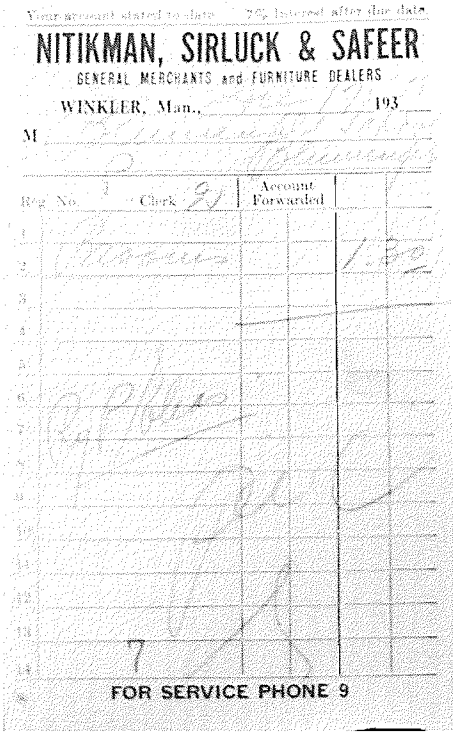
The provincial government encouraged the centralization of elementary schools by offering increased grants to Unitary Divisions. In 1967, the first of many referendums and polls was taken regarding consolidation. A group of Winkler-area people, supported by the Department of Education, favoured a move to a more centralized system of administration. They proposed that the many autonomous school districts in the Winkler area be administered as one collective unit run by a central school board.

In 1971, the Winkler school district petitioned the Minister of Education to legislate a Unitary Division called Garden Valley. An opinion poll was taken in September 1972. When the polls were returned, eleven districts favored the Unitary School Division, and seven, including Blumenfeld, opposed the change. Trustees of the village schools indicated their strong opposition in another poll by voting 51 to 35 against Unitary.[27] The Minister of Education was consulted regarding the proper procedure for using the information from the polls. Several subsequent polls demonstrated a change in opinion. By November, 1972, the number of districts opposing the Unitary Division equalled the number of districts favoring it.

Shortly thereafter, boundaries were drawn up for seven wards which were to form the Garden Valley School Division. In a public statement, John W. Kuhl, chairman of the new Unitary Board, declared, "We the trustees, of the new Unitary board would like to assure you that we will make every possible effort to keep schools in operation and will close schools only upon request or in consultation with the local people whose children will be involved."[28]

The first Unitary Board of the Garden Valley School Division took office on January 29, 1973 with the following elected trustees:

Ward 1: Bernie Elias
Ward 2: Ben Schellenberg
Ward 3: Abe Rempel
Ward 4: George J. Froese
Ward 5: John W. Kuhl (chairman), D. Feroze Khan, George W. Enns, Peter D. Labun
Ward 6: Jacob P. Wiebe
Ward 7: Abe J. Peters
Ward 8: Bill Brown (vice-chairman)



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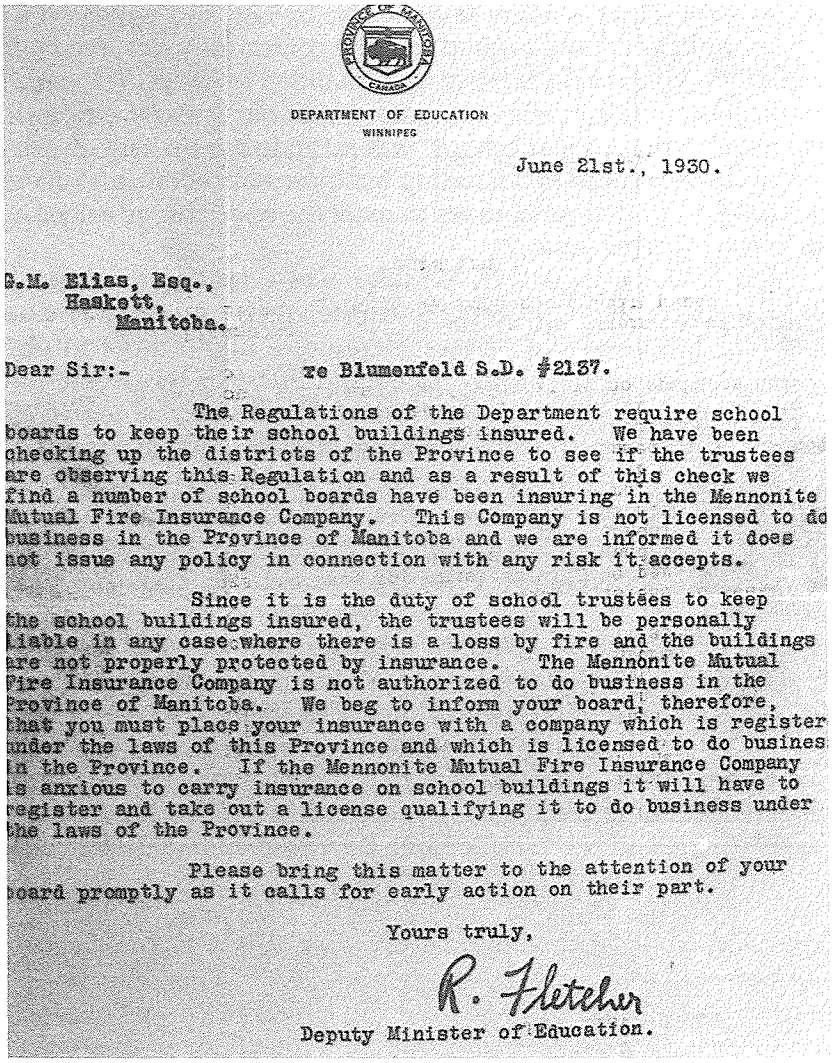


DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
WINNIPEG

June 21st., 1930.

G.M. Elias, Esq.,
Haskett,
Manitoba.

Dear Sir:- re Blumenfeld S.D. #2137.

The Regulations of the Department require school boards to keep their school buildings insured. We have been checking up the districts of the Province to see if the trustees are observing this Regulation and as a result of this check we find a number of school boards have been insuring in the Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company. This Company is not licensed to do business in the Province of Manitoba and we are informed it does not issue any policy in connection with any risk it accepts.

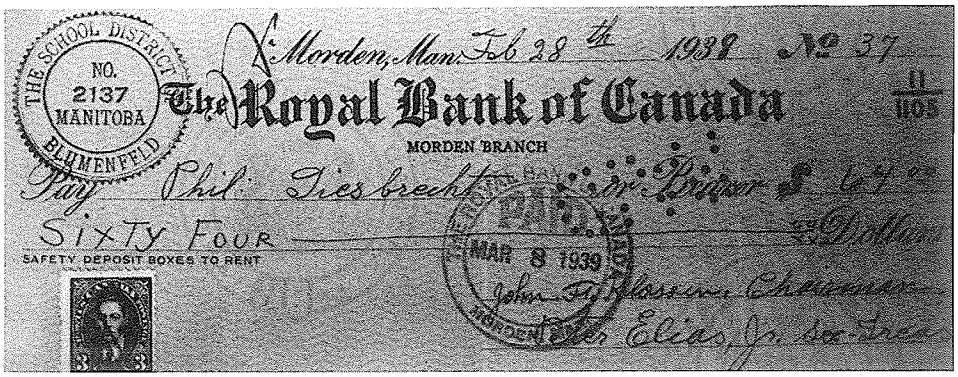
Since it is the duty of school trustees to keep the school buildings insured, the trustees will be personally liable in any case where there is a loss by fire and the buildings are not properly protected by insurance. The Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company is not authorized to do business in the Province of Manitoba. We beg to inform your board, therefore, that you must place your insurance with a company which is register under the laws of this Province and which is licensed to do busines in the Province. If the Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company is anxious to carry insurance on school buildings it will have to register and take out a license qualifying it to do business under the laws of the Province.

Please bring this matter to the attention of your board promptly as it calls for early action on their part.

Yours truly,

R. Fletcher

Deputy Minister of Education.



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 2137 MANITOBA BLUMENFELD

Morden, Man. Feb 28th 1939 No 37

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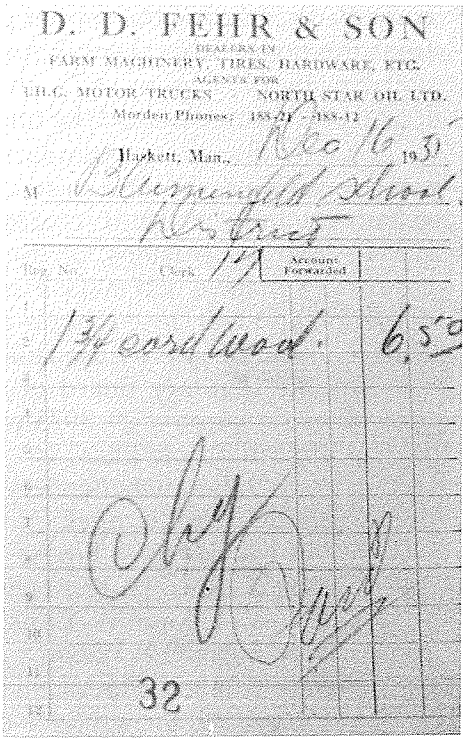
John F. Klassen, Chairman

G. M. Elias, Jr. Sec.-Treas.



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32

Correspondence from the files of the secretary-treasurer.

A local committee was established in each school district to provide leadership for local issues. This included planning Christmas concerts and school picnics, arranging German and Religion instruction, maintenance and acting as liaison between teacher, village and board regarding general attitudes and matters of discipline. Blumenfeld's first school committee consisted of George P. Klassen and John Janzen. Recently, the committee was reduced to one person.

On May 22, 1973, Solicitor Westwood, acting on behalf of the Haskett School, asked the Unitary Board to request an Order-in-Council from the Manitoba government proclaiming Garden Valley School Division a Unitary division.[29] The Haskett school district had been a strong supporter of the Unitary movement.

The Blumenfeld community has resisted efforts to consolidate several village schools into one complex as in the case of the Southwood School which serves the Schanzenfeld and Friedensruh communities. In 1981, the Blumenfeld community was successful in its appeal for a public grant to build a new school in the village. While declining enrollment has forced classroom cutbacks in most other divisions, the Blumenfeld school does not show signs of a decrease in school population for perhaps a decade.

Part II: How does a Teacher Teach?

Wide-sweeping changes have occurred since the German private schools of the early 1920's were replaced by the present school system. The single classroom of up to seventy students has become a three-classroom school. Three teachers, trained at the university and certified by the province, apply current teaching methods and use a curriculum approved by the Department of Education. The texts of the German private school, the Catechism and the Bible, have been adopted by the Reinlaender and Old Colony churches in their Sunday School programs.

A change in the educational system was inevitable. Many of the teaching aids imported from Russia in the 1870's had fallen into disuse and the quality of instruction suffered. The stagnation of the Mennonite educational system was a result of the isolation of the communities and of strict separation from Canadian society.

> Generally speaking, school and education do not thrive in a vacuum but require the intellectual stimulus which only interaction with a large area of high civilization can provide. . . Even in Russia, the Mennonite intellectual life and culture had been somewhat isolated; in Canada they were completely cut off from intercourse with any congenial area of high-civilization.[30]

The public school in Blumenfeld had been served by teachers who have responded sympathetically to the traditions of the community. They have made adjustments in their expectations, methods and content in order to give their students a practical education that is a preparation for rural living.

Graduation from formal education is a celebration for most Grade 8 student whose families are Old Colony or Reinlaender. This trend puts additional pressure on teachers to give their students a well-rounded education that will prepare them for the responsibilities of leadership in the family and the community.

De Deetsche School

Isaac M. Dyck was a teacher in Blumenfeld's private school, 1918-9.



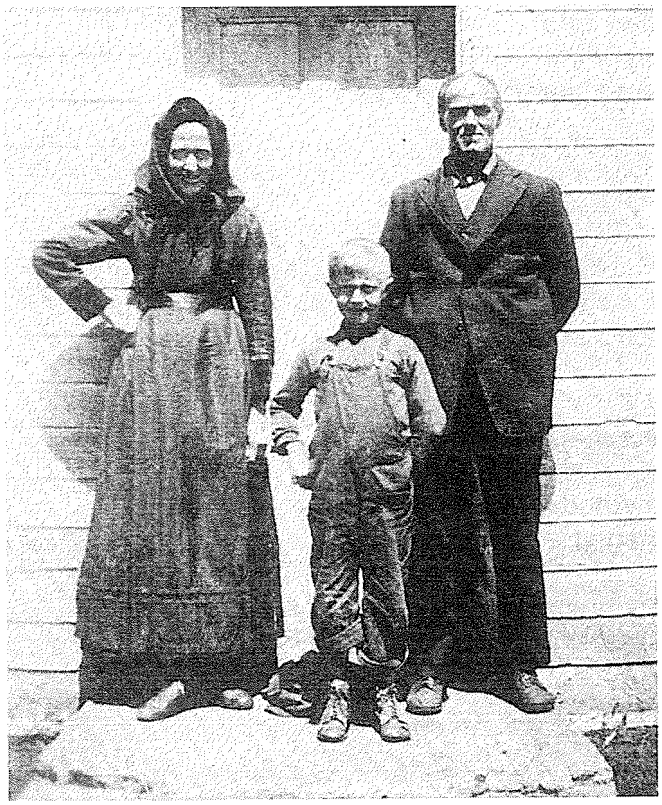
The village private school, commonly known as *de Deetsche Schaul,* was similar to other Reinlaender schools.

When the village needed a teacher, the village leaders would interview several prospects and call a *Schultenbot.* Generally, the teacher who was hired was one of the villagers who was in need of employment and housing for the winter. Johann Wolfe, who taught from 1921-1925, was also a herdsman in the summer months. Although there was no established pattern that the jobs of teacher and herdsman were held by the same person, that was true in Blumenfeld for several years in the case of Johann Wolfe. If a problem arose between the teacher, a student and parents, the matter was discussed at a *Schultenbot.*

Qualifications were not given the attention they are today. The teacher of the private school was not required to know more than anyone else, nor was this possible in the village communities where advanced education was not available. "As long as the man could read, write and 'figger', and was a good man, he was qualified for the post of village teacher."[31] In agreeing to accept the responsibility of the teacher, a person consented to maintain firm discipline. The willow-stick was an approved teaching-tool.

Wages were low. Sometimes the teacher was paid $75.00 per term. Johann Wolfe received $18.00 per month, plus donations of meat and other food supplies, as well as heating fuel.

Teachers were always married men. They and their families could occupy the three-room teacherage adjacent to the classroom where only a wall with a peephole separated the classroom and the teacher's living quarters. Single men were not eligible for a teaching position since it was widely assumed that "if they weren't smart enough to get married, how could they teach the children?"



Johann Wolfe, last teacher in Blumenfeld's private school, standing in front of the teacherage with his wife and son, Isaac.

Blumenfeld Private School
a partial list of teachers

Wilhelm Rempel *	
Johann Neudorf	
Peter Neufeld	
Isaac M. Dyck	1915
Johann Klassen	1916
Jacob Elias	1917
Peter Neudorf	1917
Peter Wiebe	1918-1920
Johann Wolfe	1921-1925

*according to oral reports he was the first teacher in the Blumenfeld school.

A typical day in the life of the private school saw students arriving at school at nine o'clock, only to find that *de Lehra* (the teacher) had been tardy in rising. The fire had just been lit and the classroom was still cold. Students stood around the stove in the middle of the classroom until the teacher called the school to order. Students came to attention at their desks and recited the Lord's Prayer (*Vater Unser*). Immediately the first class began: reading lessons for all four levels. Arithmetic followed. At the end of the Arithmetic period, the teacher issued a command, *"Ein mol eint"* (one times one) to signal the noon recess. The entire school stood to recite the multiplication tables. The youngest students listened while the others recited. At 5 x 5 = 25, the girls were dismissed in single file and the boys continued until 12 x 12 = 144. The next day the procedure was reversed and the boys were dismissed early. All students went home for a two-hour lunch recess. There was no bell to summon students back to the classroom at 1:00. The teacher went to the door and called his students to class. During the lunch recess, the playground was supervised from the windows of his living quarters. Rarely did a teacher participate in playing.

The afternoon was much like the morning. It began with reading and was followed by penmanship. At 4:00, the teacher dismissed the school with the simple statement, *"Nun ist dis Schule geschlossen, gehe nach Hause in Frieden."* (The school is now closed. Go home in peace).

The school year began around November 1st, depending on the progress of fieldwork and threshing. It ran for approximately 5 months and terminated on Thursday before Good Friday. The final day of school was like all others. There was no promotion day, no parental visits, no picnic. Students studied in anticipation of the seven month holiday.

The *Ohms* visited the school about once a year. The teacher, being forewarned of the coming visit, prepared his best students to perform. The *Ohms* were content to watch the proceedings for an hour and left saying, *"Wie koammen blos to seenen wo dee leeren doonen."* (We just came to see how they were learning.)

The first level of instruction was named *Fibel* after the primer of elementary reading exercises. The text was often called *Fibel Mit dem Roten Hahn* (text with the red rooster) because the red rooster on the back cover was not only a symbol of having mastered the skills necessary for reading, but it also had the magical quality of being able to lay coins. When a weak student needed an incentive, caring parents might drop a hint that the rooster might reward the student if improvement became evident. The matter was discussed with the teacher who cooperated with the parents by 'laying the coin' at the appropriate achievement. The child, after diligent effort, might return from a noon-hour recess to find that it was really true! The red rooster had lain a coin!

The first months of a student's career were spent in memorizing the alphabet forwards and backwards. Then came the reciting of the syllables in the *Fibel.* Familiarity with the syllables and dipthongs enabled the student to read 'by sounding out the words'. The student of the *Fibel* had to master one page at a time before being allowed to continue. The entire exercise depended on memorization. By the end of the first level, a student could read short, simple sentences.

Students were seated according to rank with the brightest student at the head of the row, ready to be promoted to the next row. Demotion was a disgrace to be avoided.

The back cover of the reading primer used in the private school is dominated by the magical red rooster.



The second level students used the Catechism as their text. Students were simply required to read the answers to the questions posed by the teacher. Memorizing the Catechism was a pre-requisite for baptism and was not required in the school. Bright students might be promoted to the third level by the end of the second school year. The *Hoatnackt* (hard learners) might remain at the second level for the rest of their school years.

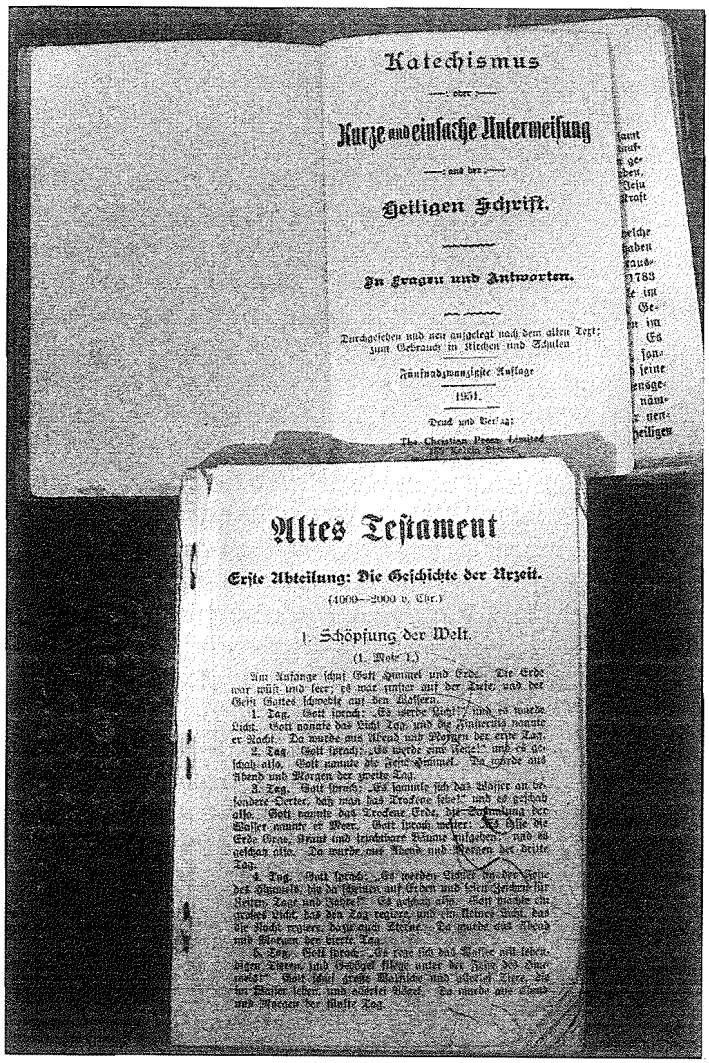
At the third level, the New Testament was the text. Members of the class would take turns reading several verses. The teacher would shout, "Choral Reading", and the whole class would read 4 or 5 verses in unison. At the teacher's next command, *Buchstabieren* (choral spelling), the class read another group of verses, letter by letter.

Promotion to the fourth level, Bible, was based on reading fluency. For the remainder of their school years, *Bibel* students read through the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, chapter by chapter. Upon completion, students returned to Genesis and began again.

How did students deal with their questions which arose from reading the colorful Old Testament stories? Many stories dealt with subjects such as child-bearing and marital relations that were never discussed in the Mennonite family. One former student of the private school reflected on the secrecy of these topics. He pointed out that



Students of Peter M. Wiebe stand in front of the one-room school which served Blumenfeld until 1927.



The text books of the private school were the Catechism, the New Testament and the Old Testament.

inquiry into the details of these matters was as sinful as the act itself. Nor did the Old Testament epics of holy wars raise any curiosity. The young students, and their parents, were largely uninformed about the biblical basis for the Mennonite stance of peace-making and non-involvement in war.

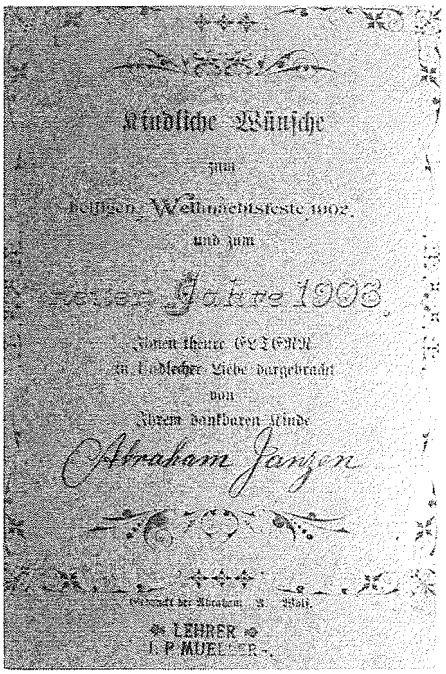
Six years of using the Bible as a textbook did not necessarily make the student familiar with the Scriptures. The teaching techniques deadened the imagination and curiosity, making it possible for only the exceptionally bright and inquisitive student to become knowledgable in the Scripture and to interpret them with authority unlike that of the other villagers. For adults, the Bible's place was in the church. It was rarely used in the home.

Inquisitive students were often discouraged from asking questions. The goal of the *Lehrdienst* in establishing this education system had been to limit the boundaries of a child's world and to keep a child untainted by the world.

> The desire for knowledge beyond that needed for participation in religious functions, local community life, and the occupation of a simple farmer was considered a worldly pretense. If it was not outright evil in itself, it certainly was an occasion for sin.[32]

Children's questions were referred to their parents. Adults' questions were referred to the *Ohms*. And the response to most questions was that "It is not good to ask too many questions". Thus young people learned to converse about the practical aspects of life such as farming and housekeeping. Philosophical discussion was almost impossible.

Two other subjects studied by all students were Penmanship and Arithmetic. Penmanship (*Schoenschreiben*) required a notebook (*Schreibheft*) prepared by the teacher. Young students used pencil to copy the sample writing, *Vorschrift*, usually a Bible verse, written by



The ornate and gilded cover of a Christmas wish-book prepared by Sarah Janzen for her parents. Lengthy poems for Christmas and for New Year, written in the students best handwriting, were prepared in school and presented to parents at Christmas.



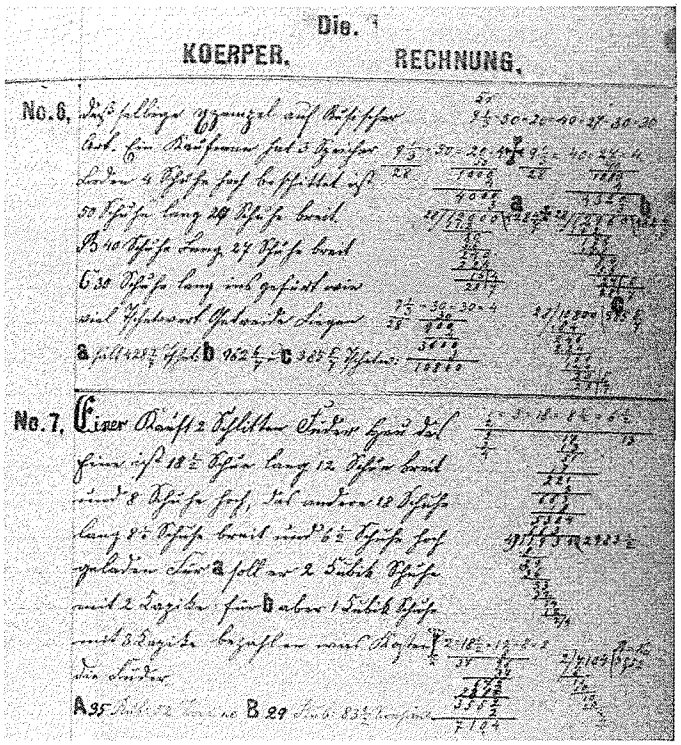
Kindliche Wünsche
zum heiligen Weihnachtsfeste 1913.
und
Neujahrsfeste 1914.
den lieben Eltern
und Kindlichen Liebe
dargebracht
von
Ihrer treuen Tochter
Sarah Janzen.

the teacher across the top of the page. Older students used a nib pen and ink supplied by the village *Schultenbot* to practice calligraphy (*Updruckschriewen*). Students were obliged to learn the Gothic script (*Dietsche Lattern*) as well as the Latin alphabet (*Latiensche Lattern*). At the end of the class a student would collect the pens and ink bottles. The teacher refilled the tiny inkwells from his large bottle.

Often capable older students helped the teacher by listening to the reading drills of the beginners. These student helpers were called *Unjalehrasch* (teacher-aids).

Arithmetic required memorization of the multiplication and division tables. There were also simple exercises and drills. The early teachers of the German school in Manitoba taught problem-solving to advanced students by using a book of problems and answers, very neatly copied from one teacher to another. The book dealt with complex mathematical concepts, such as fractions, ratios, and volume. The problems were related to farm life and prepared the student to become self-reliant in business or farming. This valuable teacher's aid fell into disuse by Blumenfeld teachers.

Teacher Johann Wolfe who taught in the Blumenfeld school from 1921 to 1925 did not use this teacher's guide and gave his advanced students arithmetic drills comparable to Grade 2 levels in the present school system.


Die.
KOERPER. RECHNUNG.
No. 6,
No. 7,

A page from the Peter P. Elias' book of arithmetic problems illustrates the teaching methods used in Russia and in the early Mennonite schools in Manitoba. This book fell into disuse in the Reinlaender schools of the West Reserve where the standards of education deteriorated.

No teaching aids were found in the Blumenfeld private school. The cane stood in its place, but the classroom could not even boast a blackboard. To save paper, the students used slates (*Toflen*) for arithmetic and writing. Occasionally music was included in the school day, using the familiar *Gesangbuch*. There were no classes in history or geography. There was no map or globe. (It was generally believed that the earth was flat.)

The private schools practiced a strict segregation of girls and boys who entered the classroom at separate entrances. The seating plan

separated the boys from the girls. The children had separate play areas. The girls were allowed to play "drop the handkerchief". The boys could play with a ball. If the ball went across the girls' area, the girls were expected to return it. No boy was allowed to enter the girls' territory. Breaking this rule could result in severe punishment.

New Books, New Teachers and a New Language

When the first public school opened in the fall of 1926, students opened new textbooks which were written in a language they could not even read. Reading, writing and arithmetic continued to be the core subjects. To them were added history, geography and science. All classroom instruction was in English.

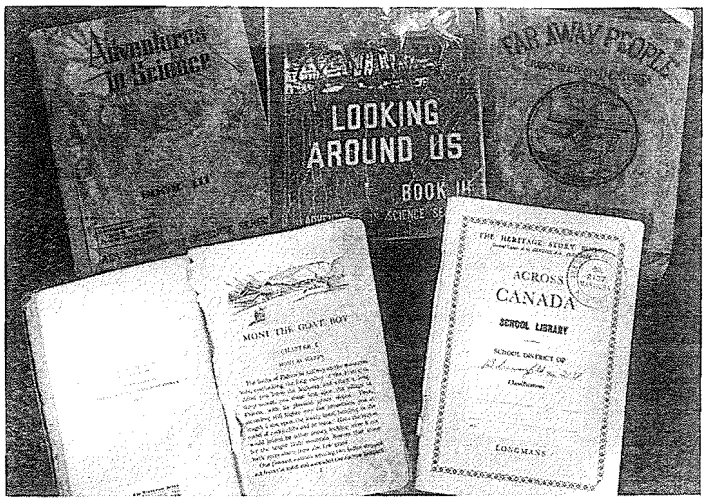
Most of those 38 students of the first public school could not speak English, much less read and write it. Low German was the mother tongue of these Mennonite students. Learning High German was the same as learning a new language. With the addition of English, students were expected to be tri-lingual.[33]

"Most of the students", recalls the first teacher, Agatha (Dyck) Brown, "were willing to study. Some of the *Russlaender* were particularly diligent and anxious to achieve."

There were few people in the Reinlaender villages who could speak English fluently, and fewer still who met the government's standard of teacher qualifications. Most of the teachers of the village public schools were people from outside the village community. The teacher training institute in Gretna, opposed by the Sommerfelder and Reinlaender for many years, became a source of teachers for the school. These teachers, because they were sympathetic to the fundamental Mennonite issues, helped many communities make the transition to district schools.[34]

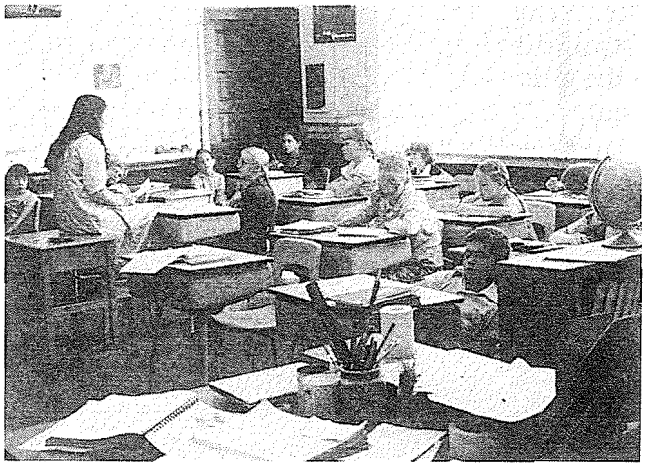
In the 1980's, a student's world include Music, Art and Physical Education as well as the academic subjects. A typical school day for a ten-year old child might look like this:

9:00 Opening exercises: Bible reading, prayer, national anthem, current events
9:15 Language: High German
9:30 Mathematics
10:30 Recess
10:45 Language Arts: includes reading, spelling comprehension, phonics, creative writing, handwriting, listening, poetry, penpals, library. . .
NOON HOUR
1:00 Teacher reads a story aloud
1:30 Social Studies OR Science (on alternate days). Health is included in Science. Science is basically a study of nature.
2:30 Recess
2:45 Physical Education OR Music OR Religion OR Art
3:30 Students clean up the classroom
3:45 Dismissal[35]

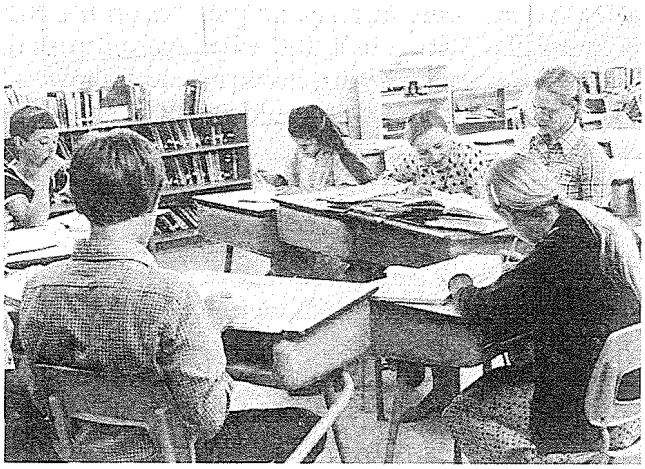


The curriculum of the public school included literature, science, history and social studies. These are texts used by students of the 1950's and 1960's.

Teachers, since 1973, have had greater access to professional assistance. The Garden Valley School Division makes available a resource teacher, Mary Kroeker, who suggests remedial programs for



Sharon Loeppky instructs the intermediate class, 1981. Photo credit David Goertzen II.



Senior students of David Goertzen, teacher, 1981. Photo credit David Goertzen II.

students with special needs and who does speech therapy.

It is well known that people remember more of what they see and hear than of the words they read. Classroom teachers in Blumenfeld today use technical equipment to help students see and hear new information. Blumenfeld school owns an overhead projector and a filmstrip projector. After years of use, the tape recorder and record player are nonfunctional. A film projector is shared with several schools. A computerized arithmetic drill is used by some students with the guidance of the resource teacher. It is projected that within the next decade students will be practicing reading, spelling and arithmetic on small classroom computers.

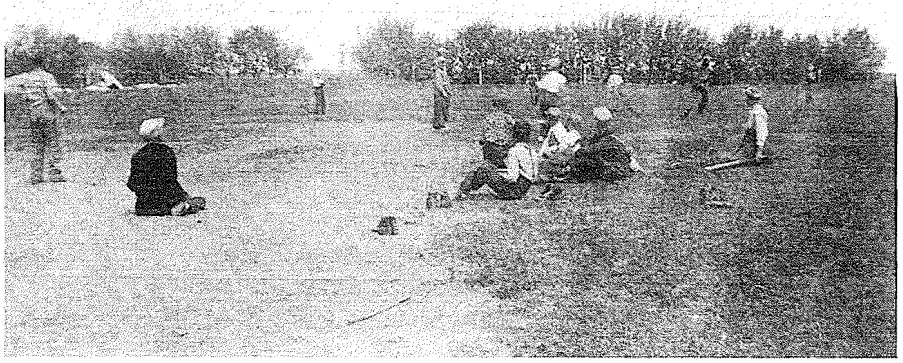
But the Blumenfeld school is far from modern. Its strongest resource continues to be the teachers hired to nurture the village children. No quantity or complexity of technological equipment can replace a caring teacher. Good teachers will always be measured by their ability to command respect and to encourage students to develop a positive character. A relaxed classroom where students enjoy working and learning is a credit to a teacher who understands and loves children.

The classroom is not limited to the walls of the school. Field trips to Winnipeg are a highlight. Nature hikes are enjoyable. At the time of this writing students are preparing for a Track and Field Meet. Each noon hour, at 12:45, Mrs. Loeppky's Grades 4-6 students run a distance up to two miles in order to build endurance for the sports event. Not all students, particularly girl-students, are allowed by parents to participate in the special school activities.



School girls on top of a snowslide.

The school yard in summer, 1950.



The community is sensitive about the use of films in school. Films from the Department of Education are generally accepted but feature films are previewed by parents before being shown in the classroom. Films which feature armed violence and crime are usually censored.

The teachers respond to the religious values of the community by omitting science units which deal with creation theories and prehistoric data. The senior teacher must exercise discretion in the choice of novels for students of Grade 7 and 8 Language Arts.

The Garden Valley School Division covers an area where education is a very low priority. There is resistance to raising taxes in order to modernize school facilities or to hire specialized staff. Any movement to give education a greater priority has usually come from the citizens of Winkler.

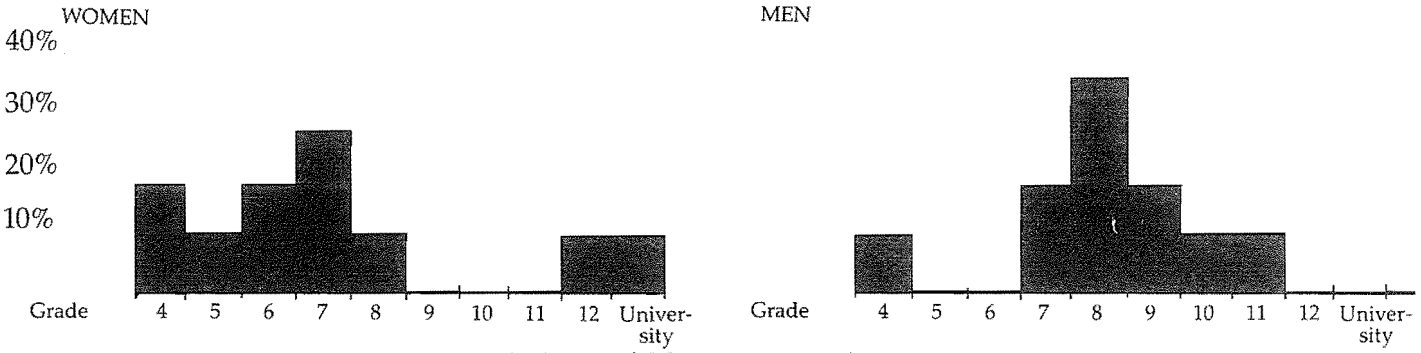
When parents plant negative attitudes in their children's minds about the value of education, they create some problems in the school. First, their child will not be motivated to put a good effort into school work and will tend to forget, as quickly as possible, what he/she was 'forced' to learn. There is no lasting value in education unless new information and new skills are retained and used as building blocks for the next steps. Second, an unwilling learner often tries to prove his/her self-worth by behaviour which keeps other students from learning or by withdrawing completely from any interaction in the classroom. Teachers are blamed for being lenient or demanding,

Average Grade Level Achieved by Adults in Blumenfeld District by Church Affiliation

	Women	Men
Old Colony	5.7	6
Reinlaender	7	8.3
Bergthaler	8	7
Sommerfelder	8	7
Zion	—	8

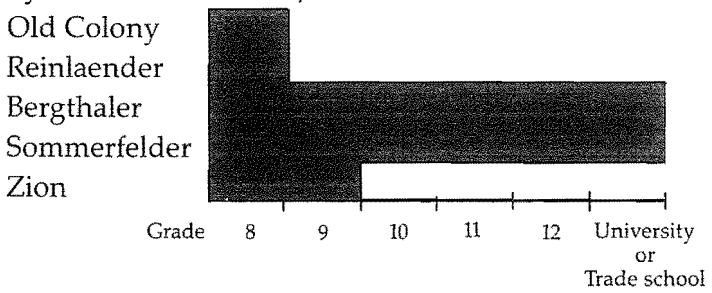
Source: Survey of Blumenfeld District residents, 1981

Education Levels of Adults in Blumenfeld District, 1981



Source: Survey of Blumenfeld District residents, 1981.

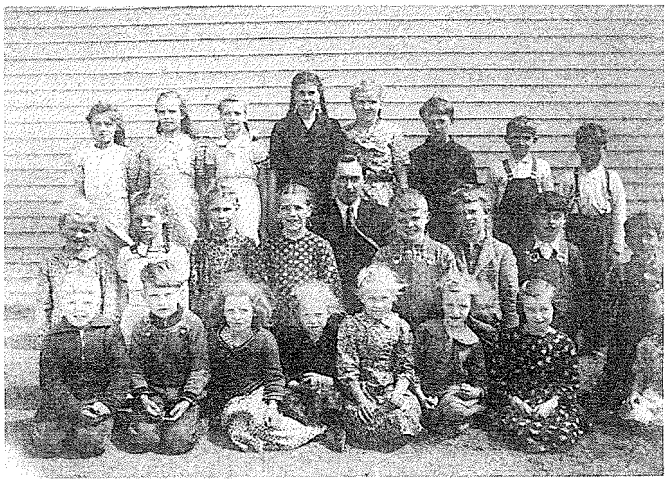
Educational Expectations for Blumenfeld Children by Church Affiliation, 1981



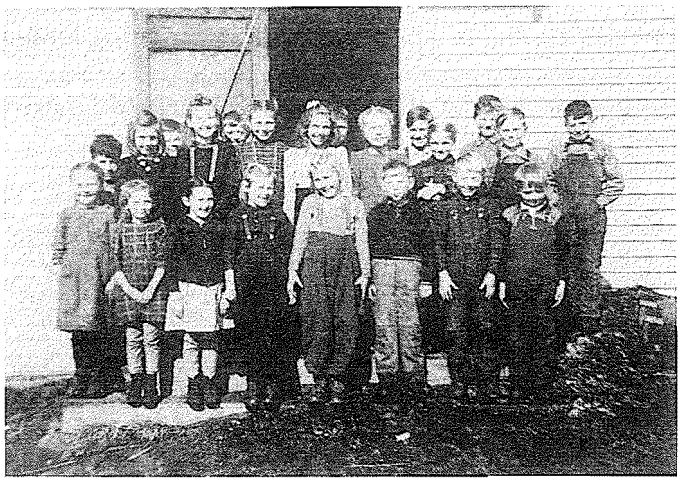
Source: Survey of Blumenfeld District residents, 1981.

when frequently the source of the problem lies in the attitudes planted in the child. Third, the child will choose to learn only those things which pertain to the immediate setting of home, farm and village. As a result, the child's opportunities in adult life must be limited to the world with which he/she is familiar. The village communities have limited opportunities for a rapidly growing population. What happens to a young adult when an employment or marriage opportunity forces him/her to live and work in an "English" town outside the Mennonite Reserve?

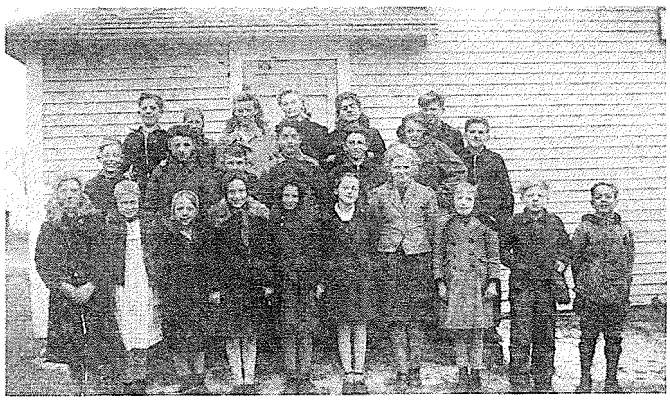
It appears, though, that many Blumenfeld families are still intent on limiting the boundaries of their children's world. Among Old Colony and Reinlaender families it seems that this conservative trend has been given more rigorous attention since 1965. The pressure on teenagers is to graduate at Grade 8. One can only conclude that these families still hold to the traditional belief that familiarity with the language and customs of the Canadian society will threaten the solidarity of the church and the community. The strength of the conviction of the Old Colony and Reinlaender families has affected youth of other denominations as well. A teenager whose parents attend the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church is forced to seek new friends when he continues his education to Grade 12.



Teacher Oscar Friesen with his students, 1943.



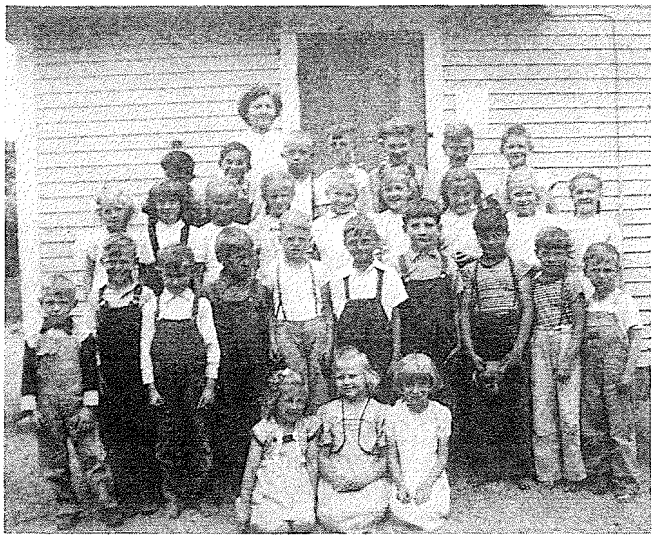
Elementary students of Sara Zacharias, 1946.



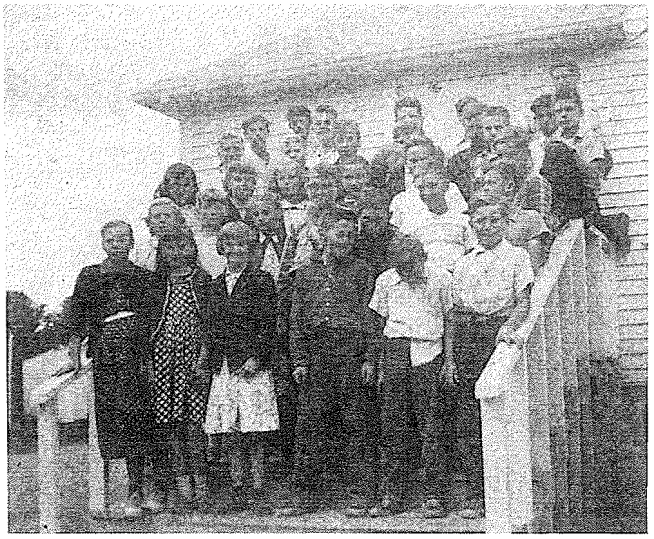
Henry Giesbrecht was the teacher of the senior room in 1946.



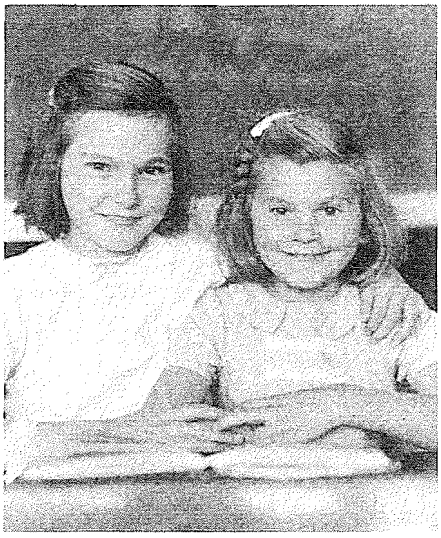
Gertrude Driedger with her class, 1948.



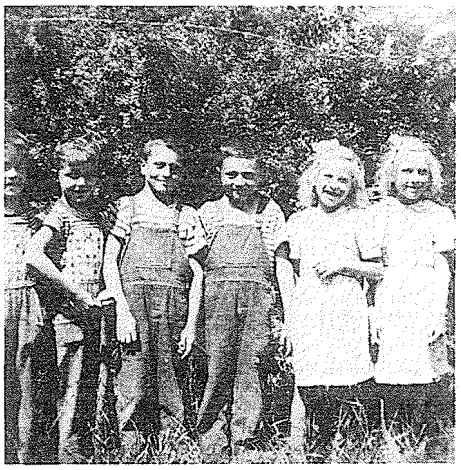
Teacher Anne Peters poses with her students of 1950-51. L-R: Back Row: Henry Klassen, Abe Penner, Peter Elias, John Klassen, Albert Warms, John Dyck, Edwin Elias. Middle Row: Anna Dueck, Evelyn Wall, Betty Wiebe, Mary Reimer, Anne Elias, Tina Klassen, Margie Dueck, Mary Klassen. Front Row: Abe Elias, Bill Dyck, Peter Sawatzky, Cornie Penner, Peter Klassen, Abe Fehr, Jake Thiessen, Barney Klassen, Elmer Elias. Kneeling: Dorothy Elias, Alvina Dueck, Tina Wall.



Students of Ben Sawatzky, circa 1957.



School photo of Anne and Mary Klassen, circa 1953.



Miss Driedger had the challenge of teaching three sets of twins in one classroom. The Wolfe, Klassen and Dueck twins are pictured here, 1950.

Mrs. W. V. Elias enjoys a joke while women prepare food at the school picnic.



Children at the school picnic, 1950.



Year	Teacher(s)	Trustees		
1926	Agatha Dyck Karoline Doern			
1927	Jacob B. Hooge J. J. Klassen	(first teacher in the new school building)		
1928				
1929				
1930				
1931	Harry H. Rempel Mrs. H. H. Rempel	Peter F. Klassen (ch) G. M. Elias		
1932	Harry H. Rempel Mrs. H. H. Rempel	G. M. Elias (ch) A. P. Janzen		
1933	Harry H. Rempel Mrs. H. H. Rempel	Peter F. Klassen (ch) Peter Elias, Jr.		
1934	Karl Pokrant Mrs. Tina Warkentin	Peter F. Klassen (ch) Peter Elias, Jr.		
1935	Karl Pokrant Edward W. Neufeld	Peter Elias, Jr. (ch) A. P. Janzen		
1936	Philip Peter Giesbrecht Edward W. Neufeld	Peter Elias, Jr. (ch) A. P. Janzen		
1937	Philip Peter Giesbrecht Edward W. Neufeld	John W. Dyck (ch) Peter Elias, Jr.		
1938	Frank Giesbrecht			
1939	Philip Peter Giesbrecht Henry F. Friesen	John F. Klassen (ch) Peter Elias, Jr.		
1940				
1941				
1942				
1943	Henry Friesen Oscar Friesen Jim and Lucy Hamm (May and June)	Peter F. Klassen		
1944	Jim Hamm Lucy Hamm	Jim Hamm, sec.-treas.		
1945	Jim Hamm Lucy Hamm Anne Giesbrecht (May and June)	Jim Hamm, (sec.-treas.)		
1946	Anne Giesbrecht Sarah Zacharias Henry Giesbrecht			
1947	Ella Klassen Tina Penner			
1948	John W. Driedger Gertrude Driedger (daughter)			
1949	John W. Driedger Marie Driedger (daughter)			
1950	Ann Peters			
*1951	Frank F. Enns Susann Enns	W. W. Reimer (ch) Jake J. Elias	John P. Elias Wm. Fehr	
1952	Frank Enns Susann Enns	W. I. Fehr (ch) Jake J. Elias	P. P. Klassen John P. Elias	
1953	Frank Enns Susann Enns	John P. Elias (ch) J. R. Penner	P. P. Klassen Bernie Elias	
1954	Frank H. Zacharias Peter I. Friesen	J. R. Penner (ch) John Dueck	P. J. M. Klassen Corn. Dyck	
1955	Frank H. Zacharias	W. W. Reimer (ch) John Dueck	P. J. M. Klassen Corn. Dyck	
1956	Frank H. Zacharias Ben Sawatzky	W. W. Reimer (ch) John Dueck	Geo. J. Zacharias Corn. J. Dyck	
1957	Ben Sawatzky Magdalena Enns	C. J. Dyck (ch) John Dueck	Geo. J. Zacharias	
1958	F. W. Dyck Eva Hildebrandt	C. J. Dyck (ch) Henry Wieler	Jake D. Klassen	
1959	H. W. Hildebrand Eva Hildebrandt	C. J. Dyck (ch) Henry Wieler	Peter E. Dueck E. G. Elias	
1960	H. W. Hildebrand Eva Hildebrandt	C. J. Dyck (ch) Henry Wieler	Peter Dueck E. G. Elias	
1961	Mary Ann Schroeder Ted Klassen	E. G. Elias (ch) Henry Wieler		
1962	Mary Ann Schroeder Ted G. Klassen	E. G. Elias (ch) Henry Wieler	Peter Dueck Jacob Elias	
1963	John R. Zacharias Mary Ann Schroeder	E. G. Elias Henry Wieler	Peter Dueck Jacob J. Elias	
1964	John R. Zacharias Betty Paetkau	E. G. Elias (ch) J. J. Elias	J. P. Klassen Peter Dueck	
1965	John R. Zacharias Betty Paetkau	E. G. Elias (ch) J. P. Klassen	Peter Dueck Geo. P. Klassen	
1966	John R. Zacharias Karen Zacharias	J. D. Klassen (ch) John R. Zacharias	Peter Dueck Geo. P. Klassen	
1967	Margaret Penner	J. D. Klassen (ch) Abe E. Elias	Jacob Janzen Geo. P. Klassen	
1968	Grace Zacharias	Abe E. Elias		
1969	Grace Zacharias Herman Friesen	Geo. P. Klassen (ch) P. J. Klassen	John A. Janzen Corn. Dyck	
1970	Keith Allen Wiebe Louise Peters	P. J. Klassen		
1971	Eldon Funk Louise Peters	Geo. P. Klassen (ch) P. J. Klassen	Corn. Dyck John A. Janzen	
1972	Marie Louise Fenske Eldon Funk	Garden Valley School Division Board Ward 3:		
1973	Marie Louise Fenske	Abe Rempel Herman Friesen		
1974	Lydia Reimer Shirley Zacharias Laura Dyck	Abe Rempel		
1975	Shirley A. Zacharias F. A. Peters	Abe Rempel		
1976	Shirley Fehr Geoffrey Funk	Abe Rempel		
1977	John Pankratz Patricia Nickel Shirley Fehr	Abe Rempel		
1978	Shirley Fehr			
1979	Dave Goertzen II Sharon Stobbe Shirley Fehr			
1980	Dave Goertzen II Sharon Loeppky Shiela Krahn			

*official school registers available only from 1951 to present. Information prior to 1951 has been gleaned from oral reports.



Marie Driedger, teacher 1949-50.



Eva Driedger, teacher 1949-50, with (L-R): Alvina Dueck, Anna Dueck, and Margie Dueck.



Mr. and Mrs. John W. Driedger celebrate a high-school graduation with their daughter, Gertrude. The number of students completing high school has gradually decreased since the 1960's. In June, 1981, only one Grade 8 student intended to pursue further education. Parents grant permission for their child's withdrawal from school as early as 14 years of age.

Jim and Lucy Hamm: Teachers and Community Leaders

In 1943, Jim Hamm left a government job in Ottawa to seek a teaching position at Blumenfeld. He stayed at the Peter F. Klassen home for a few days until his family joined him. At first, many regarded him as a strange man. He drove an old 4-cylinder Willis car which was in constant need of repairs. He smoked a pipe and enjoyed politics. It did not take long however for the Hamm family to win the confidence and friendship of the Blumenfelders. Their willingness to work for the benefit of the whole community made them popular leaders. Of the Hamm family, it is still said, *Dee koammen met aulem voadich* (They got along with everyone).

Mr. and Mrs. Hamm enjoyed their years in Blumenfeld school. "Previously we had taught 50 students in one classroom Grades 1-8. Now we had half the students in half the grades," commented Jim Hamm. Jim and Lucy remember the generosity of the village. On Friday, parents sent produce or food in order to supplement the income of the teachers. The W. M. Elias family frequently sent a fresh chicken. In summer, students brought watermelon in the back of the buggies. Then everyone, including the teachers, had a feast for dinner.

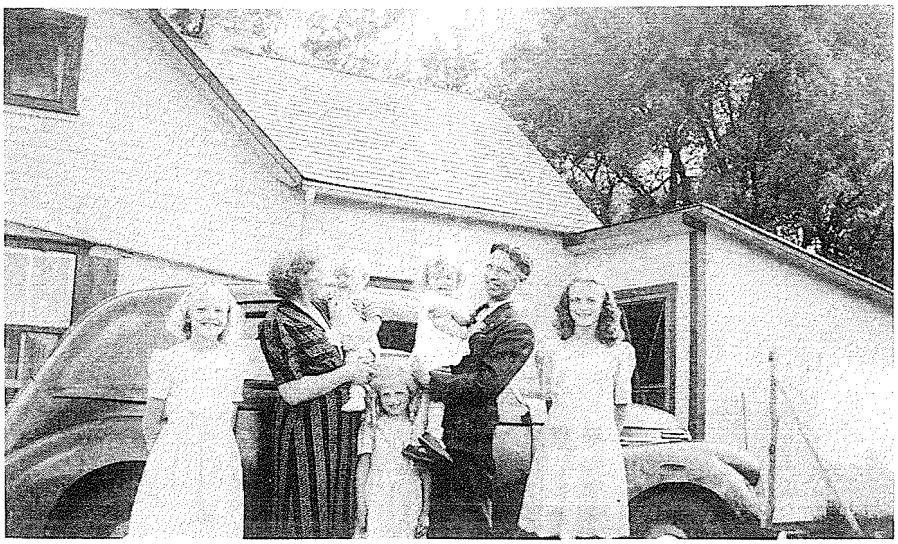
Mrs. Hamm hired Margaret Braun to look after their young children while she was teaching. At recess, she would run to the teacherage to see that all was going well. During the cold winter months, Mrs. Hamm provided hot meals for students at 50¢ a meal.

The Hamm family also had cows, chickens, pigs and a large garden. When the family slept late and missed the herdsman, the Hamm's oldest daughter had to take the cows to the village pasture.

The teachers' job included preparing the fire. In winter, Jim Hamm had a habit of placing the kindling on top of the stove at the



Teachers Tina Penner and Ella Klassen, 1947-8.



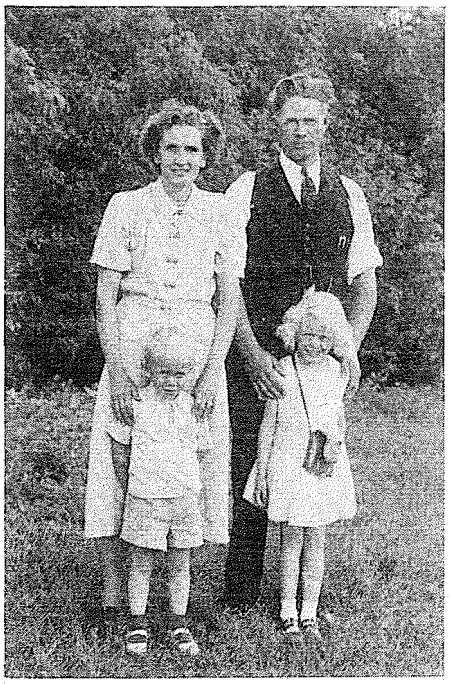
The Hamm family in front of their Willis car, 1943, L-R: Florence, Mrs. Lucy Hamm, Jimmy, Bernice, Gladys, Mr. Jim Hamm, June.

end of the school day. Next morning it was dry and ready to use. On one occasion, the school nearly went up in flames. Anna Wiebe, caretaker of the school, was boarding at the H. M. Penner home. On her way to the store, the smell of smoke made her glance toward the school. Quickly she ran to the Hamm's house, and with their help, the flames were extinguished with wet sacks. Smoke had damaged the room and the whole school had to be cleaned.

The Hamms were noteworthy community leaders. Jim Hamm was elected as secretary-treasurer of the school board. This put him in the position of being able to sign his own pay-cheques.

The Hamm family became involved in 4-H and choir. Mrs. Hamm invited the home-economist to visit the village in order to teach women more about canning vegetables and fruits. Mr. Hamm was involved in political campaigning, in the cooperative movement, the Blumenfeld Credit Union and the Pembina Co-op Canners. One summer his experiment in raising tomato-seed provided employment for many Blumenfeld youth.

Frank F. and Susann Enns with their children, Margaret and Garry.



Blumenfeld, 1951-1954: A Teacher's Perspective

by F. F. Enns

We had been farming at Lena for five years when I finally realized that I did not have enough brains to farm and so I decided to go back to teaching. It seems to me that I inserted an ad in some papers that a Mennonite couple was looking for a two-room school where both of them could teach. We had a number of offers. Believing that the Lord's leading is important when you make life decisions, we prayed about this while negotiations went on with the various districts. I have no clear memory as to what decided for Blumenfeld but we were grateful later on that things seemed to "work out" this way.

After some preliminary correspondence I decided to make a trip to Blumenfeld to finalize the arrangements. One cold but clear winter day in early 1951, I prodded the old 1938 Ford along Highway #3 to Winkler. From here I phoned to

Blumenfeld in order to make sure that the secretary, Jake Elias, would be home when I got there. Since it was almost lunch time, I made our appointment for early afternoon. When I asked him how to find his place, he told me that it was the store in the centre of the village. Rural party lines being what they were and villagers in winter having time on their hands, I knew that our meeting was not likely to be too private. I was not mistaken. But maybe the discussions over the counter of the village store with Jake behind it, and other members of the board present to put in their word, were as good as they could have been anywhere. I lived up to my name and was quite frank about what I expected. I may have sounded a bit too flippant because somebody expressed concern about the new school teacher not being strict enough. I referred them to the people at the village of Rosenort (now misnamed "Rosetown") where I had taught some years prior to being married and having children of my own. Those were the years I always knew what other people's children needed and my usual prescription was a liberal application of rawhide. By the time I got to Blumenfeld, I had already learned that children responded much better to love than to an overuse of the strap. However, the concerned trustee must have checked Rosenort for references and I never again heard any expressions of fear that I might be too easy-going in school.

We finalized the arrangements and in fall, late August, we moved into the old teacherage. There was much to be desired about the teacherage and school, especially the former. If I would have had Susann along on that first trip, it might have been more difficult to decide in favor of Blumenfeld. In school there were two rooms with separate entrances at each end and a wall in between which had the middle part on hinges so that it would be opened for occasions such as the Christmas Concert. In each room there was one of the then popular "Booker" heaters which used the cheapest coal, occasionally "stunk" quite a bit, but on the whole kept us snug and warm and did not have to be started every morning. Since the teachers were also the janitors in those days, it fell to my lot to look after the heating while the pupils helped with the sweeping.

Farther back in the yard was an old barn. We had brought a cow with us and I went to do chores every morning and evening. The animal supplied us with milk, cream and butter and when the calf was old enough, we slaughtered it for meat. In those days Blumenfeld still had a community pasture and we were lucky to be permitted to send our cow along with the rest of the village herd. This had another advantage for the village. The teacher had to get up in time and be ready to send his cow along and so they never had the problem of the teacher not being up for school in the morning. If I remember correctly, it was shortly after 7:00 a.m. that the herd went west. In our three years it was only once or twice that I missed and had to take the animal to the pasture myself.

The working arrangement was ideal for Susann and me. To this day we look back to the years in Blumenfeld as being some of the best of our teaching careers. Depending on the enrollment in the various grades, it was either Grades 1-3 or 1-4 in the elementary room and 4-8 or 5-8 in the upper classroom. The school board left that division up to us. The school board and we did not always agree on all matters, but parents and teachers always respected each other. It was good to work in a district where they had the confidence that their teachers knew what they were doing and they let them do it with a minimum of "help" from outside.

The Blumenfeld people were unique in their acceptance of a husband-wife teaching team. They were satisfied that Susann was doing a first-rate job and earning her money. We also appreciated the way our children were accepted. They were always part of the group and never felt that they were treated as "teachers' kids". We were grateful for the way the village accepted Garry's coming to school when he was only four. In the morning he would sleep as long as he liked, eat the breakfast left for him on the table, and then come to school. He would walk up to the teacher, put out one little foot to have his shoelace tied and then put out the other one. The teacher, Mrs. Enns, wouldn't miss a sentence in her instructions and the children never batted an eye. With these preliminaries taken care of, Garry would go to his assigned desk near the back of the room and pass his time with a coloring or picture book until recess. Then he would run out with the Grade Ones and Twos and they had a great time. During those three years his wagon and tricycle were completely "used up", but we didn't mind and thought it was worth it. When Garry was old enough to be in Grade I, the only difference was that now he had to be in school by 9:00.

The children and parents of the district did not resent our daughter, Margaret, being at the head of the class. The only time this became a problem was when Annie Elias and Margaret were in the same class competing for the top position. It became difficult because they were both so capable and checked their test papers so

closely, that the teacher got tired of having to mark so exactly. He solved the problem by promoting Annie (she was the older of the two) to the next Grade. Annie was easily first here too and Margaret remained first in her class and I did not need to worry about ½ and ¼ marks being correctly assigned here and there. The competition was always comradely and the girls have remained friends to this day.

The narrow schoolyard was a nuisance, especially when we were trying to play baseball. Even with the ball diamond laid carefully in the middle of this narrow strip, it was impossible to keep the ball from flying over the fence on either side. To the west it did not matter so much because there was pasture there. But on the east side Janzens had a garden, and this caused me no end of concern, especially in fall, when the watermelons were ripening. They were a continual source of temptation on hot afternoons. We had our own small garden at the very end of the narrow yard but either this was too far out or we did not grow the same enticing crop because the ball seldom went into it.

The school building left much to be desired and before long the district was debating a major renovation project. They were planning to put a full basement, with an oil-furance and indoor toilets under the old building. The debate was long and heated. The argument was that they would have debentures, $700 annually, to pay for twenty years! That seemed an insurmountable barrier for many. Then I read an article about tobacco sales in Canada far exceeding the cost of education and I asked Jake Elias how much of the "stuff" he sold in his little store in Blumenfeld. He estimated that it must be between $700 and $800 annually. I did not make any further comments but he knew why I had asked and must have passed my concern on to the board. The renovation was undertaken and as far as I know, only one of the trustees stopped smoking.

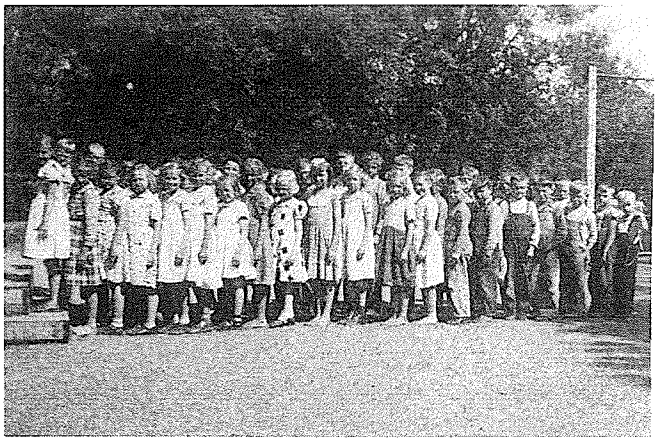
The new set-up was a great improvement. The smelly "Booker" was not in the classroom anymore. The furnace was automatic and coal did not need to be carried. There was so much less dust in the classroom and our ventilation was better. The large basement gave us extra room and more activities could be undertaken. The Auditorium was always ready whenever we wanted to use it for larger meetings in the evening. Not least of the advantages were the indoor odorless toilets. We kept the outside ones for the time being because we did not really trust all these "modern" innovations.

The teacherage was another story. It was old but clean, and we managed even though it was drafty. The window on the north side of the little downstairs bedroom was not rain or snow proof. One of the reasons we were able to "make do" was because the house-keepers did not spend much time in it. Two little attic bedrooms for a family of four would hardly be considered adequate nowadays.

We enjoyed our work in the school most of the time. The children were congenial and the parents supportive. The occasional "differences" were dealt with summarily, person to person, and we never had the feeling that grudges were held. Mr. and Mrs. Enns had their own way of doing things. They seemed a little demanding at first but when the children began to realize that they were learning and progressing, school work became more enjoyable and less of a chore.

One notable innovation instituted by the Ennses was the practice of having the children speak High-German on the school yard before 9 a.m. At that time, the teaching of a foreign language was not yet permitted during the regular school day. So we had our half hour of German from 8:30-9:00 in the morning. During the spring and fall many of the children came to school as soon as they had had breakfast at home. In a farming community this meant that children would come to school at 8 a.m. or even earlier. We asked them that at this time nothing but High-German be spoken on the school yard or in school. When I first announced this in early September, I heard a comment from one of my older pupils, "It's going to be a very quiet morning!" But children were adaptable and it was not very long until the school-yard again echoed with their voices and all in High-German. I often felt that they learnt more German during this time than during the half hour of official instruction. During the day we were strict in enforcing the "English only" rule in order to help students develop a better facility in that language. This was especially necessary for the younger children just learning it. During the "Religious Instruction" period from 3:30-4:00 p.m. we used the German again and I felt that our program was good enough to make the students bilingual in the real sense of the word by the time they were through with Grade 8.

The rule of having to speak High-German on the schoolyard in the morning did bring out some humorous incidents on occasion. There was the time when a pupil nonplussed Mr. Enns with the question: "How do you say *Schnoddanaes* in High-German?" The teacher had to go and look that one up.



Students of Frank and Susann Enns line up at recess.



Mrs. Susann Enns with some of her primary pupils.

One of the customs unique to Mennonite villages, particularly in Blumenfeld, was having the teachers over for meals during the fall pig-slaughtering season. During our first monthly meeting in September, the chairman of the board, W. W. Reimer, (if I remember correctly the other two were J. P. Elias and W. Fehr) informed me, among other things, that when they started slaughtering pigs they expected the teachers for Breakfast, Lunch, Faspa and Supper. I would be the last person to refuse an invitation to good eating but I thought that was expecting a bit much and suggested we might not be able to make it to school on time in the morning and particularly at noon. I was a little taken aback when he wanted to know who was telling me to start school at 1 o'clock in the afternoon. We finally settled for lunch and supper and asked them to excuse us from breakfast and Faspa. "Lunch" was usually roast chicken with all the trimmings. The ladies of the district soon found out that Susann had a great weakness for fresh fried spare ribs. They usually hurried some a bit so that they could give her one before she went back to school at noon. It was not considered undignified for the elementary teacher to be walking back to school enjoying a hefty *Rebspea* on the way.

Supper was a smorgasborg of *Plumi moos*, spare ribs, liver sausage, potatoes and vegetables and a choice of pies for dessert. Then there was the evening of visiting and, if you stayed long enough, another snack before you left. Having young children (who had also been well fed) we had an excuse to leave early. We were supplied with a package of spare ribs, liver sausage and by this time there was usually a smoked sausage ready to go with them. This was enough to keep us in tasty meat until the next family invited us. During October and early November we had very little need to buy meat of any kind. My weight problem had its beginning in Blumenfeld, I'm sure!

The John Wolfe family had such a small house at the time that they had difficulty accommodating the usual slaughtering crew, not to speak of extras such as the school teachers. Caroline informed Mrs. Enns that they were slaughtering pigs the next day but that they could not have us for lunch because of the room problem. Mrs. Wolfe was going to have us at some other time. We understood and thought nothing more of it. The next day when we walked into our teacherage shortly after twelve noon there was our table spread with a large meal of roast chicken and everything that went with it. Whoever brought it must have had perfect timing for it was piping hot. It was a beautiful gesture and warmed our hearts even more than it titillated our palates.

Every winter there was the annual school district meeting and shortly thereafter the board started negotiations with the teachers for the coming year. A centrally negotiated salary schedule for a whole division did not exist. It was each teacher for himself against a board of three trustees who always seemed to be in danger of bankrupting the district if they gave the teachers much of an increase. The bargaining was usually minimal when a district was satisfied with a teacher and the teacher really wanted to stay.

During the spring of 1954, Mr. Schaefer, the principal of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute of Gretna, persuaded me to join his staff at our private school.

When we had our school picnic in June that year all the parents and pupils came back to the school after the evening chores for a "Farewell"

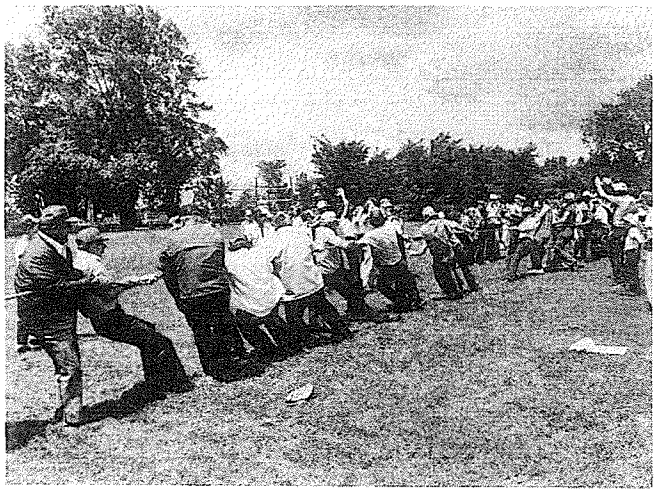
program which had been planned for us. We were overwhelmed by the love and affection that the community showed for the teachers. The new work took so much of my time that we seldom got back to Blumenfeld, but whenever we did, it was always a happy occasion of meeting and sharing with old friends.

Once, when I was in Winkler during our second year at Blumenfeld, one of the businessmen asked a bit sarcastically how the *Blumen* (flowers) were doing in Blumenfeld. I stopped him in the middle of serving me and told him that the village was living up to its name. I explained to him that from the first lilacs in spring until the last zinnias froze in fall the teachers' desks were never without fresh flowers and that the children believed in the song they loved to sing:

Give me the roses while I live,
Trying to cheer me on;
Useless the flowers that you give
After the soul is gone.



Races at the school picnic, 1981.
Photo credit David Goertzen II.



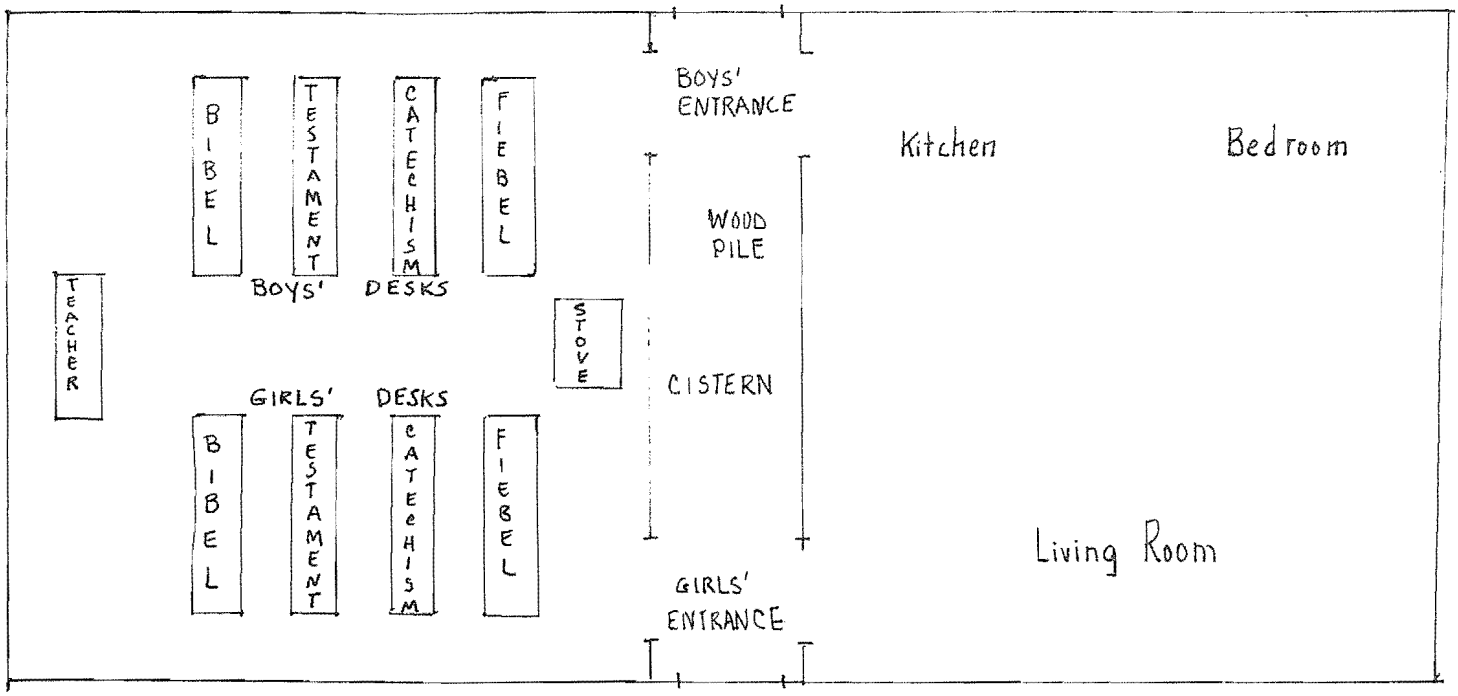
Tug o' War at the school picnic, 1981.
Photo credit David Goertzen II.

Part III: School Buildings

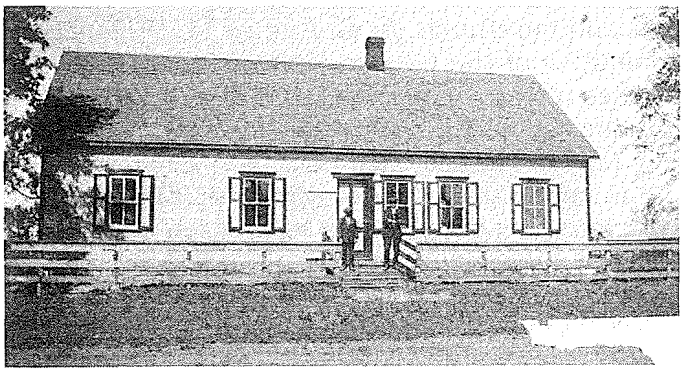
At least three school buildings have housed Blumenfeld students over the last century.

The first school in Blumenfeld was probably built at the first site of the village and opened November, 1876, according to the instructions of Isaak Mueller. It is not known whether this school was a temporary shelter like a *semlin*, or if it was of log construction. In the summer of 1877, the village moved to its present location. It can be assumed that a schoolhouse was ready for the fall school term. This school-house, a log building, was replaced with a frame structure when the economic situation permitted it. The frame building was a combination of a three-room teacherage and a large classroom.

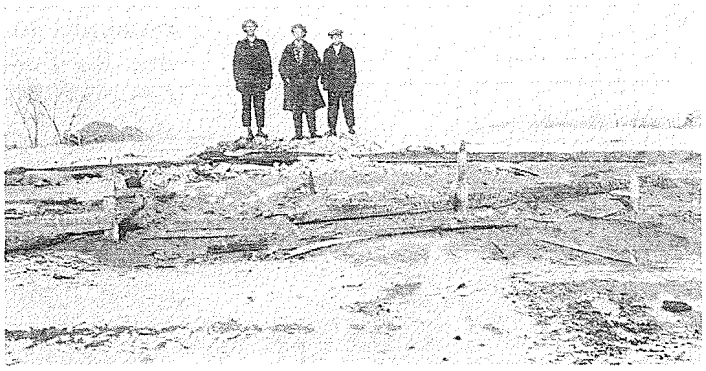
A fire totally destroyed the school-building in 1927, at the time when Jacob Hooge was the teacher. An accident with a coal-oil lamp caused the fire. A new two-room school was built on the same location. Jacob V. Neufeld, a reputable carpenter, was contracted to build the new school. He was assisted by Johann Wolfe and his son.



Floor-plan of the old school



The one-room school building with adjoining teacherage.



Young men stand on the rubble of the school building which burned to the ground in November, 1927.

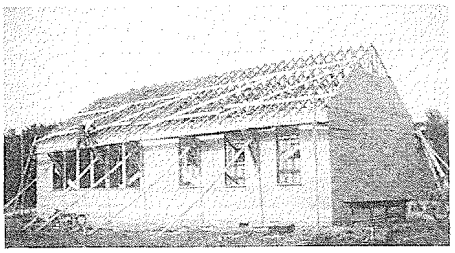
Insurance revenues from the old school totalled $1,000. A loan for an additional $3,000 was taken to cover the costs of the new building. Some of the costs incurred were:

$1,500 lumber supplies, Frank M. Letkeman, Haskett
637 lumber supplies, W. M. Elias, Haskett
500 Jakob V. Neufeld (this was probably the total amount paid out for labour)[36]

During the building of the new school, classes resumed in the home of B. B. Krahn (where J. N. Friesen lives now).

The new school featured a folding wall between the two classrooms. This permitted the school to be converted into a large meeting room. Although the movable wall was despised by many teachers, it made the building functional for community events such as Christmas programs and meetings. The school was the setting for weddings and funerals as well, particularly in the years before the Old Colony Church was constructed.

In the early 1950's the Blumenfeld district contracted Jake E. Neufeld, son of the first contractor, to make extensive renovations.



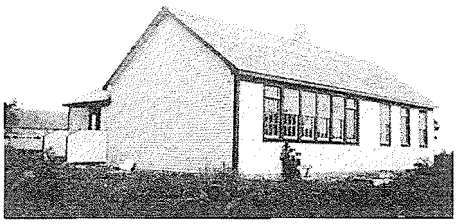
A new school was built by J. V. Neufeld in 1928. The students, in the meantime, attended classes at the B. B. Krahn home.

The school building was jacked up and moved aside temporarily while a basement was constructed. Then the school was moved back onto its new foundation. Flush toilets and a furnace were installed at the same time.

The movable wall was permanently closed. Programs and meetings took place in the basement auditorium. In spite of low ceilings and unpainted walls, this auditorium has been the principal meeting-hall of the Blumenfeld community.

Increasing enrollment created a need for another classroom and a third teacher. In 1977 a building was moved to the school yard. But in January 1979, a delegation from the village of Blumenfeld attended a board meeting of the Garden Valley School Division. George P. Klassen, spokesman for the village of Blumenfeld, told the board that "the parents were very dissatisfied with the use of huts for classrooms", and described them as a fire-hazard. Mr. Klassen further advised the board that 100 percent of the resident electorate was in favor of the addition to the village school. He reflected the strong objection to busing students to large urban schools. "A school such as ours is the highlight of the community. Without this a community is nonexistant."[37]

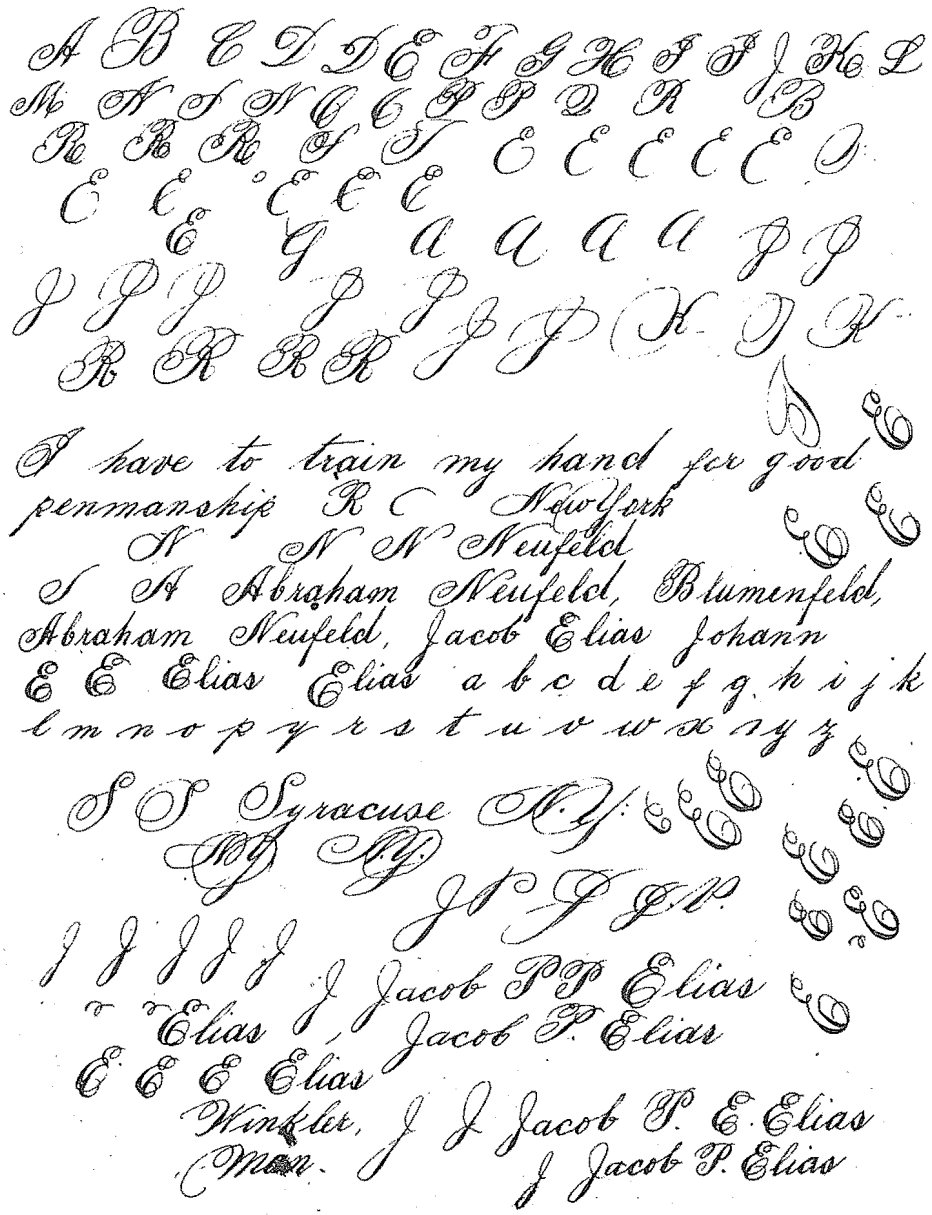
The insistence of the Blumenfeld and neighbouring Hochfeld communities that the village schools be retained reflects the strong belief that the functions of the school are best performed in close proximity to the home and the church. At an August 14, 1979 meeting, the building committee of the Garden Valley School Division responded to the wishes of these communities and pledged their support in petitioning the provincial government for grants to build rural schools to serve (a) the Haskett, Reinland, Schoenwiese and Rosengart area; (b) Blumenfeld; (c) the Gnadenthal area; (d) Hochfeld area and; (e) Plum Coulee. A visit to the area by Minister of Education, Keith Cosens, and a subsequent meeting resulted in positive action. A provincial grant to match the local levy was promised. Now, in 1981, the school district of Blumenfeld is anticipating a new structure which will include a three classroom facility plus a multi-purpose room which will also serve as a gymnasium. Construction is scheduled to begin in the summer of 1981.



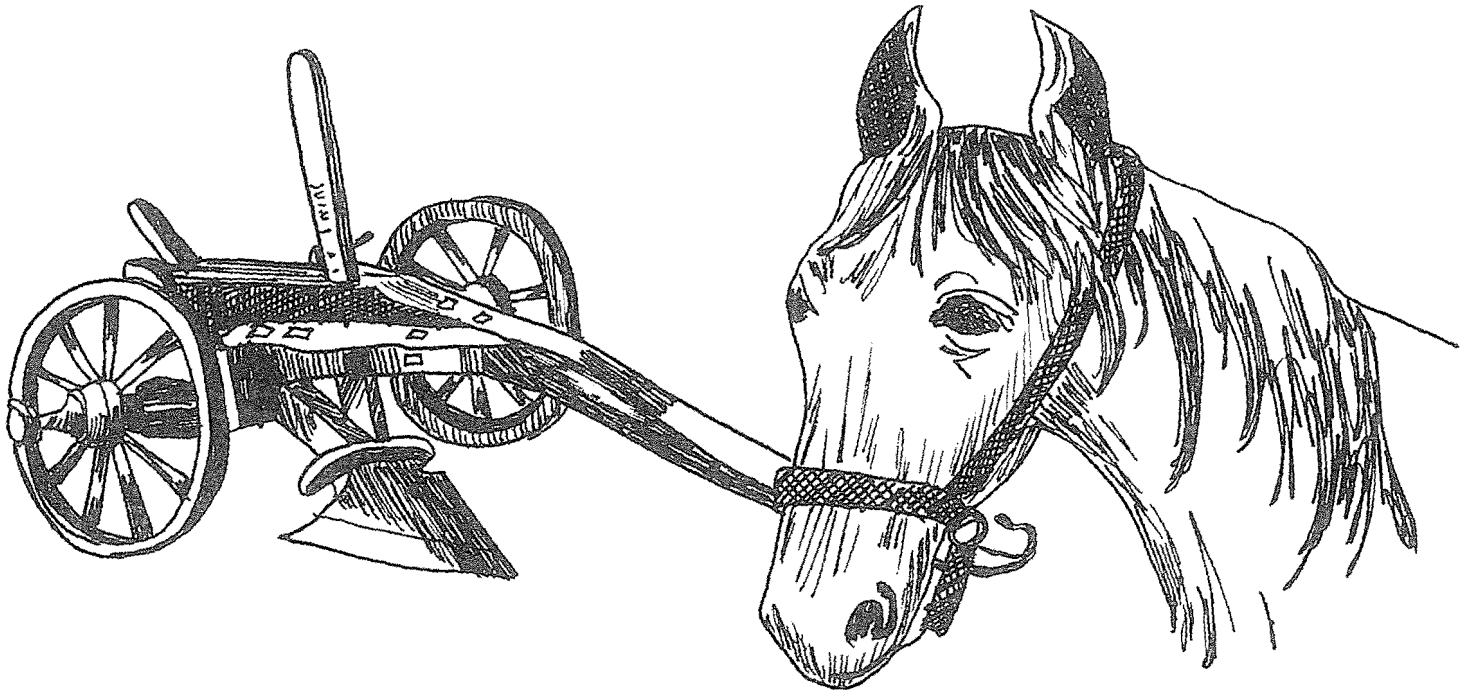
The completed building, 1928.

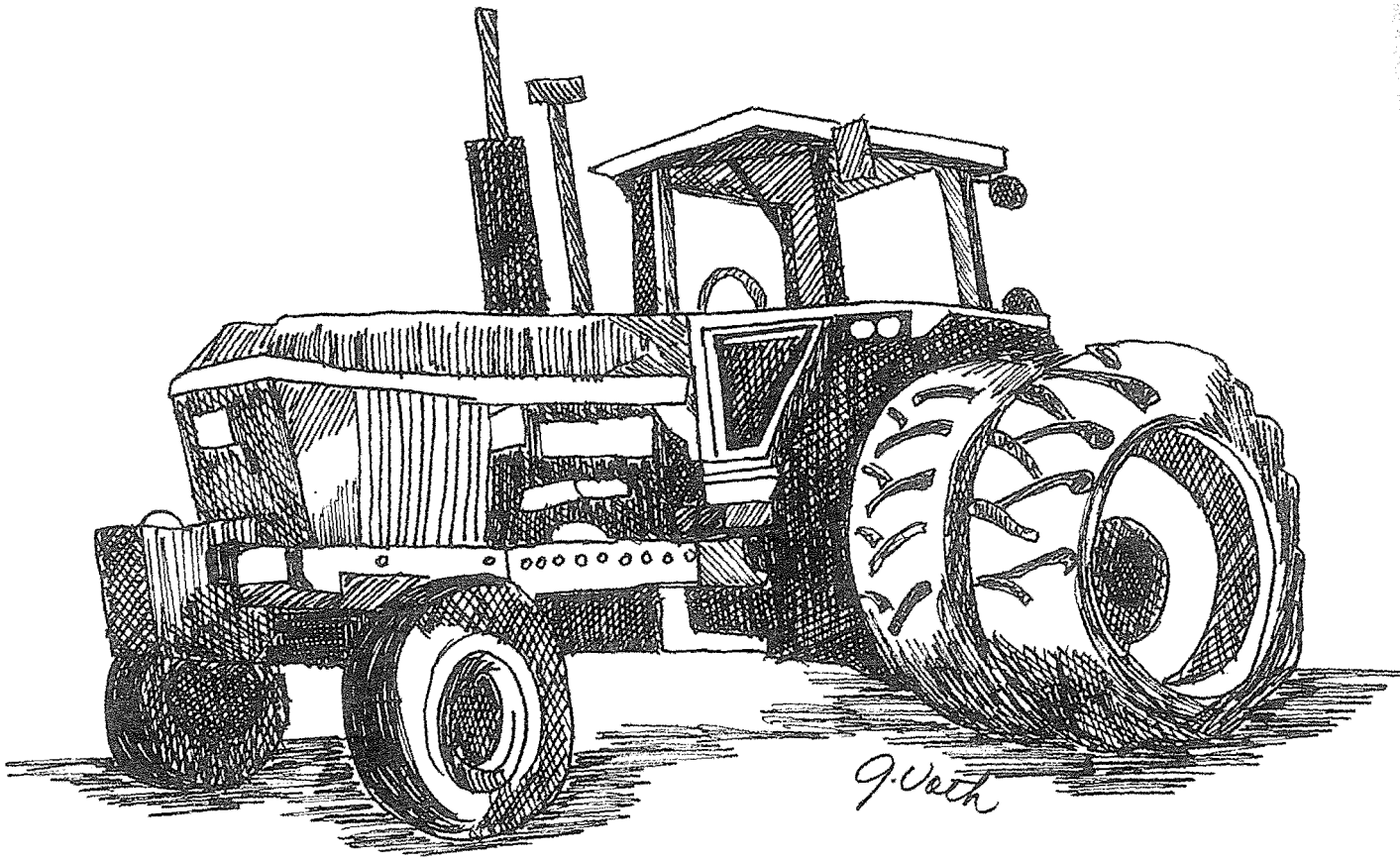


The teacherage was moved from the W. W. Reimer place and served until late '50's when a new house was moved onto the site.



Sample of penmanship.




J. Voth

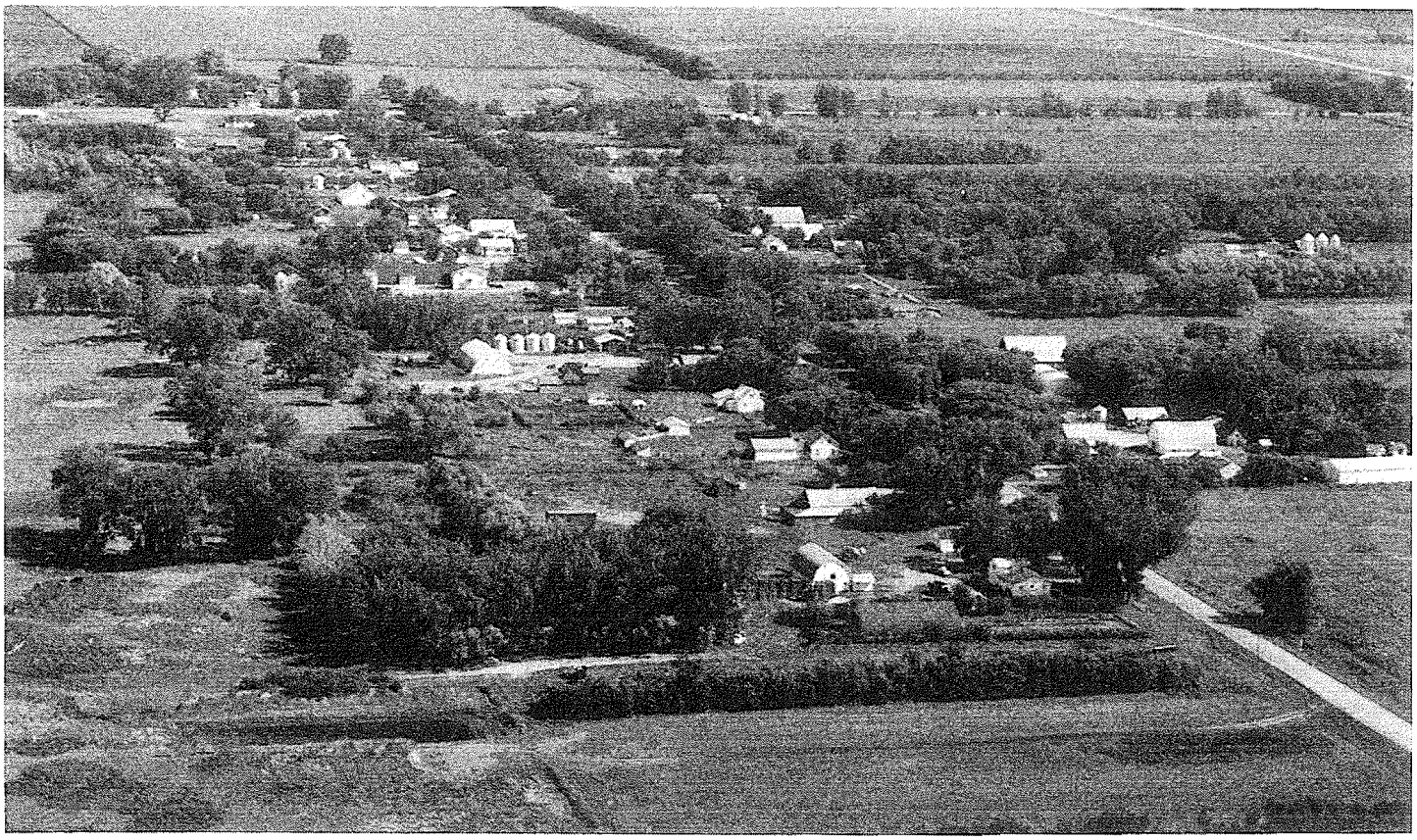
Working the Land

CHAPTER 5

The Mennonite pioneers of 1875 saw a future in the bald prairies which had been avoided by the British settlers from Ontario. One hundred years later, the treeless expanse has been transformed into a fertile farmland that produces special crops for Canadian and foreign markets. The transformation has not been an easy one. The pioneers who came from Russia were wheat-farmers. They exulted in the success of the wheat crops on the black Canadian soil. But over-specialization in grain farming depleted the resources of the soil. Mennonites did not heed the advice of "outsiders", and remained unaware of impending disaster. It took drought, disease and a collapsed wheat market to bring about a change which caused farmers to look for new agricultural methods that would renew their soil and stabilize the economic situation.

The farm survey system based on the *Gewannflur*, (strip-farming) imported from Russia, had made it difficult to implement changes in agricultural methods. The settlement system was rigidly controlled by the Reinlaender Church which used it as a method of ensuring educational, social and religious conformity. The Reinlaender Church's migration to Mexico and the break-down of the *Gewannflur* system contributed to the greater openness to government advisors. These advisors introduced diversified field crops and livestock farming. They gave encouragement and support to the various agricultural organizations and enterprises which were developed in the 1940's.

Mennonite tradition had considered it honorable to earn a living by the toil of one's hands. A businessman was viewed with distrust. Consequently, no Reinlaender village became a major trading centre, in contrast to Altona and Steinbach of the Bergthaler areas. The Reinlaender Mennonites were dependant on the non-Mennonite or Bergthaler businessmen in Morden, Winkler and Haskett. Winkler continues to serve as the essential trade and market centre for the people of Blumenfeld.



Blumenfeld, looking southeast. Prairie Agri Photo

From Bald Prairie to Cottonwood Groves

The *Gewannflur*, like the German language, had been essential protection against the influences of the larger Canadian society.

The Reinlaender church depended on the village settlement pattern to exercise the social controls which ensured conformity to the traditions of the church.[1] Farmers who left the villages to live on their homesteads did so to escape the religious, social, and economic restrictions of the Reinlaender Church. Land-hungry farmers whose thirst for freedom gave them the courage to challenge the church and to suffer the social consequences of excommunication were protected by Canadian law. By the 1910's, it appeared that the church could no longer control the ambitions of farmers and the destiny of the village communities. Many villages were breaking up. This was one of the many reasons that motivated about 3,200 Reinlaenders to move to Mexico.

The villages south of Winkler remained in control of the 500 Reinlaenders who had chosen to stay in Canada. In spite of adapting to the public school system, to modern machinery, cars and radios, these villages continued to observe the old traditions. The leavening influence of the *Russlaender* and other progressive people was not welcomed. Bold thinkers were lost to the communities. As a result "an old world, patriarchal atmosphere prevails in the village communities even today."[2]

The Bergthal immigrants of 1874 had claimed most of the useable land in the East Reserve. A Bergthal delegation, together with Jacob Y. Schantz, inspected the vast expanse of prairie west of the Red River.

They were not intimidated by the treeless land which was far more similar to their former home in the Russian steppes than the wooded East Reserve.

The second wave of Russian Mennonite immigrants arrived in 1875. Women and children waited impatiently at the Fort Dufferin immigration houses while the men surveyed the new Reserve and claimed village sites. The return of the men signalled the beginning of the last phase of a long arduous journey. Oxcarts where piled high with newly acquired possessions. Thousands of Mennonite immigrants began to move along the winding Colonization Trail. It was a two-days journey from Fort Dufferin to Blumenfeld by oxcart.



A writer from the Mountain City area described the arrival of his Mennonite neighbours:

> Before the summer was over, a long line of camp fires, extending for miles and miles, announced one evening to the lonely settlers that six thousand Mennonites had located on seventeen townships. It is '79 now, and farms on that plain are as hard to get, and are as valuable, as our much vaunted timber claims along the Mountain.[3]

The rich farming plain, known today as the Pembina Triangle, had been ignored by the British settlers from Ontario who preferred to establish their farms where there was plenty of timber.

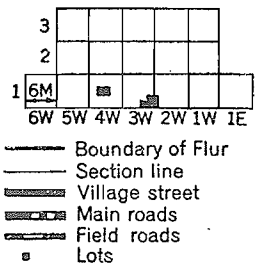
> In those days nobody ever looked at land — if the timber suited, the land had to. Notwithstanding the apparent absurdity, it is a fact that those who had the whole country to choose from, almost invariably chose the worst farms. They picked for bush and they got it; but along with it they got cold, low-lying prairies. I knew men who rejoiced in the possession of claims almost entirely wooded. Four or five years ago, they rejoiced; they don't now. While they are clearing off an acre of bush, their neighbours alongside, can break up twenty or thirty acres of prairie.[4]

The Ontario settlers realized their mistake in by-passing the barren low-lands only after the Mennonites had demonstrated the land's value.

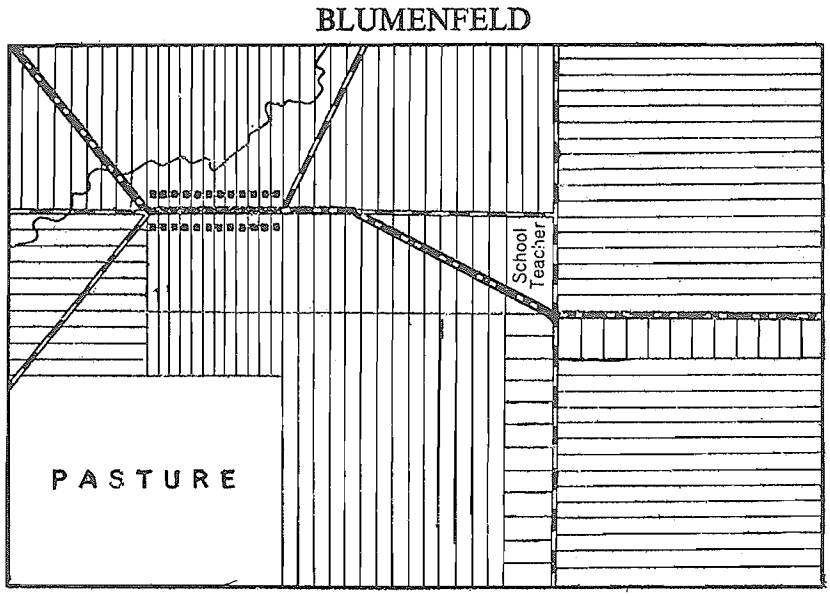
> It was not long till it became recognized that the best and most profitable farm is in the open prairie, where a plow may be started at one corner and turn a continuous furrow to the other, half-a-mile or a mile away.[5]

The pioneers of Blumenfeld arrived at the site of their future village and proceeded to survey it according to the *Gewannflur* (strip-farming) system they had used in Russia.

The rectangular survey system of Manitoba was designed for quarter-section farms, to be homesteaded and improved upon for three years before receiving a deed. The Dominion Lands Act, amended in 1876 made it legal for the Mennonites to settle in villages. But the *Gewannflur* survey system was never legally recognized, although it was widely used until the 1920's. This "nucleated" settlement pattern required the cooperation of all the villagers to accept a type of land division that had no legal foundation.



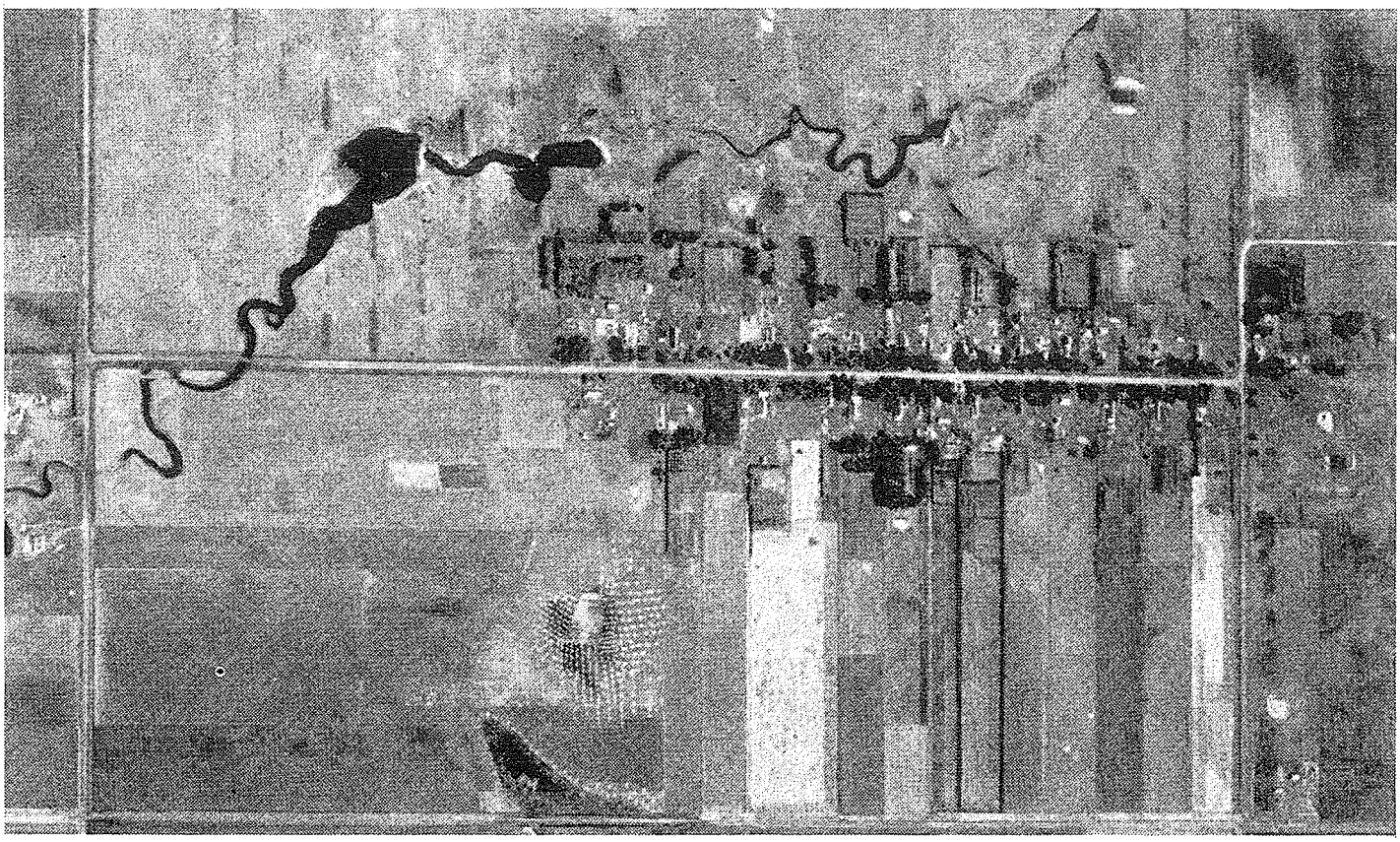
Field pattern of Blumenfeld, showing arrangement of *Gewanne* and *Koagel*. Reprinted from John Warkentin, "Mennonite Agricultural Settlements of Southern Manitoba."



The village of Blumenfeld was designed for twenty-four farmers. This group of farmers, who were friends or relatives, had made entries for Sections 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, and 22 of Range 4, Township 1. This parcel of land, or *Flur*, was chosen at the early survey stage for its diversity in land capabilities. Upon arrival at the village site, the *Flur* was divided into land areas suitable for cultivation and meadow. This division was based on drainage, soil texture, vegetation and relation to the village site. The area for cultivation was divided into three large fields which were called *Gewanne*. The *Gewanne* were further divided into twenty-four strips, one for each farmer. The strips were commonly known as *Koagel*. "This system had an advantage over the rectangular survey in that it provided for an equitable distribution of a variety of lands among the farm operators."[7]

The village was first laid out in section 16 in 1875. But spring flooding on that site caused the pioneers to move the village to its present location in section 20. Here it lies on well-drained land near a creek. "As a result of the move, the short plots in section 16, which were original house lots, were left over, and some more had to be

surveyed in section 15 to even the land distribution."[8] The first *Flur* had no prescribed arable or hay land, but in practice the lands in section 15 and 16 were used as hay land because they were poorly drained.[9]



Blumenfeld from the air, 1946. The *Gewanne* and *Koagel* have all been obliterated except in the field to the northwest of the village. Reprinted from John Warkentin, "Mennonite Agricultural Settlements in Southern Manitoba."

Blumenfeld is located on land which was admirably suited for a *Gewannflur.*

> There is just enough variation to make all the desirable types of land available. Section 22, a light loam, is the best arable land. Farther west in section 21, the land is lighter, even somewhat sandy, and not as good as in section 22. Section 20 was laid out in *Koagel* despite the fact that the creek meanders through it. In Section 17, the soil is very variable because it lies close to alluvial deposits brought from the Escarpment to the west. It has many micro-depressions (pot-holes) which sometimes delay work in the spring and also make tillage difficult. Weeds grow in the depressions, and in the early days, they were used for thatching roofs. This section was wisely used as the community pasture. The two sections to the east of it were not considered to have desirable land at the time of settlement, because they were somewhat wet in spring. Drainage commenced in 1897 and now these lands are considered among the best in the former *Gewannflur.*[10]

The strip-farming system of farming was not without its disadvantages. Farmers had to accept the strips appointed to them, regard-

less of their quality. Over the years, high ridges of dirt developed between the strips, thus cutting down the acreage. The ridges, known as *Raine*, were usually overgrown with weeds and infested with insects. The farmer's fields were scattered in several *Gewanne*, and he needed to take water and fodder for the horses when he worked on a field far from the village. The most significant disadvantage was the limited possibility for expansion. Ambitious farmers were not permitted to expand their holdings outside the village.

Some ambitious farmers broke out of the traditional system by moving onto their homesteads. This could destroy the village *Flur*, and so these farmers usually sold their village holding in order to buy land on the fringes of the Mennonite settlement. An ambitious Blumenfeld farmer in the pre-1920 era would buy land in the Haskett and Eichenfeld areas. These alternatives were not approved by the Reinlaender Church but the church was rapidly losing its power to enforce the traditions. A few farmers, notably D. D. Fehr, B. B. Krahn and I. Dyck, amassed large acreages outside of the village without being excommunicated.

The Mennonites in southern Manitoba enjoyed a prosperity that grew at an outstanding pace compared to their experience in Russia. Consequently, the mood toward agriculture tended to be easy-going. Farmers were not always careful in keeping the land clean. Modernization in farming was not pursued. Although new machinery and seed varieties were tried, the farmers ignored any innovations which would affect the social traditions of the village community. The emphasis was on the cash crop of wheat. But wheat farming was an extensive operation. Conservative Mennonites had not wanted to learn intensive farming or mixed farming techniques although government advisors were ready to offer assistance. As a result of the extensive farming methods, a large class of poor, landless people emerged, as had happened in Russia. As early as the 1890's some of these people sought their fortunes in the daughter settlements in Saskatchewan. Ambitious farmers who wanted to escape the restrictions of the village farm also moved to Saskatchewan. Among them were Peter Driedger and Johann Driedger of Blumenfeld.

The move to Mexico in the 1920's was attractive to the poor and landless. The strong supporters of the traditional way of life and of the authority of the *Ohms* were motivated to migrate for other reasons.

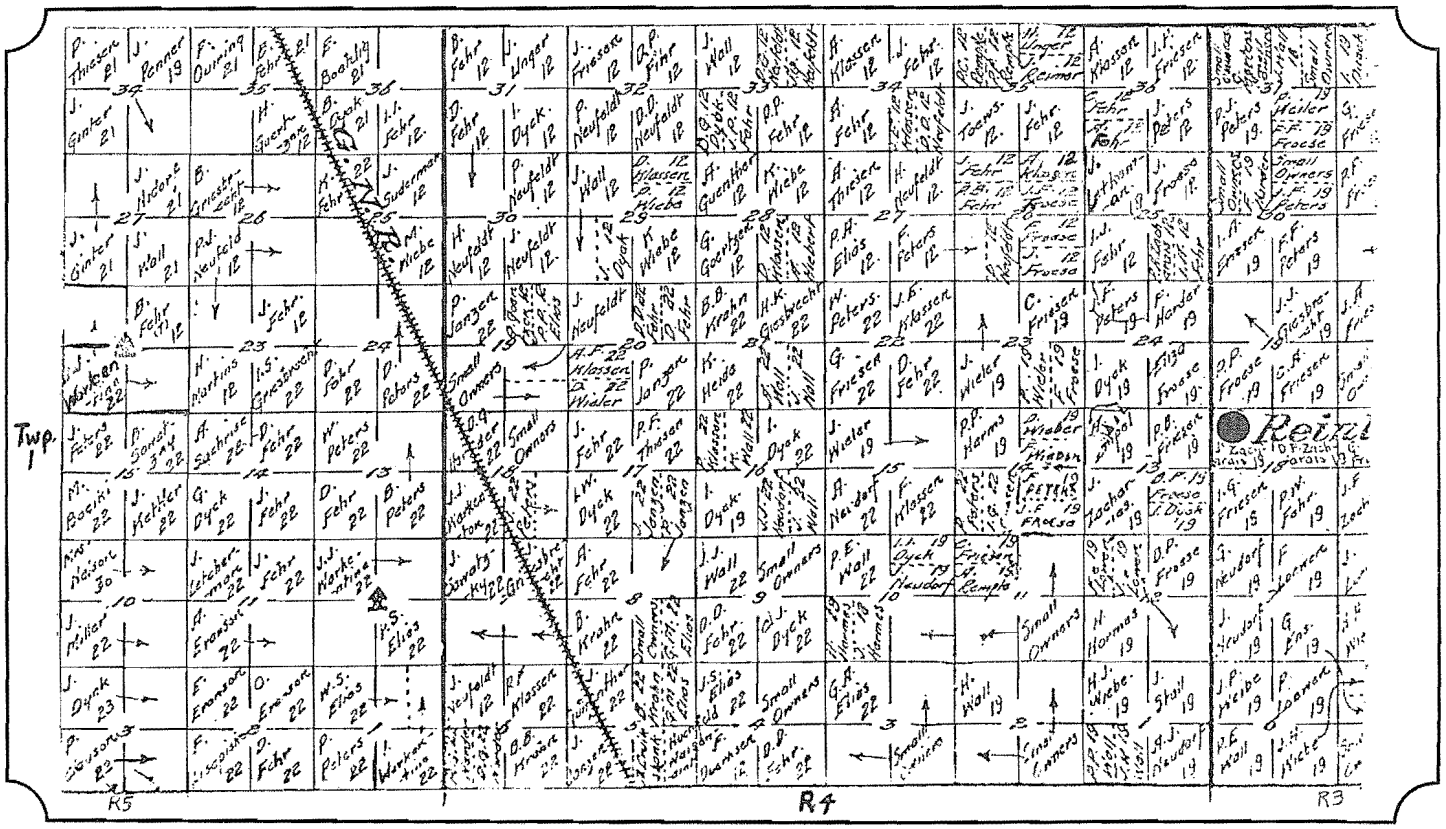
When the Reinlaender Church moved to Mexico it was forced to give up its control on real estate. Up to that time, rigid control by the church had prohibited Reinlaender members from purchasing or selling property to persons outside the Reinlaender Church. The purpose of this measure had been to prevent the intrusion of "worldly" influences, including the Bergthalers. Initially the Reinlaender Church had attempted to sell the entire West Reserve area as a block. When this had been impossible, Reinlaender members were free to sell without restriction. Those who chose to stay in Canada often acted as land-agents for relatives who migrated to Mexico. A map of landholders in the post-1923 era indicates that Jewish businessmen, land agents and Russlaender are among the owners of farm and village properties.

15-1-4 nw David Rabinovitch, 1922
17-1-4 sw registered by D. D. Fehr, Haskett, 1923, for I. W. Dyck
16-1-4 ne registered by D. D. Fehr, Haskett, 1923, for I. Dyck

Lot 17, village of Blumenfeld, rented by Kornelson and Albrecht, Russlaender

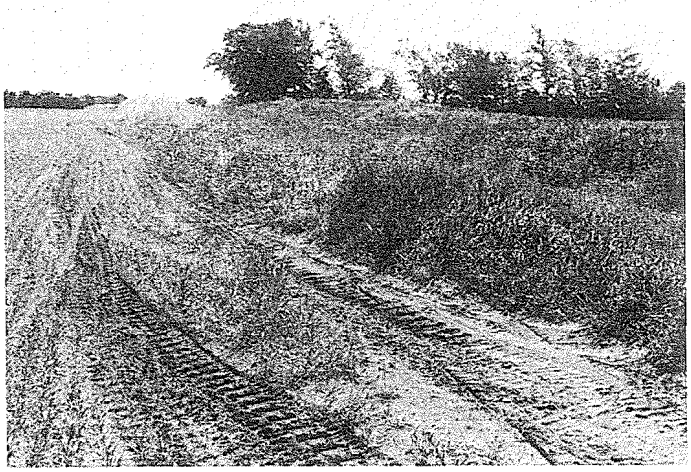
In 1923 Blumenfeld abandoned the strip-farming system. The villagers continued to live in the village and travelled out each day to farm their lands. Villages, like Blumenfeld, which survived the breakdown of the *Gewannflur* became known as farm-operator villages.[11] Villages which had broken up before 1895 had adopted the Canadian survey system entirely and had moved their homes from the village site to their farms.

This map of 1915 landholdings indicates several farmers with large holdings. Ambitious farmers in the Blumenfeld area had to expand their holdings by buying land in the Haskett area and on the western fringe of the reserve.





The dirt ridges of the *Raine* hampered field work. This ridge, photographed in 1981, illustrates the size of the *Raine*.



This *Raine*, approximately 1½ miles north of Blumenfeld, is wide enough to be used as a road.

It proved hard work to turn the *Gewannfluren* into quarter section fields. Pastures when broken up by the new owners gave excellent crops, but the *Koagel* and *Raine* proved to be miserable farm land for years. It was impossible to work down the higher *Raine* with horse drawn implements, and farmers had to use tractor-drawn equipment, especially the one-way, to accomplish the job. A few even used bull-dozers on the very large *Raine.* For years they had to be very careful when working in these fields to ensure that they did not upset their tractors. Farmers put fertilizer on the *Koagel*, grew sweet clover, fallowed the land faithfully and finally they managed to rehabilitate the land. Some of the *Raine* are still susceptible to blowing (1955) and have to be specially cultivated. Yet farmers maintain that in dry years it is quite noticeable that the crops on the former Raine are better because of their accumulation of top soil.[12]

When the *Gewannflur* system broke up in 1923, farmers usually registered their property under the Real Property Act at the Land Titles Office. They received a title for their land in place of the deed which had been part of an old system of land administration. Farmers were also required to get a title for the lot on which they lived. All Blumenfeld villagers, except the *Anwohners*, lived on the quarter-section whose deed had been held by Peter P. Janzen from 1875 until his death in 1920. The Janzen family retained the deed to the property until 1923 when it was registered under the Real Property Act, probably in order to facilitate the division into lots. It is known that no villager made a cash settlement for his property, since it was assumed that the lots had been paid for in the original purchase of a farm within the *Gewann* system. A descendant of Peter P. Janzen has proposed that Janzen acted as a trustee for the church and held the deed to the village land on behalf of the church.

Neighbours get together to lower a well-casing into a freshly dug well. Volunteer help is an unadvertised benefit of living in the village.



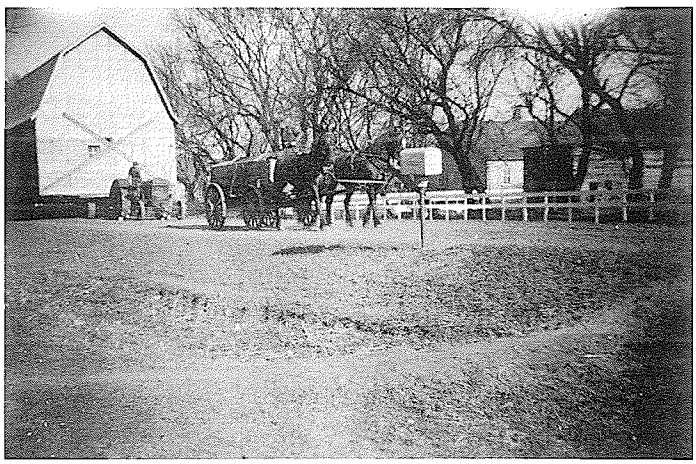
The deed for the *Anwohner* end (21-1-4sw) was held by Klaas P. Heide until 1923, when he sold it to a land agent. In 1925 Peter Elias borrowed money to purchase the quarter section for $10-$15 per acre. Either the land agent or Elias issued eviction orders to the *Anwohner* who occupied the cottages. The *Anwohner*, believing the land was rightfully theirs, were angered and resisted the eviction. The occupants went so far as to press a court case over the issue of the Elias' dog biting a woman's leg. But the case was dismissed on insufficient evidence. "Most of the *Anwohner* who occupied the cottages were planning to move to Mexico and had a false impression that the land was theirs," commented Peter Elias.[13]

The dissolution of the strip-farming system caused disputes among some farmers. As a result, some farmers moved out of the village to establish farmyards on their land. The dispersion and expansion of farms weakened the villages. The absence of the church made it difficult to resolve differences and to cooperate for a common purpose. Some feared that there would be a complete break-down of the spirit of community which had been integral to the village settlement system. The weakened position of the village communities fuelled the righteousness of those who had moved to Mexico. The passage of time, however, healed old wounds. Blumenfeld was kept together by the villagers' desire for the social advantages of living in a village.

The approximately 500 Reinlaender Mennonites who chose to stay in Canada retained control over the former Reinlaender villages. They had become wealthy by dealing with land bought at good prices from friends and relatives who moved to Mexico. At first a few *Russlaender* farmers occupied the vacant houses but they left as soon as possible for the farms because there was active hostility between the two groups.[14] Today there are no *Russlaender* families living in the village or on the farms in the Blumenfeld district. During the 1930's many penniless Reinlaender Mennonites returned from Mexico and moved into the vacant houses in the village where they obtained work as agricultural labourers on the large farms, or were forced to accept relief.

Blumenfeld was the last village to abandon the *Gewanne*. Even after 1923, the fragmentation of land close to the village remained so severe that the *Koagels* were practically recreated.[15] From 1920-1954 the land controlled from the village decreased from approximately 3,000 acres to 2,000 acres.[16] Owners of large half-section farms tended to move to their land.





Moving buildings was a difficult task. Here, three Hart-Parr tractors move the John J. Dyck residence from the village to its new site northeast of Blumenfeld. Peter Elias, John Dueck and John J. Dyck are among the group of men.

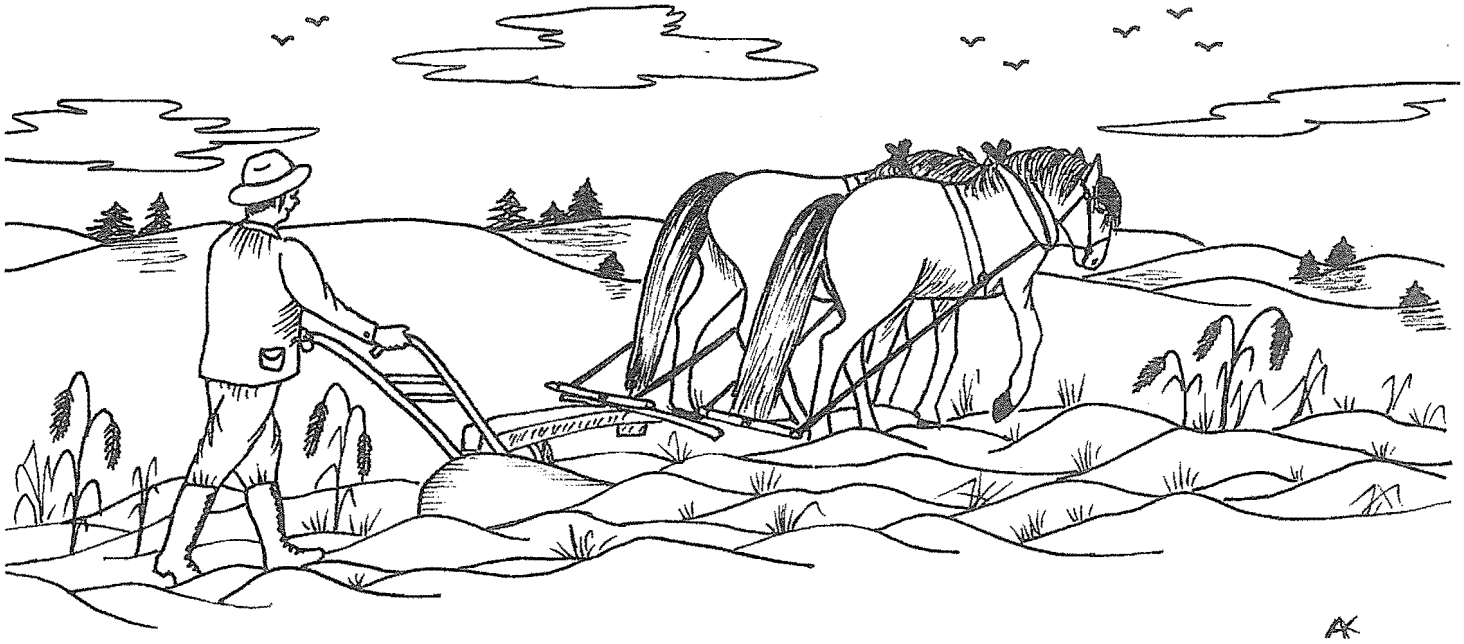
John J. Dyck's barn is also moved to the farm, site, May 17, 1945.

Manpower, Horsepower, Gasolinepower

Immigrants arriving in the summer and fall of 1875 prepared for the coming winter. They erected temporary shelters of prairie sods and made hay for the livestock. During that first winter the men hauled timber from the Pembina Hills for building their more permanent homes.

When the Mennonites settled on the West Reserve they drew on the experiences of the East Reserve. Considerable stock, especially oxen, was purchased at Moorehead, Minnesota, en route to Manitoba. Horses were usually brought from the Metis at Walhalla. Oxen were important to the pioneers of Blumenfeld. As well as being cheaper than horses, they fared better in Manitoba winters and were stronger and better for breaking land. In spring they could be used earlier than horses because of their wider hooves. They had their disadvantages too. They were stubborn animals. They could not back up properly. They did not have the spirit of horses, and their slow pace made travel to distant *Koagels* time-consuming.

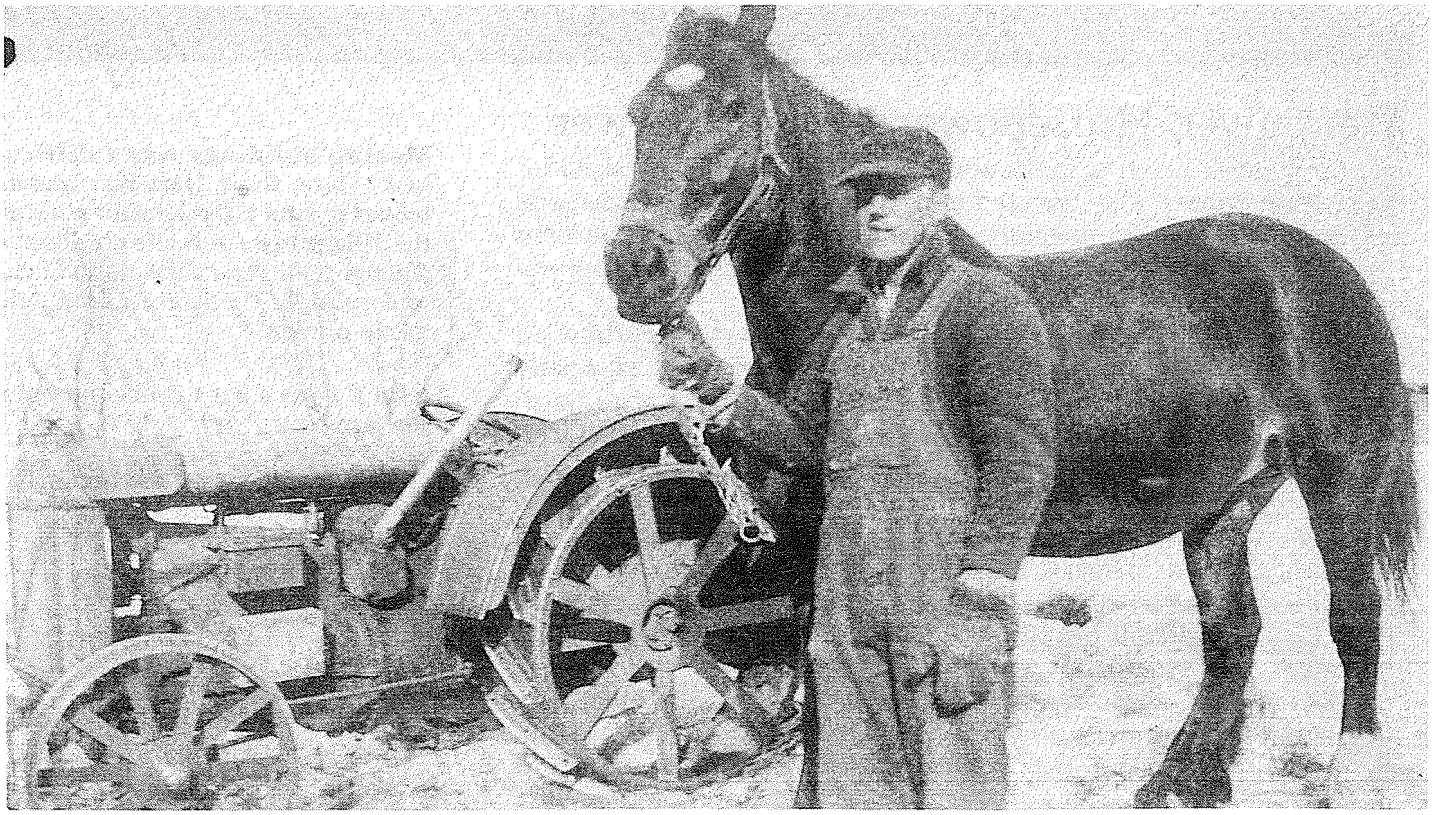
Breaking the virgin land began in 1876. The Mennonite farmers revealed their inexperience by breaking the land too early in spring and by ploughing too deeply. Their intention was to plant oats and potatoes the same year. A more accepted way of breaking land among the Canadian settlers was to break sod during June or July, turning



Isaac Wolfe with his horse. The Fordson tractor belongs to J. Neufeld Manpower, horsepower and mechanical power have performed significant roles in the development of agriculture in the Blumenfeld area.

over a 12-14 inch wide strip as shallow as possible, so that it could rot in the hot summer sun. In fall it was backset, that is, ploughed in the same direction, but a little deeper, say up to three inches, mixing the rotted sod well and also bringing up some new soil in the process. Breaking the land usually required two oxen.[17]

Farmers in the West Reserve broke 1,500 acres and put 1,475 into crop in 1876 although production was not good. Sowing was all done

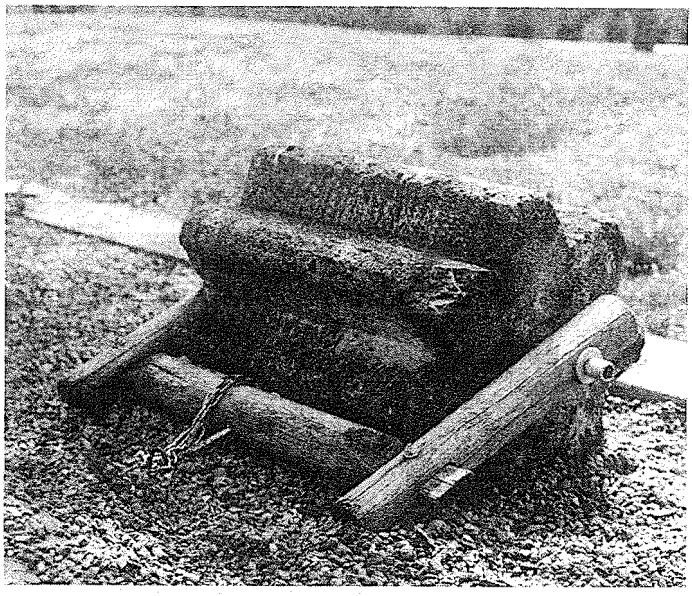


by hand and the seed worked into the soil by wooden-toothed harrows.

In 1880, Blumenfeld farmers had an average of 31 acres of broken land. By 1882, Blumenfeld farmers had broken a total of 913 acres, averaging 38 acres per farmer.

In the early years hay and grain were cut with scythes. Three acres per day was good for one man working from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. In 1878, reapers were introduced, followed shortly by binders equipped with wire-tying devices. By 1882 the first twine binders were available and the problem of cutting grain was solved.[18]

Flails were used for threshing. Another device was the threshing block called *Utfoasteen* which was pulled over sheaves of grain by horses or oxen. Soon, however, new machinery had replaced these primitive methods and the *Utfoasteen* was used only for flax. The first horse and steam-powered threshing machines were introduced to the West Reserve in 1877. In Blumenfeld, in 1882, Cornelius Giesbrecht owned the only steam-driven threshing machine. That year he resided in the village but did not farm the land he had previously held.

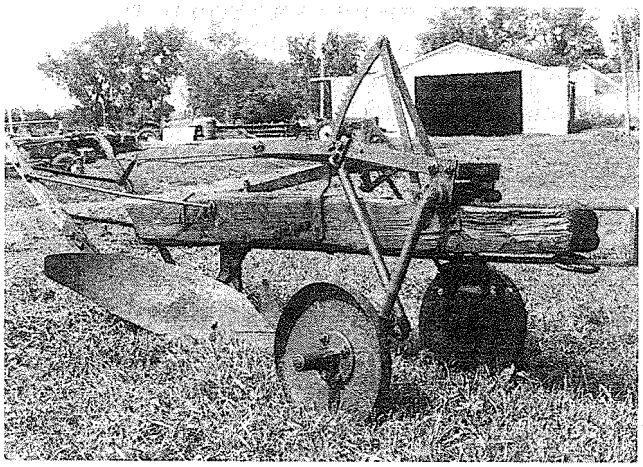


The *Utfoasteen* was used in the 1870's for threshing the grain. The design for this device was imported from Russia with the pioneers.

Photo credit Norman Rempel.



Five horses pulling a one bottom plow. The flat prairie sod turned evenly to the Mennonite pioneers' plows.



Machinery owned by Blumenfeld Farmers, 1882

6 grain cleaners
1 steam threshing machine
10 grain measures
7 mowers

This one-bottom plow is of an earlier vintage. The farmer walked behind and applied his weight to keep the plow in the ground.

Oxen were gradually replaced by horses. The changeover was nearly complete by 1882 when only one farmer still owned two oxen.

Horses owned by Blumenfeld Farmers 1880-1882[20]

	Yearlings	Workhorses
1880	39	17
1882	4	59



This bob sleigh provided the means of hauling winter feed. On mild winter days fodder was sledded from the storage pile into the barn.

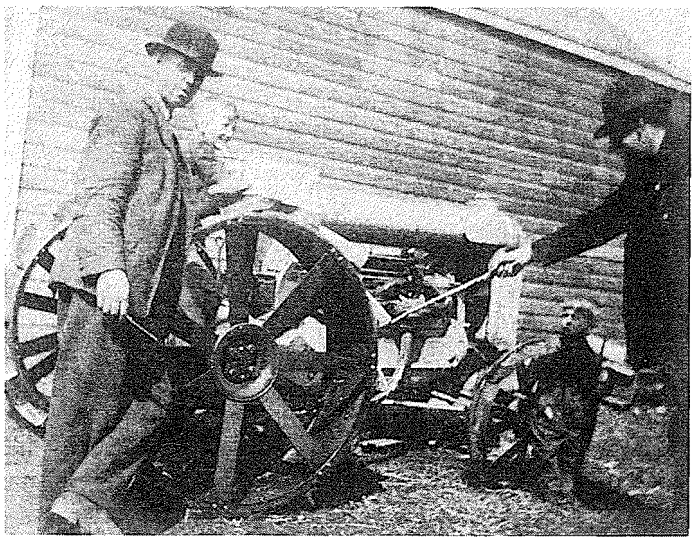


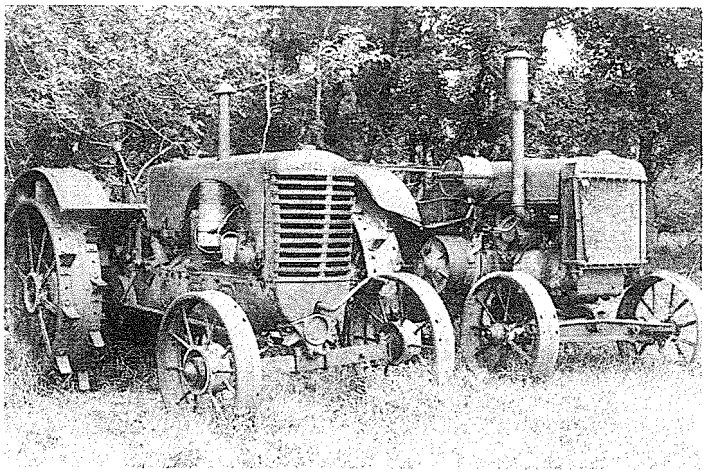
A team of good horses was the pride of a Blumenfeld farmer. D. S. Klassen has just returned from Morden after purchasing this team, 1928.

Horses were used for farm work until the 1950's. George P. Klassen recalls how, as a young boy, he had to cultivate corn with a horse. He rode the sweaty horse without a saddle while his brother walked behind the cultivator. That evening before the boys left for home, they loaded the cultivator into a wagon, and hitched the horse to the wagon. Two exhausted boys and one tired horse plodded home and unhitched a final time. The trio knew exactly where to find the pond for a refreshing swim before supper and chores.

The turn of the century saw an emphasis on improving the power and efficiency of agricultural implements. The change from horse to gasoline power occured gradually, with many consequences. It reduced labour requirements. Farming was easier and more efficient. "This did not result in a more complete or a more intelligent use of the land," commented John Warkentin in his research of agricultural developments in southern Manitoba.[21]

> Field cultivation with tractors was begun in the 20's, but the high, almost prohibitive price of oil and gasoline prevented many farmers from mechanizing their farms, and in the succeeding decade the tendancy was to avoid the expense of gasoline for draw-bar work. Not until 1937, a good crop season, and the year when there was a scarcity of horses because of disease (sleeping sickness), did the switch to gasoline power begin. Complete mechanization was delayed during the War, but the war years ultimately finished the horse. Prosperity brought the means for mechanization. The labour shortage and the reluctance of young people to work with animals completed the change.[22]





D. D. Fehr expounds the merits of this tractor to a potenital buyer, A. P. Janzen.

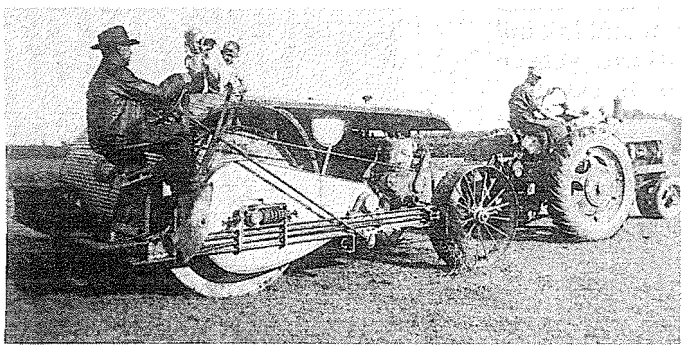
This John Deere and Massey Harris Pacemaker are memories of the first days of internal combustion engines. Some were fueled by kerosene, others by gasoline.

The Mogul tractor, introduced in 1913 by McCormick, was as strong as one three-horse team. The Rombley-Oil Pull operated on kerosene and was cooled by oil. It had two gears and managed 2 m.p.h. at best. Only the most adventuresome farmers owned this machine which cost $800. The Emerson was the first mass-produced tractor. It was water-cooled and operated on kerosene. The Fordson was a more up-to-date, smaller and lighter tractor, but it was difficult to start. "If you stopped near a haystack, then the next day you could start it up by using a long pipe, stuck into the stack, and with three men to crank up the engine," reminisced D. A. Fehr, whose father, D. D. Fehr, was a tractor and implement dealer in Blumenfeld. The Grey tractor, the first remote-controlled tractor, was a miracle for its day. It would cultivate a field by following a circular furrow. The tractor stopped when it ran out of gas. The Grey tractor made it possible for a farmer to have his field cultivated by morning while he enjoyed a good night's sleep in his own bed.

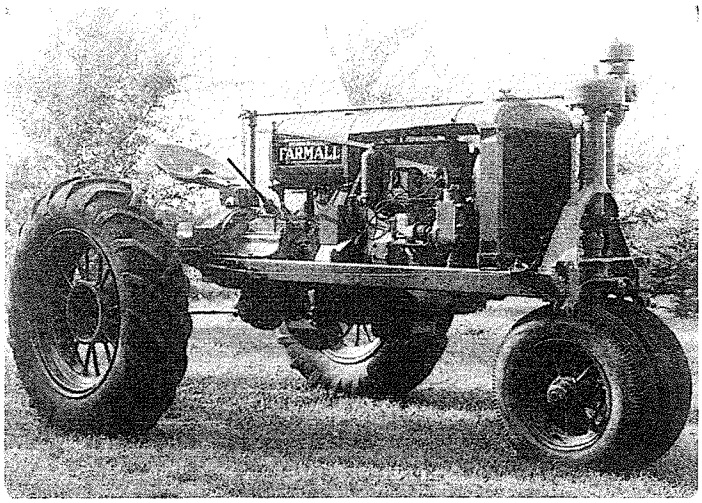
The tractors of modern farmers are built with airconditioned cabs that are equipped with radios and C.B.'s. A well-to-do farmer of the 1980's who operates a farm of 360 or more acres might own a tractor with 160 horsepower, a thirty-four foot cultivator and a twenty-four foot seeder. All this large equipment makes it possible to sow or cultivate 100 acres in a day.

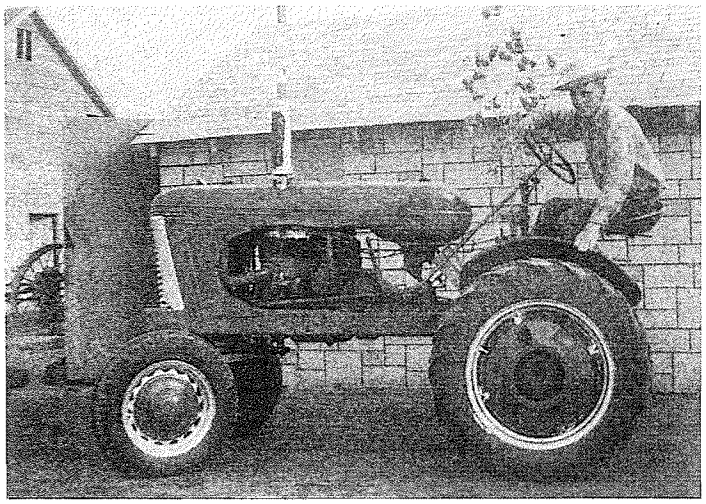
The Gray tractor had a unique design. One feature of this tractor was its ability to follow the furrow of the plow around the field without an operator. Here, Frank Klassen is pulling the Gray tractor owned by B. B. Krahn.





W. W. Peters had this tractor built in 1958 by Peter H. Wiebe of Hochfeld. He is seen here on the street in Blumenfeld.





The McCormick-Deering Farmall was a row-crop tractor which featured the front wheels close together for better tillage visibility.

John M. Wiebe built this tractor from spare parts in 1947.

The era of steam threshers carries nostalgia for many Blumenfeld men who were part of the threshing gangs. The modernized equipment of today's farmer has eliminated the laborious, yet exhilirating job of working on a crew with 10 other men where brains and brawn were matched. Efficiency was dependent on good teamwork as well as on muscle and horsepower.



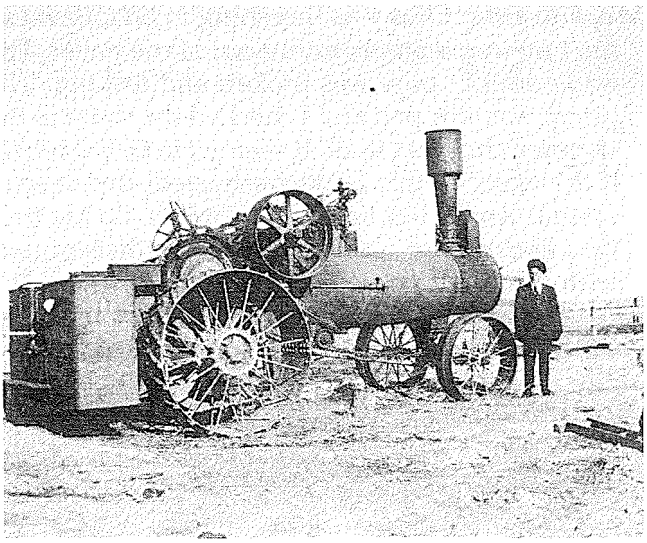
Modern equipment such as this Case tractor and John Deere combine has taken much of the sweat and toil out of farming. The radiator screen mounted on the tractor is manufactured locally at Friesteel Manufacturing in Blumenfeld.

Peter P. Elias owned a threshing outfit that worked in the Eichenfeld area and among the Norwegian farmers at the foot of the Pembina Hills. His son, Peter, recounts the story of the year they were threshing at Peter Letkeman's farm:

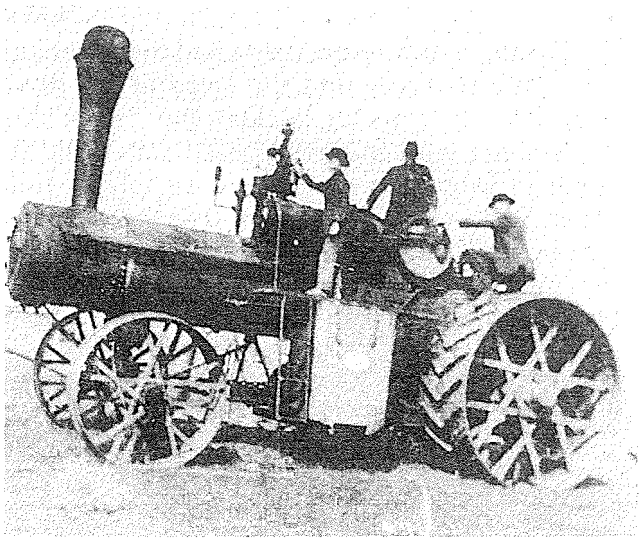
The man in charge of supplying the water for the steamer went for water with the water wagon but returned without water or tank, only an empty trailer. "Waut nu?" demanded father.

The driver replied, "Ejk woll en baet noda aum Woata foahren, oba daut Faehraut hoajkt unj'rem Traila (because he had turned too sharp) en schtelpt em Woata."

Extra hands had to go to drag the tank out of the water. In the meantime, I had to watch the horses at the outfit while brother Jacob was the fireman at the tractor. Suddenly the tractor



A Case steam engine with the large water reservoir mounted in the rear, standing J. V. Neufeld.

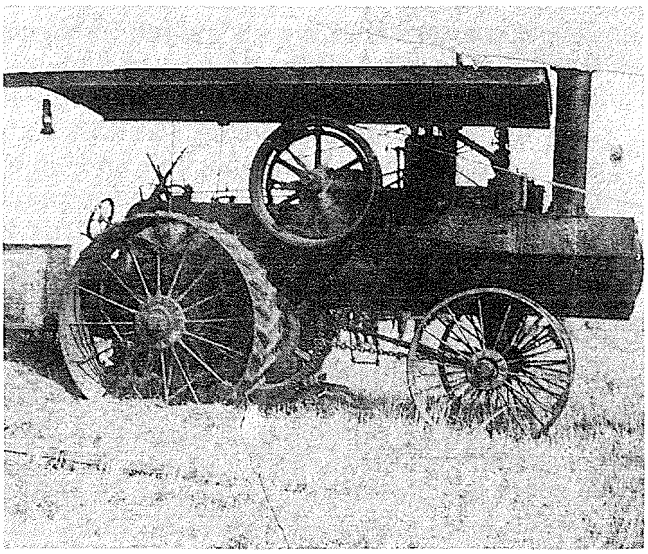


D. A. Fehr, Klaus Wall and D. D. Fehr are riding this steam engine. The use of the steam engine was an innovative step in improving farming efficiency.

poofed'. Jacob quickly stopped it. "Doa es waut aurach em Fiaschpell," he called to me.

Father returned with the others and asked why Jacob had stopped the tractor. I replied that Jacob had not had enough water in the boiler, but Jacob defended himself, saying that the water level gauge was not below the danger level. We discovered that the gauge had stuck. In the meantime the water level had gone down too far and as a result the crown sheet, a ½ inch thick sheet of steel, in the top of the firebox, had buckled inward from the tremendous pressure of the overheated water and steam in the boiler. The excess steam, under 300 to 400 pounds pressure had melted the safety valve which should have released the excess pressure. As a result the pressure pushed the heavy crown sheet down into the firebox. The eight stay-bolts holding this metal in place had ripped.

When Father saw the damage he realized that we could not repair it ourselves. He went to John Dyck, a blacksmith in Morden who, at first, said that he had no time. After some persuasion, he consented to come the next day. The bottom was dropped out of the firebox so that Mr. Dyck could stand on the ground. His torch was inadequate for heating the whole section of metal, so piece by piece he reddened an area and hammered it back with a sledge hammer. The job required a whole day. Dyck also rethreaded the stripped stay-bolt holes, but told Father to put the bolts back himself as he had to return to his work in Morden.

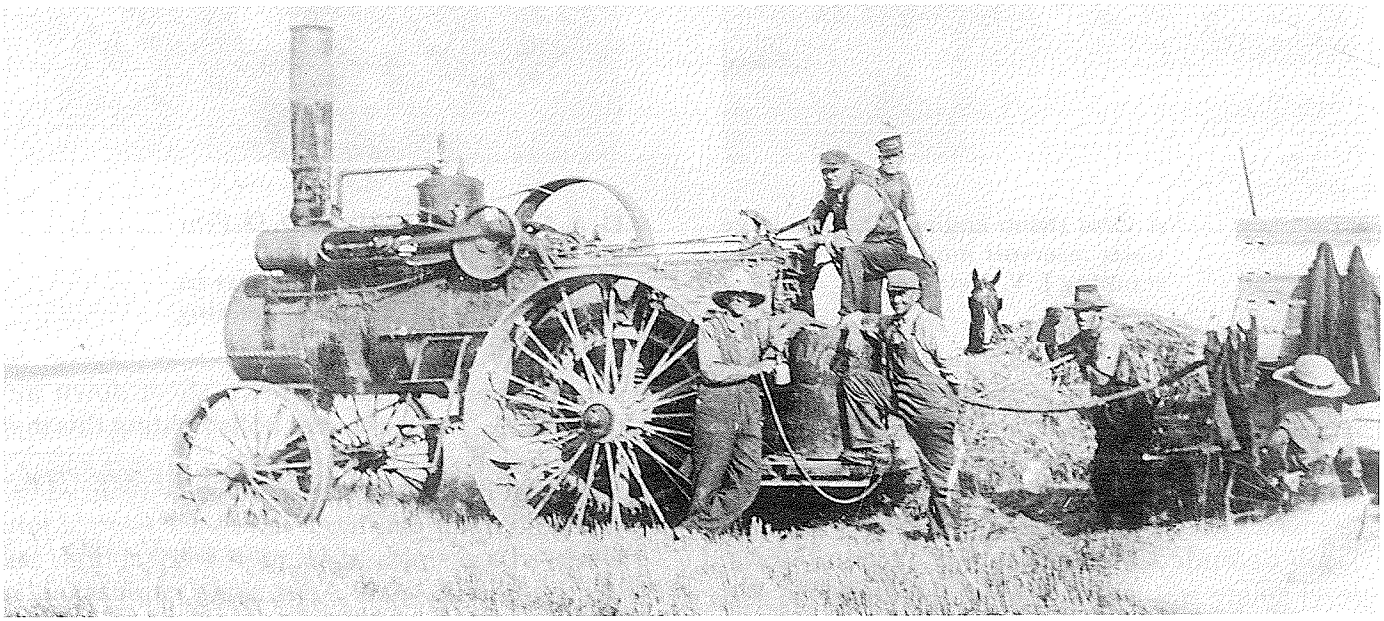


This steam engine has the long canvas belt mounted on its huge flywheel for operating the threshing machine. The kerosene lamp on the sun shield provided light for the late evenings.

The steamer we were using had the water tank under the rear axle and the steps of the driver platform. An injector sucked the cooler tank water along with the hotter used water into the boiler to provide a continuous supply of fresh water. Suddenly this injector stopped working. Father told the men to use the steam pump but the pump had difficulty pumping into the boiler. I was the fireman on this occasion. Looking at the fire I noticed water running out of the boiler. The water supply pipe was broken and leaking. The pump was stopped and I checked the water in the steamer's holding tank. It seemed to be too warm. If the water in this tank overheated, the injector system would not function properly. So the tractor injector hose was placed into a different tank with colder water and everything worked well.

Next morning, at 3:30 a.m., we had to replace the section of leaking water pipe in the boiler.[23]

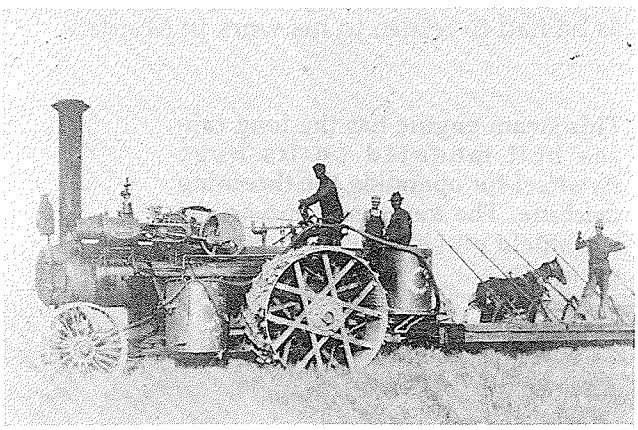
On another occasion Peter Elias was threshing in Schoenwiese:



Henry and William Miller are part of this threshing gang which used an Advance steam engine.

The threshing gangs worked in extreme conditions. The men lived in tents during the harvest in the Pembina Hills. One morning, the gang woke up to find their tents buried in several inches of snow.

Another incident occurred in the fall of 1911, when the Elias threshing outfit was in the Pembina Hills.



This Sawyer-Massey was used for doing field work.

We had a 22 foot Advance Steamer. In order to reach our location we had to climb a steep hillside. The steamer was first, hauling its wagon of water and straw supplies as well as the *Draschkoasten*. Halfway up the hill the tractor's front wheels lifted off the ground, making it impossible to steer. We had to back down the hill. But the steamer had no reverse. The tractor operator let the steamer roll downhill and applied steam pressure to break the roll and to prevent the unit from going out of control. This was touchy work.

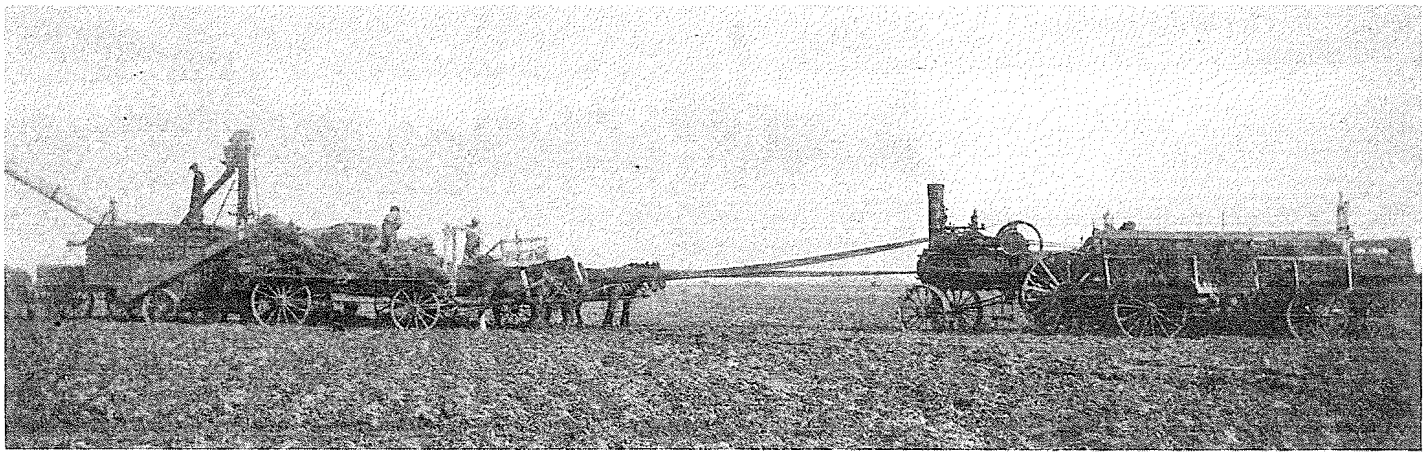
To stop or slow down was difficult. But to start going forward was even more tricky while the machine was still on the downward slope. To go forward the machine had to overcome the dead weight (inertia) of the tractor. We managed to get up the hill by another route.

Next year, we had a Case steamer. It pulled uphill without any difficulty.[24]



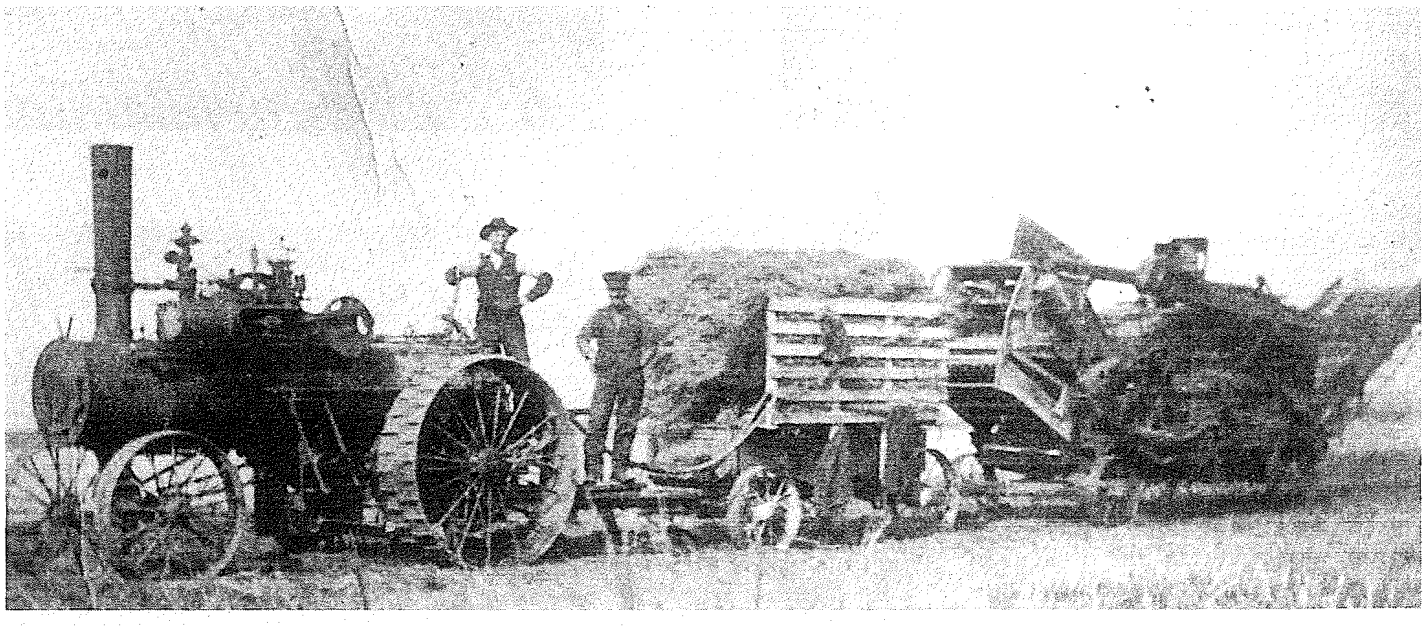
Mounted on wheels, this stationary engine is used for cutting feed.

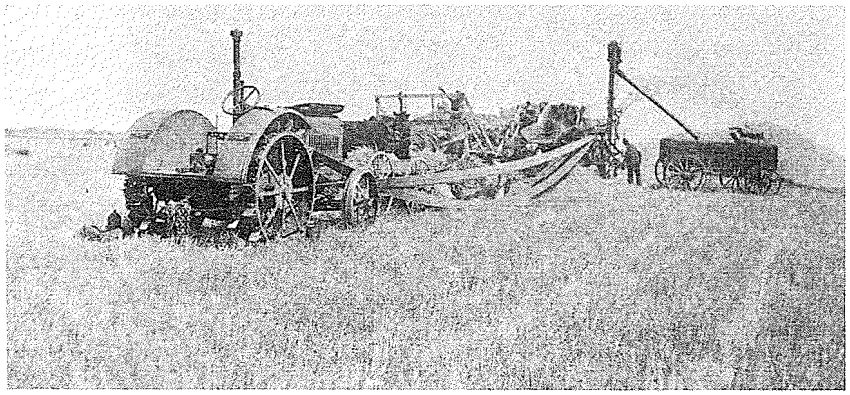
The grain wagon, the threshing machine, two wagons of sheaves being stooked into the thresher, the long drive belt with the steam engine and the straw wagon made up a typical threshing unit. This one belonged to Johann Wolfe.



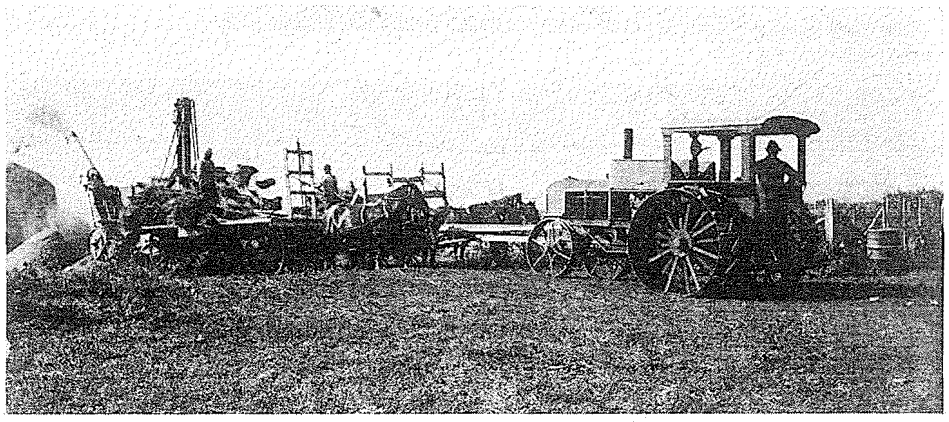
The glory of the threshing gangs has not died. In the 1960's W. V. Elias organized the first thresherman's reunion. Many people came to relive the years of the threshing machine. The reunion became an annual event and was the beginning of the Pembina Thresherman's Reunion and Museum which has since relocated to a site on Highway #3 between Winkler and Morden.

A threshing outfit enroute to the next location. The gangs would travel from farmer to farmer until the harvesting was completed.



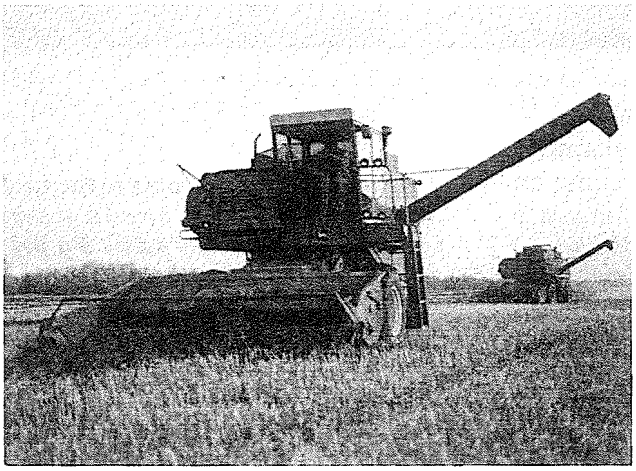


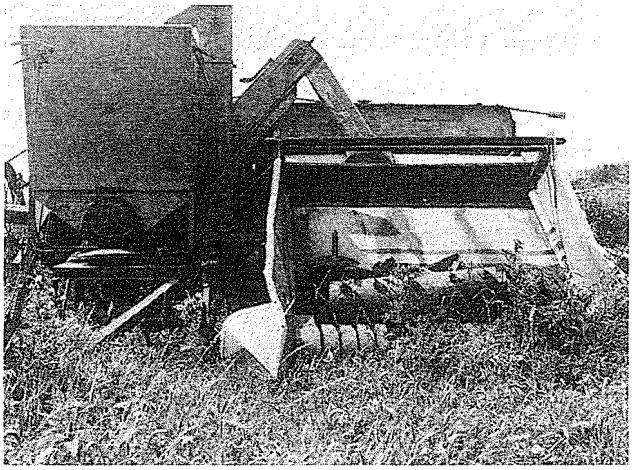
Here a McCormick-Deering drives the threshing machine. The wagon, or *dubbleltbaks*, was used to haul the grain.

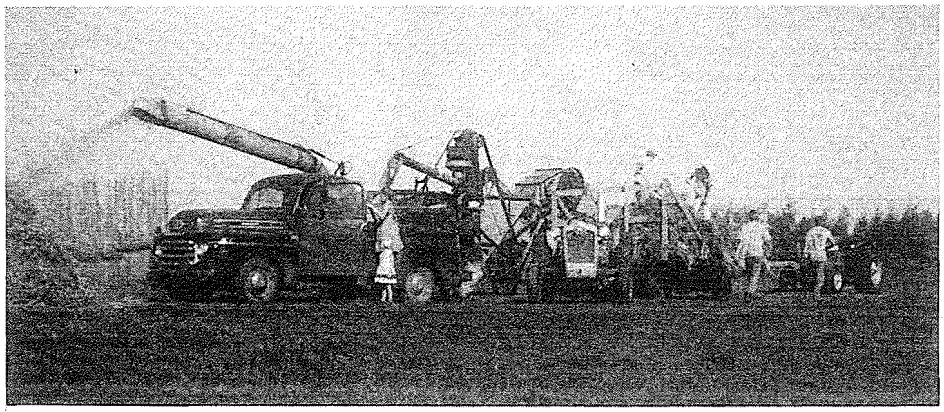


One of the gasoline tractors of 1920's was the Pioneer. The sides of the tractor are open for better cooling.

The McCormick pull-type combine. The advent of the combine spelled the demise of the threshing machine and the beginning of a new era in harvesting the prairie grain.





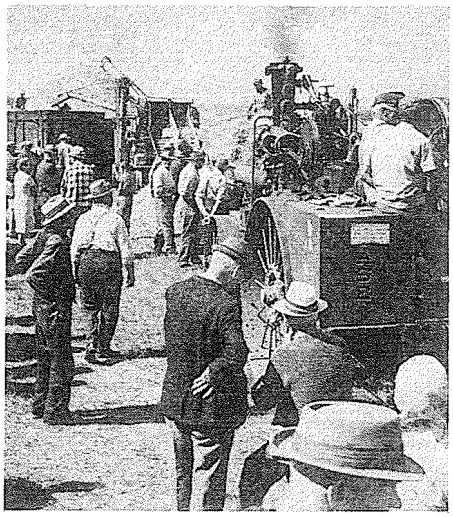


Today's modern combines are more efficient and comfortable, and have a much greater capacity. C. J. Dyck's two self-propelled John Deere combines are seen combining buckwheat.

In this modern set-up, tractors are used for hauling the wagons and a truck hauls the grain. In the fall of 1966, J. J. Elias was one of the last farmers to use the threshing machine.



The threshing machines were also of various makes. In 1955, Diedrich S. Klassen used this Advance-Romely to do his threshing. Manitoba Archives Photo.



The highlight of the day was the threshing outfit. Stories were told and retold amid the noise and dust.



Memories of the "good old days" are relived at the Pembina Threshermen's Reunion every summer. W. V. Elias of the Blumenfeld district was one of the founding members of this annual event. The first threshermen's reunion took place on his farm where Peter P. Schmidt now resides.

From Wheat to Beets

Mennonites were primarily wheat farmers until the 1930's. The farmers were not aware that their single-crop economy was rapidly depleting the soil's resources. The transition from wheat-farming to diversified crops was necessitated by the Depression and the decline in wheat markets following World War I. Farmers in the West Reserve could not rely on tradition to teach them how to survive these difficult years. Assisted by the advice of the Morden Experimental Farm and the Agricultural Societies, and encouraged by the financial savings realized due to the cooperatives, the West Reserve farmers were able to increase the productivity and fertility of the soil which they had broken and called their own since 1875. The unfamiliar situation was mastered and the resourcefulness of the farmers proved that although there are no easy solutions, there is hope that innovations and new discoveries will secure the future.

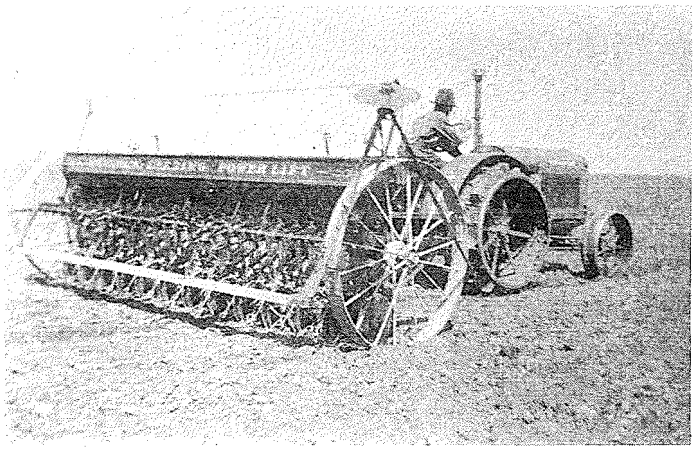


Horses and mechanical power are used simultaneously in this corn planting operation, May, 1946.

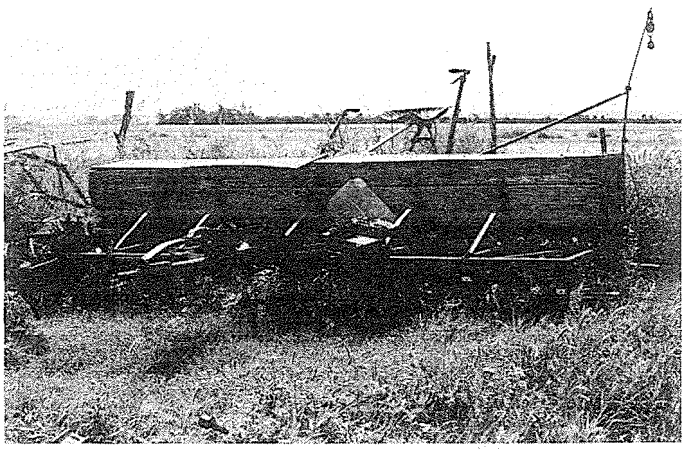
The first Mennonite settlers had purchased seed wheat from the Ontario Mennonites and from the Canadian government. The seed brought from Russia was used to a limited extent and by 1896 it was largely abandoned in favor of Red Fyfe which was 2 weeks earlier in ripening. Oats, barley, rye and potatoes were other important crops in the early years. In the West Reserve, flax was a valuable cash crop on first breaking. By 1878 Mennonites were shipping out considerable flax.[25]

The West Reserve was producing a good surplus of grain by 1883. They used much of their crop themselves for food and animal fodder, but surplus grain was hauled to market at Emerson.

The bottom fell out of the wheat market in the 1930's. Drought conditions, excessive heat and high winds ruined crops and caused severe soil drifting. Stem rust damaged crops. The war was over, and so was the boom on which the farmers had been riding. Wheat prices dropped from $1.20 per bushel in 1927 t0 80¢ per bushel in 1935. Not until 1943, and another World War, did wheat regain its 1927 value.[26]



This McCormick-Deering power lift drill was operated from the tractor operator's seat.



This seeding drill was operated by one person on the rear seat. Horses were hitched to the implement.

Cereal Grains Seeded in the West Reserve[27]

1891:	100% acreage in wheat, oats and bar ley
1936:	85%
1956:	50%

Grain Shipments to Winkler[28] (in '000s of bushels)

1922-30	1741 wheat	747 others
1931-38	2024 wheat	420 others
1939-46	3035 wheat	2519 others
1947-54	1644	3792 others



Margaret Thiessen, an adopted daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Peter L. Thiessen, is dwarfed by the work-horses she is handling. Girls and women were frequently required to help with the field work.

Field Crops — Stanley Municipality*

Year	Wheat %	Cereal %	Flax %	Mixed or Other Grains %	Legumes (acres)	Sugar Beets	Sunflower %	Potatoes (acres)	Corn (acres)	Cultivated Hay or Fodder	Other
1891	74	25									
1921	58	39								2	
1931	50	41	3					(441)	(27)	5	
1941	37	41	1	16				(206)	(5)	5	
1951	24	45	13	10				(450)	(837)	2	4
1981 Blumenfeld District* *	21	20	7	4	(28)	5	7	(500)	(461)	6	

* Based on John Warkentin, Table 16, p. 313
* * Based on survey of Blumenfeld District.

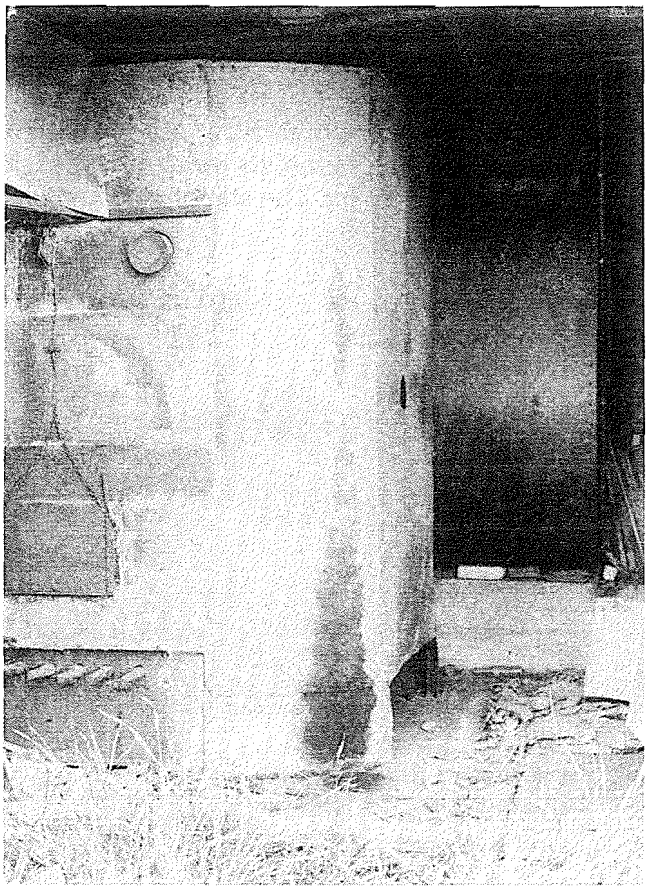
The decrease in the proportion of land devoted to cereal grains permitted the development of special crops such as corn, sugar beets, sunflowers, rapeseed, potatoes and onions. In 1980, Blumenfeld farmers seeded 49% of their acreage in cereal grains.[29]

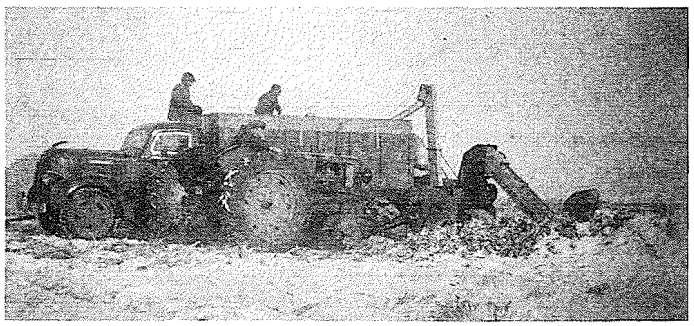
Corn was introduced in the early 1930's in an attempt to arrest the soil drifting on summerfallow fields. At first, farmers sowed the corn for livestock fodder. But in 1937, A. A. Kroeker, a progressive Winkler farmer, built a seed-corn drier that enabled Manitoba to export its first corn in 1939, 63 years after the first shipment of wheat.[30] Many men and woman from Blumenfeld have found employment at the Kroeker corn drier. "Barley King" Elias also built a seed corn drier in the Haskett area.

Oil-bearing crops such as sunflowers and rapeseed were encouraged in 1943 by the government in order to remedy a situation of short supply caused by the war. The Vegetable Oils processing plant in



A beet-hoeing gang of the 1950's with boss, Peter Reimer. The boys came from Blumenfeld, Friedensfeld and Eichenfeld.



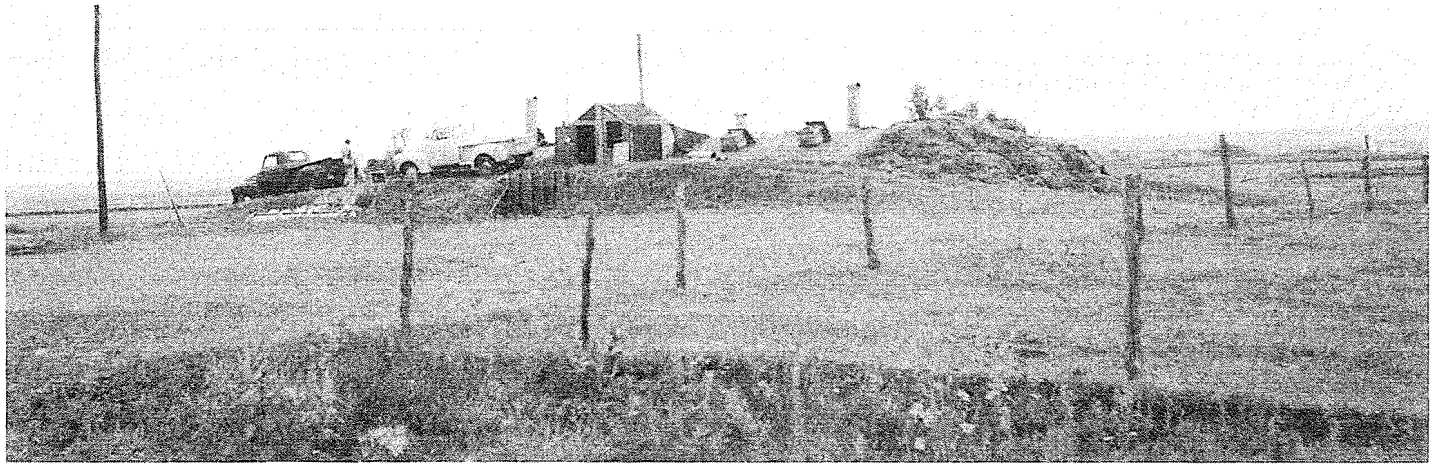


In spite of snow on the fields, these men thresh corn with a John Deere Model H tractor in 1942. Corn was a good cash crop.

This corn-dryer is still standing on the George Elias farm in the Eichenfeld area. The corn-drying operation provided job opportunities for Blumenfeld people and was a service to local corn-growers.

Altona, established as a cooperative in 1943, continues to make these crops important to Southern Manitoba.

In 1940, the sugar beet factory was built in Winnipeg. Farmers near Altona and Gretna had been growing sugar beets for an American sugar company for several years. The Winnipeg factory moved the boundary of sugar beet farming westward to Morden. In spite of high overhead, sugar beets are a profitable crop. Weeding and thinning continue to be done by seasonal labourers although at least one Blumenfeld farmer has bought mechanized equipment.



The early potato storage facilities were primitive compared to the air-conditioned units used by today's farmer. George Elias of Eichenfeld owned this underground potato storage on the site of the present W. Fehr farm. Manitoba Archives Photo

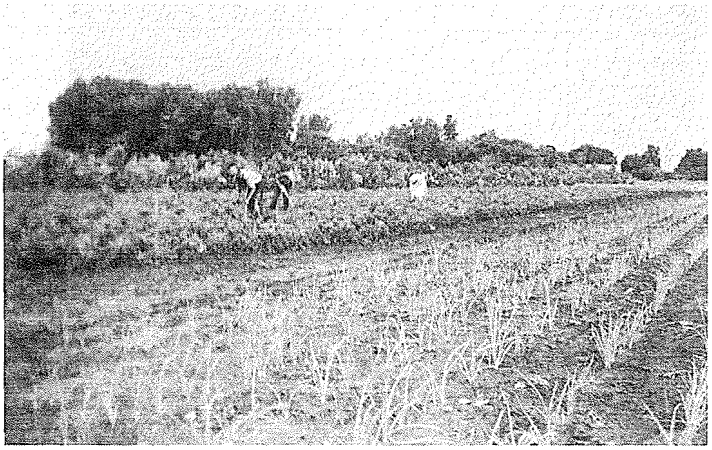
A.A. Kroeker and Sons Limited has proven that the Winkler area soils are excellent for growing seed and table potatoes. Seed potatoes have been grown since 1944. In 1947, George Elias built a potato cellar west of Blumenfeld. Today's potato farmer uses modern cooling equipment to store root crops. Peter Schmidt, a Blumenfeld farmer, has raised potatoes for thirteen years and onions for seven years.

Two organizations are responsible for leading the farming community into crop diversity that replenished rather than depleted the resources of the farms.

The Dominion Government Experimental Farm, established in 1914 at Morden, did research for 15 years before its influence was felt on the Mennonite farmers south of Winkler. The station encouraged



Jim Hamm, teacher in the 1940's, experimented with vegetable crops. His family helps to tend this one and one-half acre tomato field.



In the foreground is Jim Hamm's onion field; beside it, the tomato field.

crop rotations in an endeavour to get farmers to include grasses and clovers in their crop sequences. It promoted adding organic matter to soils to assist in controlling soil erosion, to increase the water-holding capacity of the soil, and to assist generally in improving soil fertility and crop production. Considerable work was also done in trying to substitute corn for black summer-fallow in the crop rotation.[31]

Dr. Charlie Walkof of the Morden Experimental Farm persuaded his friend, Jim Hamm, Blumenfeld teacher, to conduct an experiment in special crops. In 1945, Walkof supplied the bedding plants for 1.5 acres of tomatoes which were planted for the purpose of marketing the seed. John Dueck, Blumenfeld farmer, provided a plot of land that was sheltered by trees and which had the tilth of fine garden soil. It was a late spring and when Walkof drove out to inspect the plants, he expressed his doubts about the success of the experiment. The summer was a long and hot one. The 1.5 acres produced enough tomato seed to create a welcome income of $1,600 for the teacher. Besides the seed, there were plenty of tomatoes for canning, for fodder and for selling in the towns and villages.

School children were hired for weeding and picking. Local people were grateful for the opportunity to earn extra income for their families.

Peter Elias, blacksmith, developed a machine for extracting the seeds from ripe tomatoes. The seed had to ferment in wooden troughs filled with water. The fermentation took the jelly off the seeds which then sank to the bottom of the trough. The water was drained off and the seed was put on screened trays for drying in the sun.

The Morden Experimental Farm had guaranteed Jim Hamm a contract for the seeds with an Ontario seed house. Before the seed was shipped a germination test indicated 96% germination. With such proven quality, the Ontario firm bought the entire crop of Early Chatham tomato seed.[32]

The experiment with tomatoes was pursued the next year in Blumenfeld as well. The following entries from the diaries of J. J. Elias gives us a sample of the labour required in the project:

1947

April 12: Isaac planted tomatoes in the greenhouse.
May 10: transplanted the tomatoes to the coldframes
May 13: planted tomatoes in the afternoon
June 7: fertilized
June 11: planted about 1500 tomatoes in the afternoon
June 16: Still planting tomatoes.
June 20: Watered all the tomatoes
August 12-19: worked on the tomato thresher
August 23-Sept. 15: sold tomatoes in the Purvis district, in Winkler and in the eastern towns. The tomatoes sold at 5¢ a pound. There is twice as much money in producing seeds.
Sept. 24: picked tomatoes. They were all frozen due to an early frost on Sept. 22 which dipped to 4° F.

Tomato farming was discontinued after 1947. Local people indicated that it was too much work for the monetary return. The Morden Research Station, however, continues to encourage farmers south of



P. G. Elias and Jake Klassen digging potatoes. Gardens provided the family with fresh vegetables in summer and for winter storage.



Garden of Peter F. Klassen in the 50's. The bees helped pollinate the fruit trees and provided honey for the family.



If Father has to tend the children as well as cultivate the garden, there is an ingenious method of doing both jobs at once. The father is D. S. Klassen, 1928.

Winkler to use their rich loam soil for intensive farming of vegetables.

The agricultural societies and cooperatives also encouraged diversified farming as a possible solution to the Reserve's problems in the 1930's. The Rhineland Agricultural Society, formed in 1930, had called upon outside assistance. This was a radical change from the Mennonite way of doing things and made the Society suspect by the more conservative Mennonites in the westerly parts of the Reserve. The Stanley Agricultural Society was founded in 1947, 17 years after the Rhineland group. In the Winkler area, leadership in developing new agricultural methods was provided by progressive farmers. "A group of big farmers who adopted new agricultural practices showed by example what could be done in overcoming drought, depression, grasshoppers and rust."[33] These farm leaders were encouraging row crops for several reasons.

> First, this would result in a more stable economy because there would be a variety of markets to serve; second, such farming practices would require a much larger labour force and thus use some of the surplus labour; and third, the land would improve as a result of the greater opportunities for crop rotation.[34]



A. P. Janzen standing in his wheatfield.

All of this required expert advice and this is where much opposition came from the conservative Mennonite group of which Blumenfeld was a part. This conservative group feared that the cooperatives and agricultural societies, by associating with government institutions, would pose a threat to the traditional ways. The organizations proved stronger than their opposition. Individual farmers were anxious to better themselves so that, in the end, the entire area benefitted from the input of the agricultural societies.

The cooperative movement rallied the support of local people for bulk-buying of farm supplies such as oil and gasoline, binder-twine, building supplies and drygoods. The cooperative movement also headed up efforts by the communities to process and market local products. The cannery, vegetable oil plant and creamery had a direct effect on the farming community in Blumenfeld.

The Morden Experimental Farm had produced research which indicated that the area could grow vegetable crops successfully. But because there was insufficient local market for fresh vegetables, farmers pursued the alternative of canning them. A group of Reinland area farmers organized the Pembina Co-op Cannery in 1945. That year thirty acres of corn were grown and processed. The next year corn from 100 acres was processed. But inability to compete with large

companies and to handle fluctuating crops and markets caused the cannery in Reinland to close. Meanwhile, a privately owned cannery, Prairie Canners, was established in Winkler. The Aylmer Cannery was built in Morden in 1952. Many of the farmers who grew corn, peas, green beans, carrots and beets for the cannery were those with small land holdings. The vegetable crop was a large part of their income. By 1981, vegetable canners have ceased operation. Peas, beans and lentils are raised as dried legume crops.

Blumenfeld families have successfully grown a variety of fruit. Besides the small fruits, strawberries, raspberries, and gooseberries, orchards have included apples, crabapples, cherries, pears and plums.

Livestock Farming

Self-sufficiency was all important to the Mennonite settlers coming from Russia. Emerson, the nearest trading centre, was two day's journey away. Most farmers, as they were able, bought a few cows and hogs as well as chickens. The cattle were used primarily as a supply of dairy products — milk, cream and butter. Beef was not as common on the table as pork, which could be preserved for longer periods with smoking.

Farmers in the villages grazed their cattle on the village pasture. The villagers cooperated in hiring a herdsman who tended the cattle during the day, sought the best pasture for them and prevented them from damaging crops. The herdsman would go down the village street ringing his bell or blowing his horn at 7:00 a.m. A farmer's good reputation was at stake if he failed to have his cows at the street in time for the herdsman. Those who preferred to sleep late in the mornings were responsible for taking their own cows to the pasture. After the fall harvest the cattle were allowed to graze on the *Raine* and road allowances.

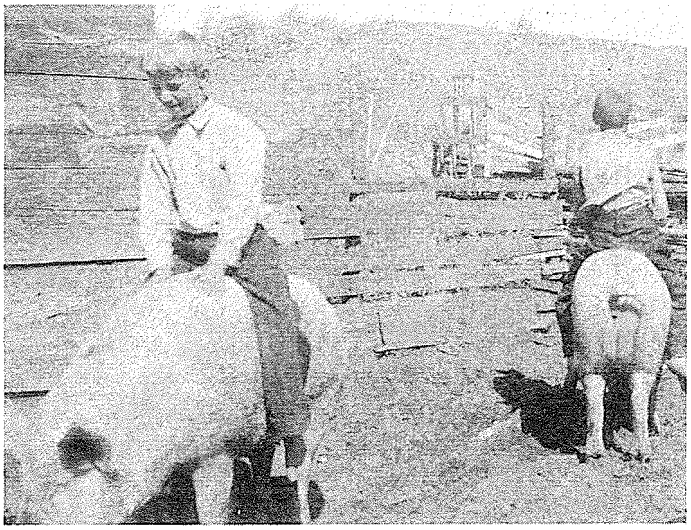
The herdsman was chosen at the *Schultenbot*. Some were Ukrainians seeking work in the village. Some were young men eager to earn a few dollars. The wages were meager. The herdsman was paid a little lard, a little wood, a little meat, a little money, and a few manure sods to heat his cottage home in the *Anwohner* section. In winter, when farmers cared for their cattle in their barns, the herdsman was forced to find another source of income. Herdsman Johann Wolfe was a respected school teacher in the German private school. Others were shoemakers, watch repairmen, etc.

Surplus cream was shipped to the Morden Creamery via the Morden/Haskett train which ran daily. In winter blizzards or during a summer dust storm, when roads became impassable for a Model T, farmers needed only to leave their cream at the railway track a mile west of the village. The next week, a cream-cheque came in the mail. Storekeeper Neufeld and the Klassen Brothers also helped villagers get their fresh dairy products to the creamery. People who weren't content with local prices had the option of shipping to Winnipeg with Peter Elias and Henry Elias.

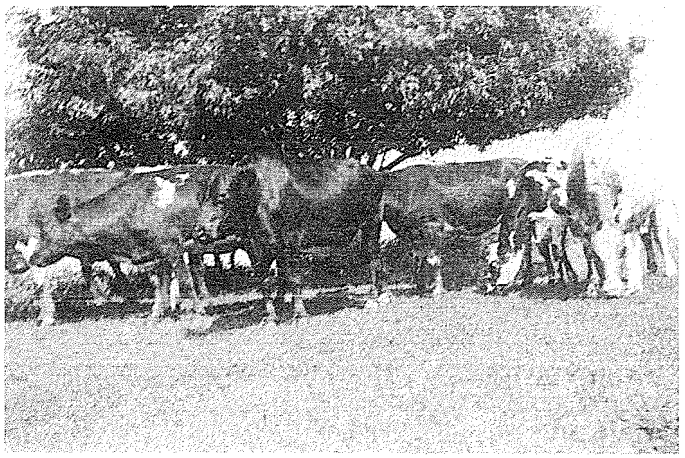
After World War I, dairying became more important. Local markets were developed. The Reinland cheese factory operated from 1937 to 1949. The Winkler Cooperative Creamery, established in 1939, was a market for milk, cream and eggs. It was influential in the improvement of dairy herds south of Winkler. It started a herd-improvement program among the farmers in 1947, calf clubs were established, and artificial insemination was introduced in an effort to build up the

quality of the herds.[35] Blumenfeld dairy farmers continue to ship their milk to Winkler Creamery, now operated by Manco, a provincial dairy products cooperative.

The village pasture was owned by the village until 1923 when the *Koagels* were abandoned. In 1923, the title to the village pasture located on Section 17 was held by Peter L. Thiessen. The village pasture was relocated to Section 20, where J. J. Elias presently pastures his dairy herd. The big farmers in the village bought shares. Other farmers rented the services of the pasture and the herdsman. A farmer with 10 shares could graze one cow. A farmer with only 5 shares could graze his cows at $2.00 per head per month. The village pasture was quit in the 1950's. The farmers holding the last shares were H. K. Giesbrecht, John F. Klassen, Peter F. Klassen and W. W. Reimer.



Pork is essential to the family larder. In fall, pig slaughtering bees are still popular family events. Here, George and John Klassen take a ride on two porkers destined for the table.



Cattle belonging to J. V. Neufeld. Dairying has become part of the Mennonite agricultural pattern.



D. S. Klassen hauling hay.



This barn was designed to store loose hay in the loft. John Reimer and William Krause stand waiting for the hay.

Livestock Per Farm Unit
Mennonite Reserve, Stanley Municipality

Year	Horses	Dairy Cattle	Beef Cattle (total)	Hogs	Poultry
1891	4.1	2.5		3.3	24
1916	8.8			7.3	
1931	6.1	3.8		8.5	150
1941	5.0	6.4	(416)	13.0	192
1951	1.5	5.1	(1096)	9.0	234

* Based on John Warkentin, Table 23, p. 328.

Livestock Farmers: Blumenfeld 1980

100+				2
26-100	2	2	1	5
6-25	4	6	1	1
1-5	2	4	2	
	Beef Cattle	Dairy Cattle	Hogs	Poultry

Another measure was taken to protect crops from roaming cattle. The municipality appointed three or four poundkeepers for the ward in which Blumenfeld was situated. It was the poundkeepers' responsibility to keep stray cattle in a pen until the owner had paid restitution for the damage. Jakob V. Neufeld, Blumenfeld, was a poundkeeper for many years. The following story is told by his son:

Peter L. Thiessen raised turkeys which repeatedly found their way to Neufeld's cornfield. Jake V. Neufeld told his son, Jake E., to chase them away. Young Jake, tired of the nuisance, took the German shepherd along. The dog killed seven of the turkeys which Jake stacked up at the binder. A few days later, Jake was called out of school to be confronted by a towering R.C.M.P. officer who interrogated him about the turkeys. As a result the poundkeeper had to pay a fine of $30, as restitution for the turkeys.

Later that season, the Thiessen cattle roamed into the same cornfield. Neufeld impounded them immediately and demanded restitution from Thiessen. But Thiessen cut the fence at night and took his cattle home. Neufeld was angry and threatened to take the case to court if the Thiessen family did not return the $30.00 that he had to pay for turkeys. Thiessen, whose experiences in court due to indebtedness had not been altogether happy, was anxious to avoid the courthouse and returned the money.

Some years later the Thiessen family made plans to move to Mexico. In preparing for their move, they approached Jake E. Neufeld and asked him to help them "roll up some pennies" in order to exchange them for foreign currency. The family had always been considered poor, but when Jake E. Neufeld arrived to roll up the pennies, he found a laborious task before him as the Thiessen family brought out pail after pail of pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters.

There are oral reports of a sheep pasture located at the crossroads at the end of the village. Sheep were important in the pioneer days as a source of wool for jackets and winter blankets (*Woldajch*).

Many small farmers maximize their pasture acreages by combining beef herds with dairy farming. Cattle buyer, Jack McKennitt of Morden, is a well-known businessman whose truck is welcomed to the village by a chorus of children's voices, "Hea tjemmt Feehtjeapa McKennitt." Jack drives to the store to have a coke with the boys, and soon the word is around the village that he has come. McKennitt's popularity among the villagers might be credited to his willingness to learn their language.

The Road to Town

The travel routes of the West Reserve connected the many villages to the trade centres which were necessary for marketing produce and buying supplies.

The town of Emerson, established in 1876, was the first supply point of the Mennonites and whole South Central Manitoba area. The road to Emerson was the Colonization Trail, also known as the Post Road, which ran in an east-west direction through the Mennonite Reserve. It was a two days journey by oxcart from Blumenfeld to Emerson. Often the trip was undertaken by a group of farmers on behalf of the whole village. "The Mennonite Store" in Emerson was an establishment owned by J. H. Ashdown of Winnipeg, but operated by Enoch Winkler, an Ontario German from Berlin (now Kitchener) who knew Jacob Y. Schantz. The Winkler family became well-respected leaders in the West Reserve. Howard Winkler, represented the Mennonites in the legislature for many years.

In July 1879, the Hudson's Bay Company laid out a townsite, West Lynne, across the river from Emerson in order to capture some of the western trade Emerson and West Lynne were the grain and livestock marketing centres for the West Reserve Mennonites until the railway opened up new trading centres.

The Canadian Pacific Railway laid a line from Winnipeg to Rosenfeld from where it took a westerly direction, through the Mennonite Reserve, to the Pembina Mountain country. It began operation in December 1882. There was a spur line to the United States boundary. Little railway towns were established on the new railway — Winkler, Plum Coulee, Rosenfeld, Altona and Gretna. The C.P.R. line promoted trade with Winnipeg and as a result the town of Emerson suffered badly. In 1884, Emerson was forced to declare bankruptcy.

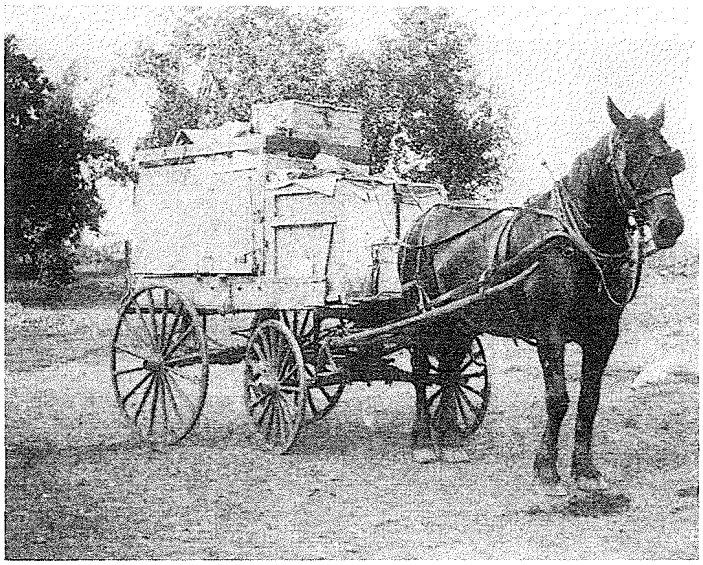
The town of Morden was laid out in 1883, midway between the existing communities of Mountain City and Nelsonville. Both the small communities boasted a saw mill, grist mill and store. Mennonites from the western fringes of the Reserve had obtained supplies and had wheat gristed at both places. But both communities were forced to concede to the railway town of Morden. Morden's first store, built by Penner and Schultz of the East Reserve, began operation in 1883 and served the Mennonite population.

Other grist mills in the West Reserve which ground wheat for Blumenfeld bread were located at Blumenort (1877), Rosengart (1891) and Winkler.

In 1892, the Hoffnungsfeld Siding on the C.P.R. tracks became the village of Winkler. From that time, until Haskett became a service centre, Winkler was the chief market and trade centre for the farmers of Blumenfeld.

Winkler was started as a Mennonite trading centre, and although non-Mennonite businessmen, especially Jews, came to Winkler, they realized that they were catering to a Mennonite trade exclusively. Winkler prospered because its businessmen were competitive. The competitive nature of Winkler's retail business, even today, reflects a history in which Mennonite consumers have believed it their right to purchase goods at wholesale prices.

In the early 1900's, seven or eight Jewish peddlers worked out of Winkler, selling goods in the villages to the south. They called at each village once a week, delivered their goods, and took orders for the next week's supplies. Some of these peddlers were very successful and after a time managed to open stores in Winkler where they

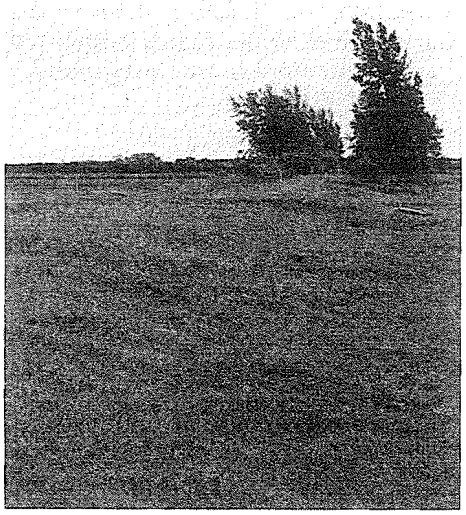


The horse and wagon of the Jewish peddlar, Hersche Danske, who visited the Mennonite villages weekly. A chicken cage was under the seat.

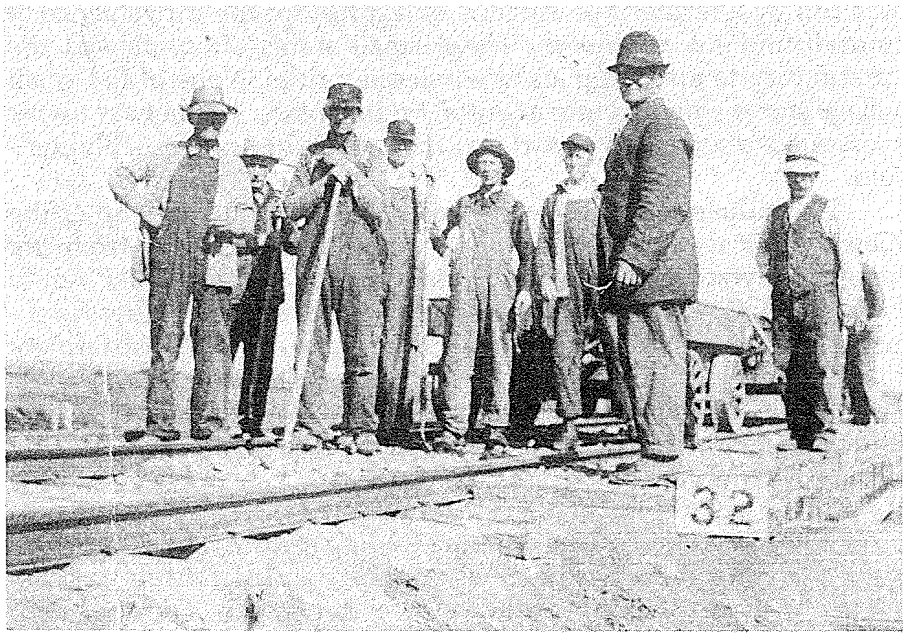
continued their business. A Jewish merchant of Winkler was the first to buy cream from the farmers, the first to buy chickens by the pound, and also the first to introduce regular "sales".

The rapid development of Winkler had a profound effect upon Morden where business became quiet and some stores were forced to close. An editor of a Morden newspaper explained to the public that Winkler was not only closer and offered better prices, it provided a business place that offered the respect and courtesy that the Mennonites deserved. In Morden, the Mennonites had often been treated disrespectfully. They were treated ruthlessly by the grain buyers who docked the grain excessively and insulted the farmers as well. The men and women were made sport of in the streets.[36]

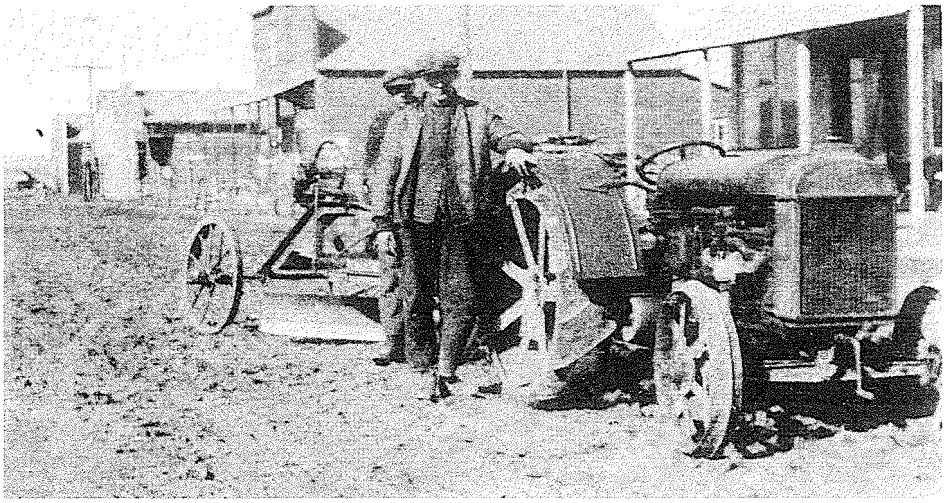
In 1907, the Midland Railway Company laid the tracks from Haskett to Morden. A grain elevator was built. Stores and dealers made Haskett a convenient market centre only a few miles from Blumenfeld. The railway discontinued its services in August, 1936, and most of the businesses in Haskett moved to Winkler. By 1950, it was a ghost town.



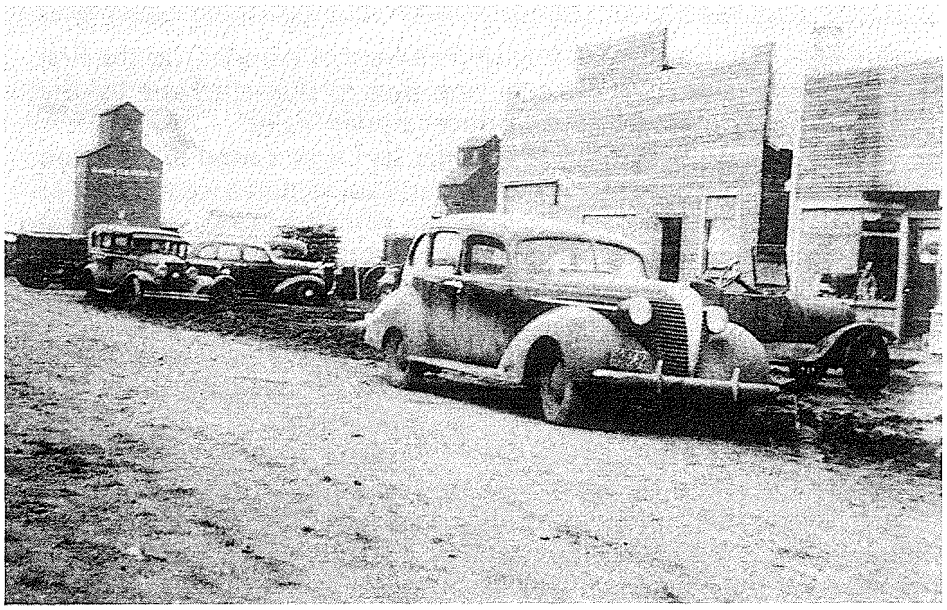
A grassy ridge flanked by trees marks the former Haskett/Morden rail-line.



Jacob Reimer, Blumenfeld, was a section worker when the railway was being built from Haskett to Morden.



Haskett became an important trade centre for the Mennonite villages near the international border. This view of Haskett in the late 1920's shows (L-R): W. M. Elias' lumberyard, Sam Ashkin's store and J. J. Letkeman's store. In the foreground is the local road grading crew with their grader and tractor.



Haskett appeared to be a thriving business centre in the 1930's. The McCabe and Lee elevators stand in the background; D. A. Fehr's unpainted garage and store in the foreground.

Blumenfeld, like many other villages, had a small store which was run by a farmer as a sideline enterprise for the convenience of himself and his neighbors. These small stores often allowed the community to buy supplies at wholesale prices. None of the small village stores emerged into a central trading place. The railway towns continued to serve this important function for the farmers of Blumenfeld.

The influence of the towns was a factor in the break-up of the *Gewannflur* system of farming. If a farmer broke away from the village to live on his homestead, the trading centres enabled him to survive on his new location. The townspeople recognized these Mennonites who had broken from the villages as the progressive farmers and made them feel welcome in the towns. The towns came to be seen, by the conservative majority, as a threat to Mennonite solidarity and as agents which introduced the lively pulse of the world into the veins of Mennonite blood.

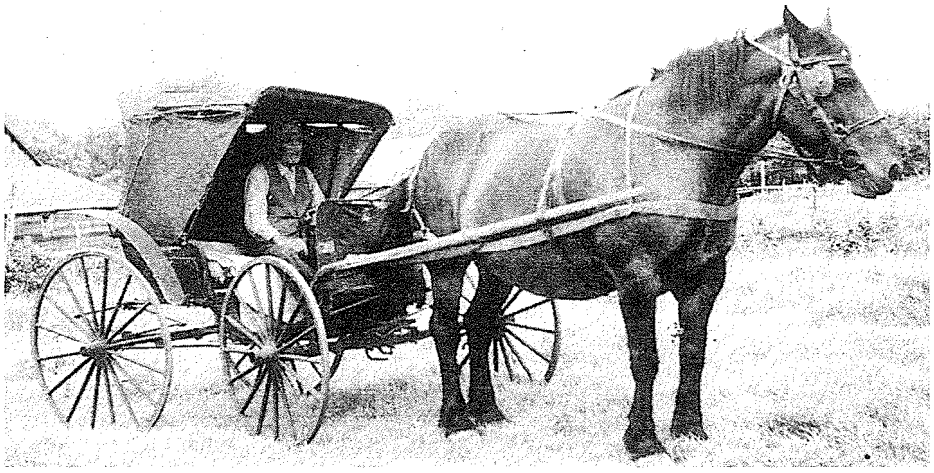
> The conservative Mennonites bitterly opposed the influence of the trading centres, shunning them as much as possible, and declaring them off limits for the younger generation. They tried to treat the new towns as if they were not

> part of the Reserve, and regarded them as business places only. Thus the trading centres confirmed the conservative Mennonites in their isolation, but performed the usual function in the prairies for the Mennonites who moved on the homesteads. This divided attitude has remained to this day.[37]

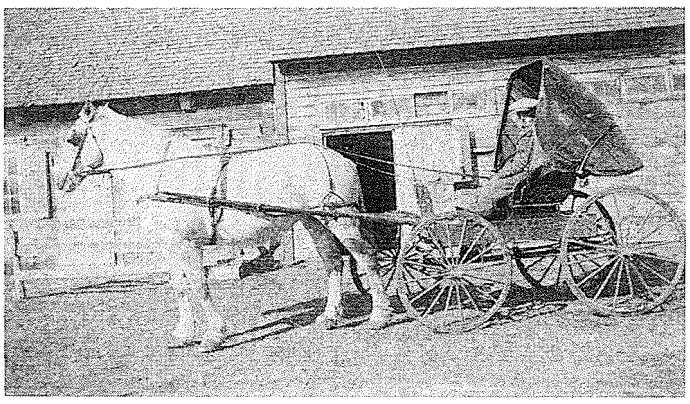
The first important trail, the Post Road, was used very little as a colonization and trade route after the coming of the railway. But within the reserve it served the important function of connecting villages.

Most of the villages were directly linked by trails that completely ignored the road allowances. The route from Blumenfeld to Chortitz, for example, was a mere trail, not a well defined road. The trails were never graded, and if wet weather created a severe pothole, the travellers preferred to detour around it, so that in places, the road could become very wide.

After the municipal government took office in 1884, more attention was paid to the problem of roads. At first all work was done by statute labour, but usually only in mid-summer. "The farmers of each village performed their statute labour in common, and usually they would work on roads which would benefit the village (except the village street), though this had to be approved by the municipality."[38] When the villages started breaking up, farmers on their homesteads put up fences across the trails, preventing travellers from crossing their grain acreages. The necessity for building roads became more urgent. In 1895, the Rhineland Municipality did away with statute



Klaus Heide continued to use horse and buggy after his return from Mexico until 1955. Manitoba Archives Photo



The democrat was a favorite mode of travel in summer. The driver is Abe V. Neufeld.

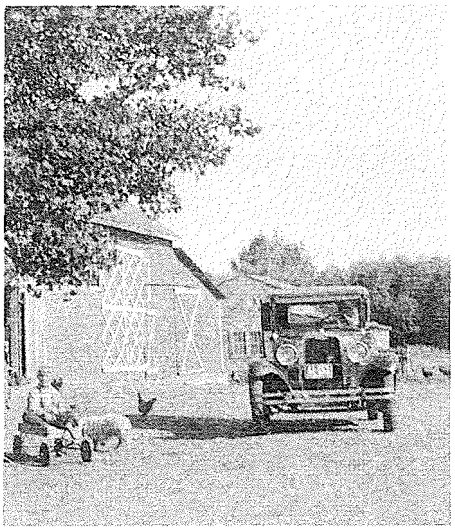
labour and began levying a tax for road-improvement. Road building became more efficient when work crews could complete a road that had been started.

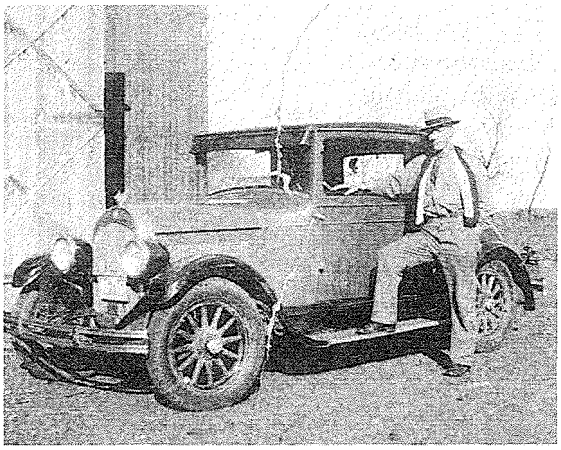
In 1900 only the main section roads, about 6 to 8 miles apart, were built to lead to the trading centres. These roads later became the provincial trunk highways. By 1928 there was a fairly good development of market roads. Winkler's connection with Winnipeg, Highway #3, was gravelled all the way to Winnipeg in 1931.

In the years from 1900 to 1914 most of the road allowances in the Reserve were graded. The quality of these roads deteriorated rapidly in the dust storms of the 1930's, when ditches filled up with dirt and were sometimes higher than the road itself. This was remedied in the next decade when new roads were built.

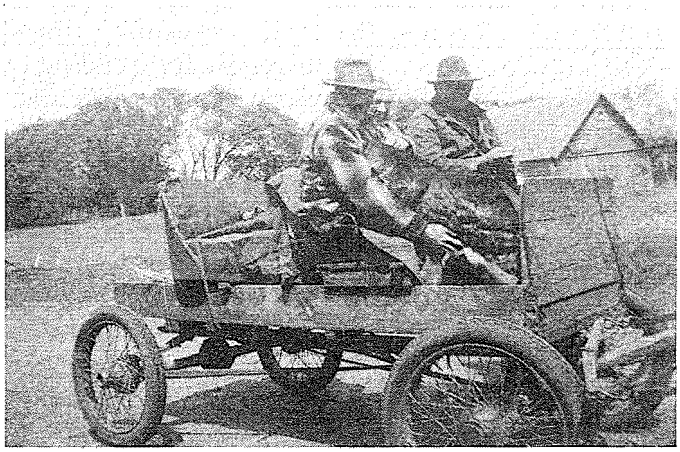
The Walhalla-Winkler road was frequently in poor repair. There were numerous washouts. The low spot near Schanzenfeld was particularly troublesome. In 1941, an all-weather road was built. The road was raised and gravelled, making travel to Winkler much easier. In the 1950's, the highway was paved with light oil only to deteriorate quickly. Local residents complained of the pot-holes, but to no avail. The road became the butt of Jim McSweeney's jokes on Radio CFAM until road officials silenced him. The road was rebuilt and paved again in the 1960's. Highway #32 continues to serve as a vital link to the town of Winkler and other trade centres.

Peter F. Klassen owned this 1928 Chevrolet known as the "Bigger and Better". Son George is contented with the wagon.





Herman V. Neufeld with his shiny car.



During the Great Depression, the Bennett Wagon was a common sight. Mr. H. K. Giesbrecht, Alex and Mary Sidof go for a ride.

J. J. Elias driving down the street in his 1963 Ford. The winter of 1966 is remembered for its above average amount of snowfall.



Peter Klassen still uses this old International farm truck.



1881 Possession List

Name of Farmer	Farm bldgs. (sq. ft.)	Broken land (acres)	Meadow (acres)	Land Owned (acres)	Work Horses	Yearling Horses	Cows	Sheep	Calves	Pigs	Wagons	Plows	Harrows	Grain cleaners	Rakes	Threshing machines	Grain measures	Mowers	Foddercutters
Giesbrecht, Abraham	95	42	118	160		3	1	7		4	2	1	1	1			1		
Giesbrecht, Cornelius	72	30	130	160			1	2		2	1					1			
Wiebe, Abraham	107	42	118	160	2	2	2	6		3	1								
Driedger, Peter	94	45	115	160	2	2	2	5		5							1		
Vaehr, Cornelius	44,	24	136	160			2	2		3		1	1					1	1
Wiebe, Jacob	42	18	142	160		2	1	1		2	1	1	1				1		
Schmidt, Jacob	60	30	130	160		2	1	3		2	1	1						1	
Neudorff, Johann	34	18	142	160	2	2	2	3		2	1	1	1		1				
Dueck, Jacob	90	30	130	160		2	2				1	1							
Martens, Jacob	39	27	133	160	1	2	1	3		2	1	1	1				1		
Classen, Peter	59	36	124	160		2	1	3		2	2	1							
Loepki, Johann	44	25	135	160		2	1	1	2		1	1							
Martens, Cornelius	59	36	124	160		2	1	3		3	1	2		1			1		
Classen, Franz	71	33	127	160		2	1	2		3	1	1							
Janzen, Johann	63	30	130	160		2	2	2		2	1	1	1						
Vahr, Johann	58	30	130	160		2	1	8		2	1	1			1			1	
Janzen, Peter	76	21	139	160		2	1	2		1	1	1						1	
Classen, Gerhard	62	39	121	160		2	2	1		3	1	1						1	
Braun, Peter	41	0	130	160	2			3		2	1	1							
Huebert, Abraham	59	30	130	160	2		1	3		3	1	1	1						
Krahn, Abraham	100	30	130	160	2	2	1	4		3	1	1							

1882 Possession List

Name of Farmer	Farm bldgs. (sq. ft.)	Broken land (acres)	Meadow (acres)	Land Owned (acres)	Work Horses	Yearling Horses	Cows	Sheep	Calves	Pigs	Wagons	Plows	Harrows	Grain cleaners	Rakes	Threshing machines	Grain measures	Mowers
Giesbrecht, Abraham	106	60	100	160	3		3	2	1	4	1	2	1	1			1	1
Bergen, Franz	104	39	121	160	3		2		1	4	1	1	1	1	1		1	
Wiebe, Abraham	126	48	111	160	4		2		7	5	3	1	1	1			1	
Driedger, Peter	100	60	100	160	4		3		6	2	1	1	1				1	
Vaehr, Cornelius	61	53	107	160	2		2		1	3		1	1				½	
Wiebe, Jacob	62	24	136	160	2		1			2		1					½	
Schmidt, Jacob	58	33	127	160	2		1		3	2	1	1	1					1
Neudorff, Johann	59	27	133	160	2	2	2		1	3	1	1	(two oxen)					
Vaehr, Jacob	92	42	118	160	3		2			4	1	1		1			1	
Martens, Jacob	38	33	127	160	2		1			2	1	1	1					1
Classen, Peter	80	33	127	160	2		2		2	5	1	1	1	1				
Loepki, Johann	54	27	133	160	2		1		1	2	1							
Martens, Cornelius	85	45	115	160	2		1		2	3	1	1	1	1			1	
Classen, Franz	66	34	126	160	2		1		1	3	1	1	1					
Janzen, Johann	63	30	130	160	2		1		4	2	1	1	1					
Vaehr, Johann	75	40	120	160	2		1		4	3	1	1	1		1		½	
Classen, Gerhard	61	39	121	160	2		2		3	4	1	1	1				⅓	
Janzen, Peter	75	33	127	160	2		2		3	2	1	1	1				⅓	1
Braun, Peter	56	21	139	160	2		1			2	1	1	1					1
Huebert, Abram	59	36	124	160	2		2		1	3	1	1						1
Krahn, Abraham	106	30	130	160	2	2	1		3	3	2	2	1				½	1
Classen, Peter	59	42	118	160	2				3	3								
Schmidt, Salomen	82	42	118	160	2		2		5	3			1		1		1	
Martens, Abraham	76	42	118	160	2		1		2	4	1	1	1				⅓	
Giesbrecht, Cornelius	58			0	1		1	2		4						1		
Dueck, Jacob	56			0	3		1				1	1	1				1	1



Serving the People

CHAPTER 6

A variety of businesses have operated in Blumenfeld. They provided necessary services and supplies for this agricultural community. More recently, several manufacturing enterprises have created employment opportunities close to home and provided goods for the larger society. The nature of business has been service-oriented.

The Blumenfeld store which continues to serve the community stands in the line of history. A village store has operated since 1900, albeit intermittently.

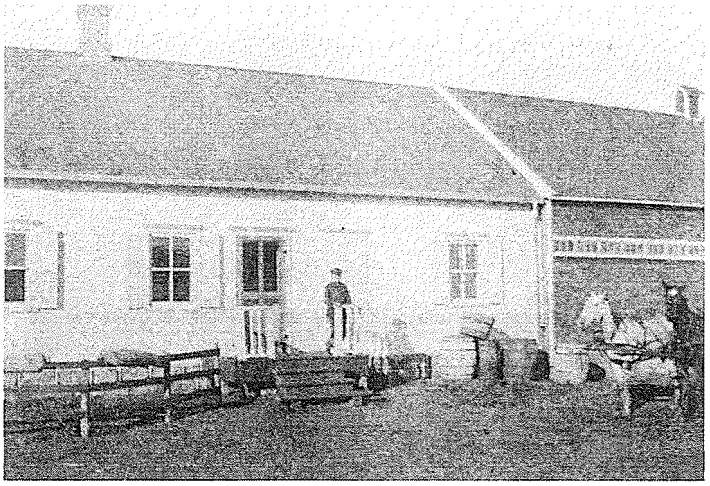
The people who have made their skills and services available to the community have come from all walks of life. Farmers in retirement, small farmers with sideline industries, big farmers with hobbies, women with special sewing or gardening skills — all these have served the community in a variety of occupations: coffin-maker, watch repairman, shoemaker, hat-maker, fruit grower, tanner, building mover, etc.

Who Minds the Store?

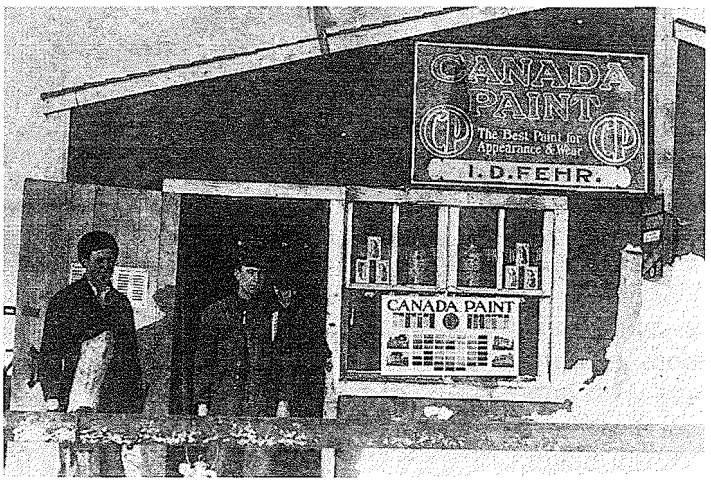
The Mennonites were farming people who depended on the railway trading centres for most of their farm and household needs. Among the conservative Reinlaender pioneers, there was the notion which still prevails today, that it was more honorable to earn a living by tilling the soil than by engaging in business that depended on making a profit from one's friend and neighbour. As a result, the first businessmen in Blumenfeld were daring men who were willing to flout tradition. They set out to disprove the popular Mennonite saying that "Een Bizznessmaun kaun n i ch opp rejchtijch sen'n."

Pioneer Johann Driedger operated a store as a sideline to farming. The store, located at his home, provided food staples and small hardware for farming. In 1902, Johann Driedger moved to the Hague-Osler area where he became a successful businessman.

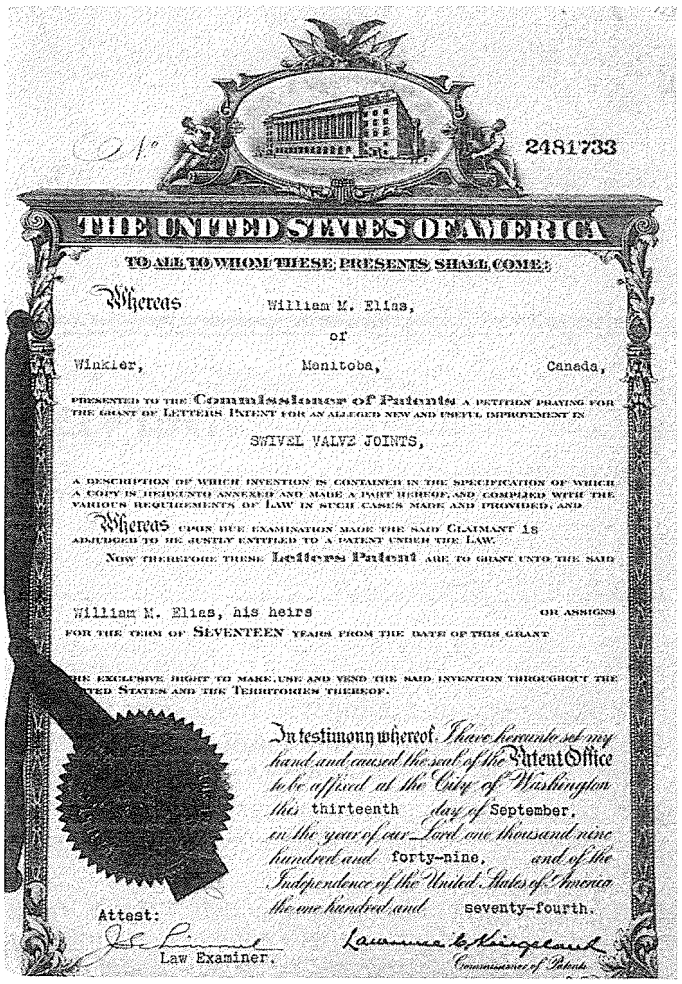
D. D. Fehr moved to Blumenfeld in 1909. From his home at the *Anwohner* end of the village, he operated a small store which sold hardware and farm supplies. In 1915, the small business was taken over by his brother, Isaac D. Fehr. I. D. Fehr moved to Mexico in 1922 and quit the store business.



Johann Driedger's new house in Blumenfeld, circa 1900. The Driedger store operated out of the family home.



The store at the *Anwohner* end was first owned by D. D. Fehr and later by Isaak D. Fehr.



2481733

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME:

Whereas William M. Elias,
of
Winkler, Manitoba, Canada,

presented to the Commissioner of Patents a petition praying for the grant of Letters Patent for an alleged new and useful improvement in

SWIVEL VALVE JOINTS,

a description of which invention is contained in the specification of which a copy is hereunto annexed and made a part hereof, and complied with the various requirements of law in such cases made and provided, and

Whereas upon due examination made the said Claimant is adjudged to be justly entitled to a patent under the law.

Now therefore these Letters Patent are to grant unto the said

William M. Elias, his heirs or assigns

for the term of Seventeen years from the date of this grant

the exclusive right to make, use and vend the said invention throughout the United States and the Territories thereof.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Patent Office to be affixed at the City of Washington this thirteenth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and forty-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred and seventy-fourth.

Attest:
Law Examiner.

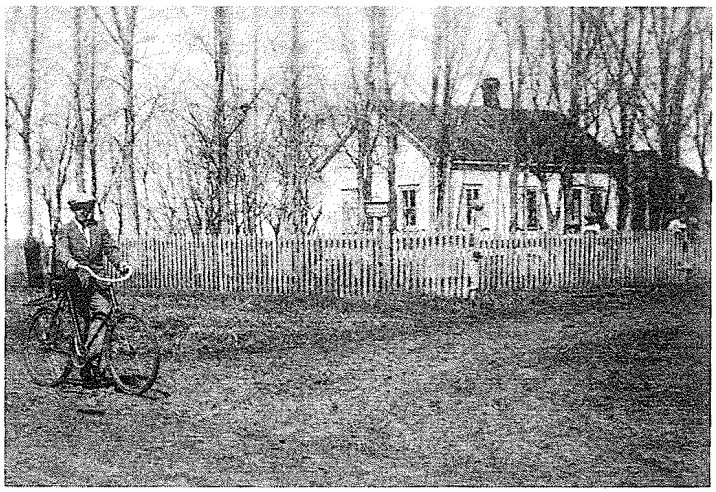
Commissioner of Patents.

Mr. W. M. Elias patented several small inventions. This patent was granted in the United States in September, 1949.

Meanwhile, D. D. Fehr expanded his business holdings on Lot 5 in the village. He tore down the existing house and *Gang* (partition connecting the house and barn) and built a new home which was unattached to the barn.

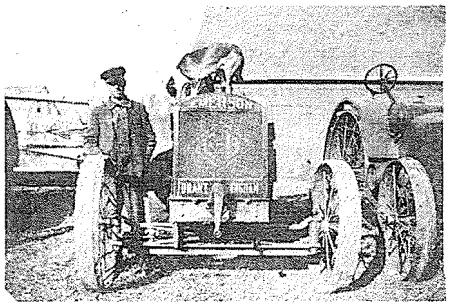
Several buildings on the yard served as the headquarters of his growing implement business. In the pre-1920 period he sold handsome democrat buggies. He sold tractors and steam engines which were shipped by rail to Winkler and then transported to Blumenfeld. His merchandise included a variety of farm needs such as beltings, tires, Overland wagons (popularly used for hauling grain), Case harrows, plows and drills. He kept a small stock of dry-goods and food staples. On one occasion he secured a carload of sugar at a discount price. This was stored in the basement and sold over the following years.

Mr. Gillis, the travelling agent for the Case Company was a frequent visitor to the Fehr home. He was a kind man and provided interesting and stimulating contact with the outside world, in spite of



Abram P. Janzen rented this yard from Peter F. Klassen. The sign on the fence advertises Mr. Janzen's Watkins dealership.





D. D. Fehr with the Emerson tractors he purchased by the carload. The shed behind the tractors housed the buggy inventory. On the second story, harnesses and accessories for the buggies were kept.

the language barrier.

Customers came to shop at D. D. Fehr's business from Reinland, Haskett, Schanzenfeld and Osterwick as well as from the village of Blumenfeld. Fehr took a great risk in ordering trainloads of tractors and implements which were unfamiliar to the local farmers. For Blumenfeld the world seemed to come to an end when as many as ten brand-new tractors arrived in a single day. But D. D. Fehr was a speculator who usually won.

In the 1920's, Fehr bought up land from Mennonites who were moving to Mexico, paying from $15 to $17 per acre. By 1926 his holdings extended to Neuhorst, Schoenwiese, Eichenfeld and Hochfeld. Some of this land was resold at a profit. Some was rented to Russian Mennonites and other farmers.

The change from horsepower to gasoline-powered machinery, and the land speculating of the 1920's made D. D. Fehr a wealthy man.

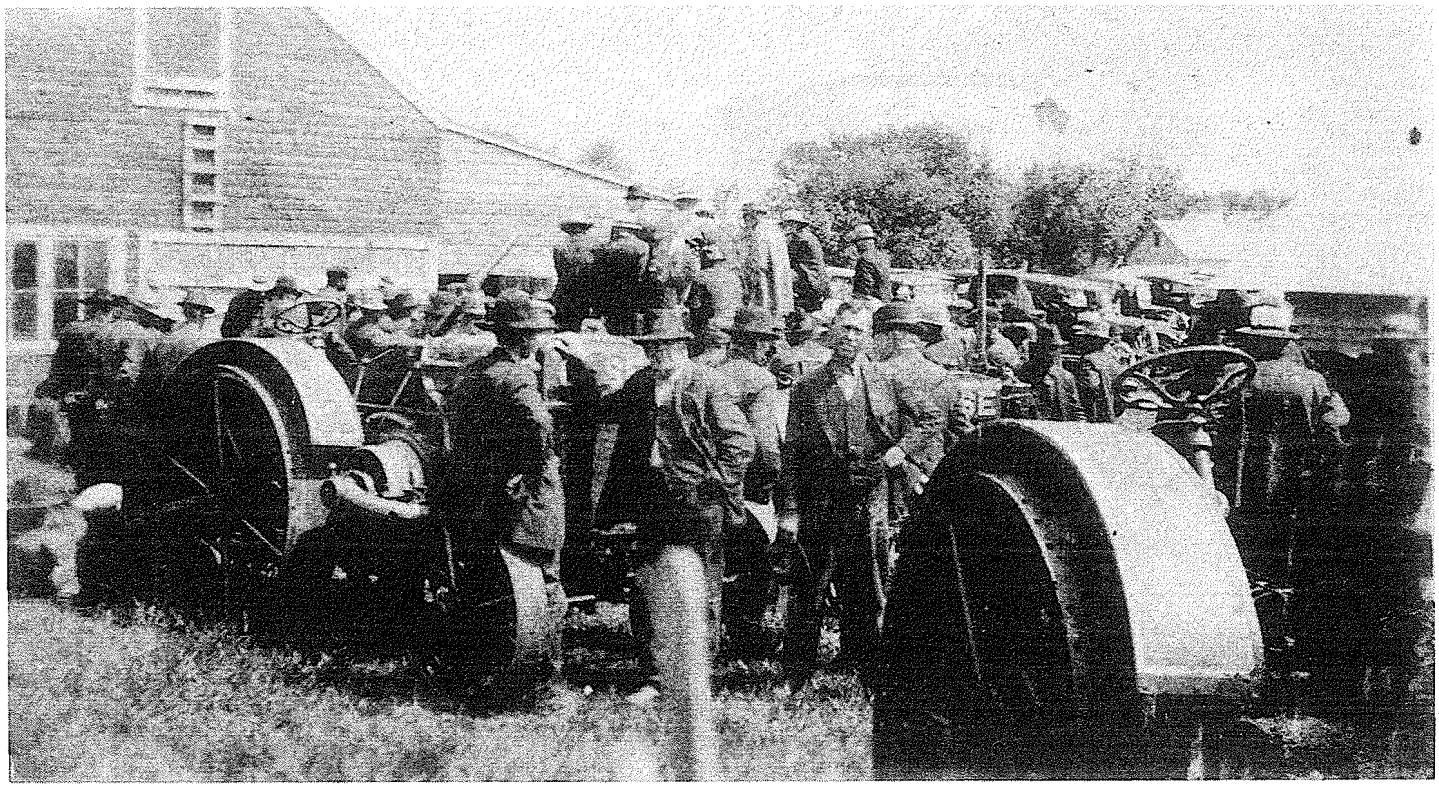
D. D. Fehr made frequent business trips to Winnipeg in his 409 Chev. On one trip, his children, David and Justina, were permitted to accompany him. They left Blumenfeld at 5 a.m. and travelled via Winkler, Roland and across country to Winnipeg.

At the Romley dealer on Notre Dame, son David asked directions to the toilet. He was shown to a small room behind a louvered door inside the building. Inside, he discovered a flush toilet! It was many years before such conveniences were introduced to Blumenfeld.

When the trio arrived at the Case dealer, someone asked D. D. Fehr why he was so dressed up. Mr. Fehr's English was not adequate for explaining Ascension Day. Finally he explained, "This is the day when Jesus bizzed upstairs."

D. D. Fehr promised to take his children to a modern store. Inside, they made their way to a small room. The doors were closed behind them. Suddenly the children caught their breath as the room slowly rose. Later, their father explained that it was an elevator.

An auction sale at the D. D. Fehr yard. The auctioneer was Mr. Reimer, Benjamin Fehr stands in the foreground with his back to the camera. D. D. Fehr stands with his hat off, facing the camera.



In 1926, D. D. Fehr moved to a farm near Haskett. His house in Blumenfeld was moved to its new location on section 17-1-7. The basement remained vacant until 1939 when the Old Colony Church was built on that site.

In 1927, D. D. Fehr bought the International Harvester dealership and lumberyard in Haskett from W. M. Elias. By 1931, his oldest son, David A. Fehr, was anxious to assume some responsibility in the family business. He became manager of the store. In 1936, D. A. Fehr married Annie Elias, daughter of W. M. Elias, and that same year he purchased the International Harvester dealership from his father for $3,000. By 1938, D. A. Fehr's business holdings included a garage, a fuel dealer — ship for North Star, a Red and White grocery and hardware store, as well as the International Harvester dealership.

When the Morden/Haskett railway was abandoned, the businesses located in Haskett moved to Winkler or Morden. By 1949, D. A. Fehr had closed his business interests in Haskett to operate an International Harvester dealership in Morden. He retired from business in 1968.



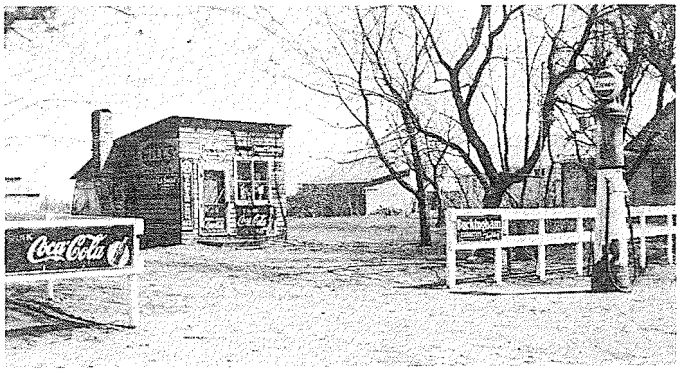
J. V. Neufeld's first store was in this house. The oil and gas barrels stand in front of the door.

The Neufeld Store

As a school boy, Jake E. Neufeld sold Gold Medal garden seeds, chocolate bars and other small items. Later he expanded his trade to include tobacco, chewing gum and drinks. The *Vae t'Hus*, which served as his bedroom, became his place of business. The small profit he made enabled him to buy fashionable clothes.

In 1937, his father, Jake V. Neufeld, took over the business and expanded the stock to include more varieties of tobacco and food staples. Neufeld made frequent trips to Winkler where he purchased supplies from Grunau and Janzen. Later he moved an old granary to the street and transformed it into a store. He began to sell Wm. Penn oil and North Star gasoline.

Jake E. Neufeld resumed the business after his father's death. Immediately he made plans to build a new store building which would attract customers and allow him to expand his stock. In the spring of 1944, when the supply of lumber arrived, neighbors came and said he was foolish. "Blumenfeld can't support a store," declared H. K. Giesbrecht. The new store was built by Neufeld himself. Stock was expanded to include oil, gasoline, veterinary supplies, medicine, building hardware, dry goods and groceries. A gasoline pump kept

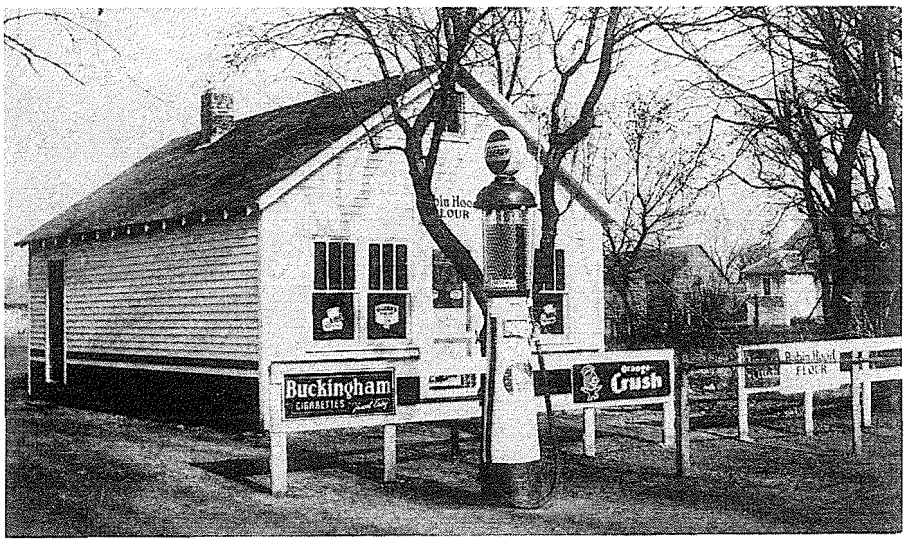


J. V. Neufeld's second store was on the same yard, but in this shed which he moved to the street.



Visiting at the Neufeld store, (L-R): Henry Klassen, Jake E. Neufeld (owner), Abe Klassen; sitting are Herman Klassen and Isaac Friesen.

Jake E. Neufeld built this store on the same yard in 1944. The North Star Oil Company provided the paint for the store.



Blumenfeld vehicles running. Neufeld also provided a local market for eggs and butter.

On his regular trips to Winkler, he took cream and eggs to the creamery. Villagers placed special orders with him for merchandise from the Winkler stores. Neufeld always made a trip to Winkler on Saturday afternoon to purchase bologna, sliced white bread and ice-cream. Upon his return to the village, the word was sent out and soon women came to purchase their Sunday supplies of bologna and sliced bread while young men and women came for the ice-cream. The ice-cream came packed in dry ice and had to be consumed before mid-night.

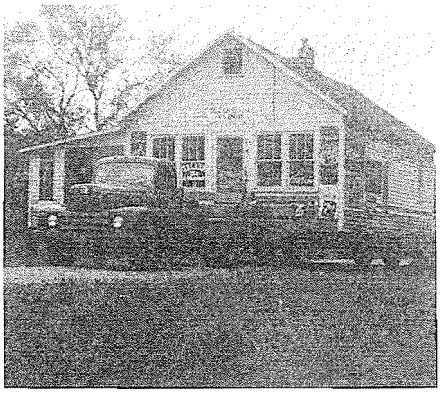
In 1949, Neufeld married Ella Klassen, a Blumenfeld school teacher. That year he sold the store to Jacob J. Elias and moved to Haskett.

Jacob J. Elias moved the store to his rented property. The store was moved by Ben Wiebe, mover from Osterwick, with all the stock on the shelves. During the following years electricity came to the village and Elias enjoyed a lucrative business selling electrical sup-plies and home appliances such as stoves, refrigerators and washing machines. Elias also operated confectinery booths at the school pic-nics in Hochfeld, Blumenfeld, Reinland and Winkler.

In 1959 Jacob J. Elias sold the store to his brother, Abe Elias, and moved to his farm west of the village. The former store from Gna-

denthal was moved to the store's present location in Blumenfeld. The Neufeld store, situated beside it, serves as the warehouse.

The store has changed hands several times in the last decade. Owners include Bill Dyck, Jacob Thiessen and most recently, Jake Thiessen. Increased mobility and a paved highway takes most Blumenfelders to Winkler to do most of their shopping. The present store is stocked with a variety of farm clothing, hardware and grocery supplies, but it serves primarily as a 'convenience store' and popular meeting place rather than as a retail service centre. It is open long hours and depends on evening and week-end business to remain in operation.





Abe Elias, the new storeowner, moved the Gnadenthal building and the former Neufeld store to a newly purchased site where the store is located today. The former Neufeld store serves as the warehouse to the store.

Peters' Service

Blumenfeld vehicles have been serviced by the capable mechanics at Peters' Service, located on Highway #32. The garage was begun as a family business in 1965 when Bill and Dave Peters decided to build a garage on Dave Peters' land near Friedensfeld. By the spring of 1966 the brothers were in business. Several years later, Bill Peters became the sole owner.

The brothers were young and lacked a strong financial backing when the business opened. The venture began with a loan of $1000 to purchase tools and to pay for the two acres of land. Gillis and Warren extended credit for some equipment. For some years, Penner Dodge of Winnipeg put in motor parts on consignment.

In the first years the garage operated out of a 24' x 38' building which had been moved onto the site. In the summer of 1973 an addition was built.

The garage was open long hours. Often Bill Peters worked from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. for six days a week. But increasing demands of family life and failing health have shortened his hours from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mrs. Peters has been a valuable co-worker in the business. She may be Blumenfeld's only female mechanic, capable of doing value grinds, muffler jobs, grease jobs or replacing water pumps. She was the bookkeeper and parts-manager until 1978. Mrs. Peters gave up the work at the garage to spend more time with her family.

The Peters family enjoyed visiting with their customers. Their aim, to satisfy all customers, was a challenge to the popular belief that all business people are crooks. In 1976, the business experienced financial difficulties because of too many charge accounts. People took advantage of the verbal work-estimates. Consequently, money was lost and the Peters were forced to make estimates according to the Chilton timing records used by most garages.

GRAND OPENING

PETER'S SERVICE

Garage and Filling Station
ON HIGHWAY NO. 32
8 MILES SOUTH OF WINKLER
To Be Held On

Saturday, May 14, 1966

COFFEE and DONUTS SERVED

Bill & Dave Peters
Phone 325-7239 Winkler



Bill and Dave Peters operated this garage located on Highway #32 south of Winkler. Bill Peters is seen working on a 1951 Meteor.

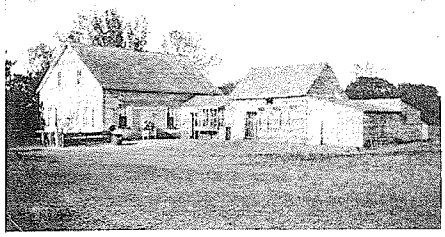
The Peters have experienced several break-ins and a fire. In December 1979, freezing rain and sleet combined with low temperatures froze the bowser line. The Peters' son was heating solvent in order to melt the line. Some solvent spilled and ignited. Bill Peters threw a pair of coveralls on the fire, but this only spread the flames. The furnace fan blew the flames toward a pile of tubes, tires and clothing. The fire was finally put out with water from the pressure nozzle on the pressure system. They were fortunate in sustaining only smoke damage.

Peter P. Elias: Man of many Trades

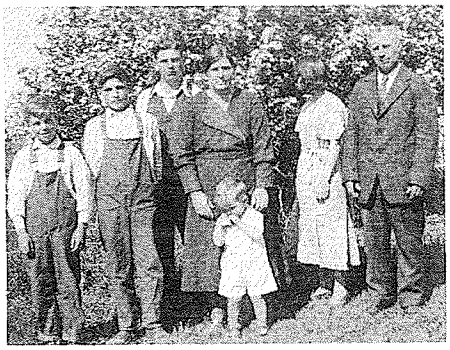
Peter P. Elias, Blumenfeld's most senior citizen in 1981, is experienced in several occupations. At the age of 14, he quit school to help his father in the blacksmith business. Shortly before his marriage he took over this business. In the 1920's, he bought the land on which the *Anwohner* cottages were situated and proceeded to annex the acreage on which the cottages were located. The blacksmithing business operated from his yard at the east end of the village where Henry A. Elias, now lives.



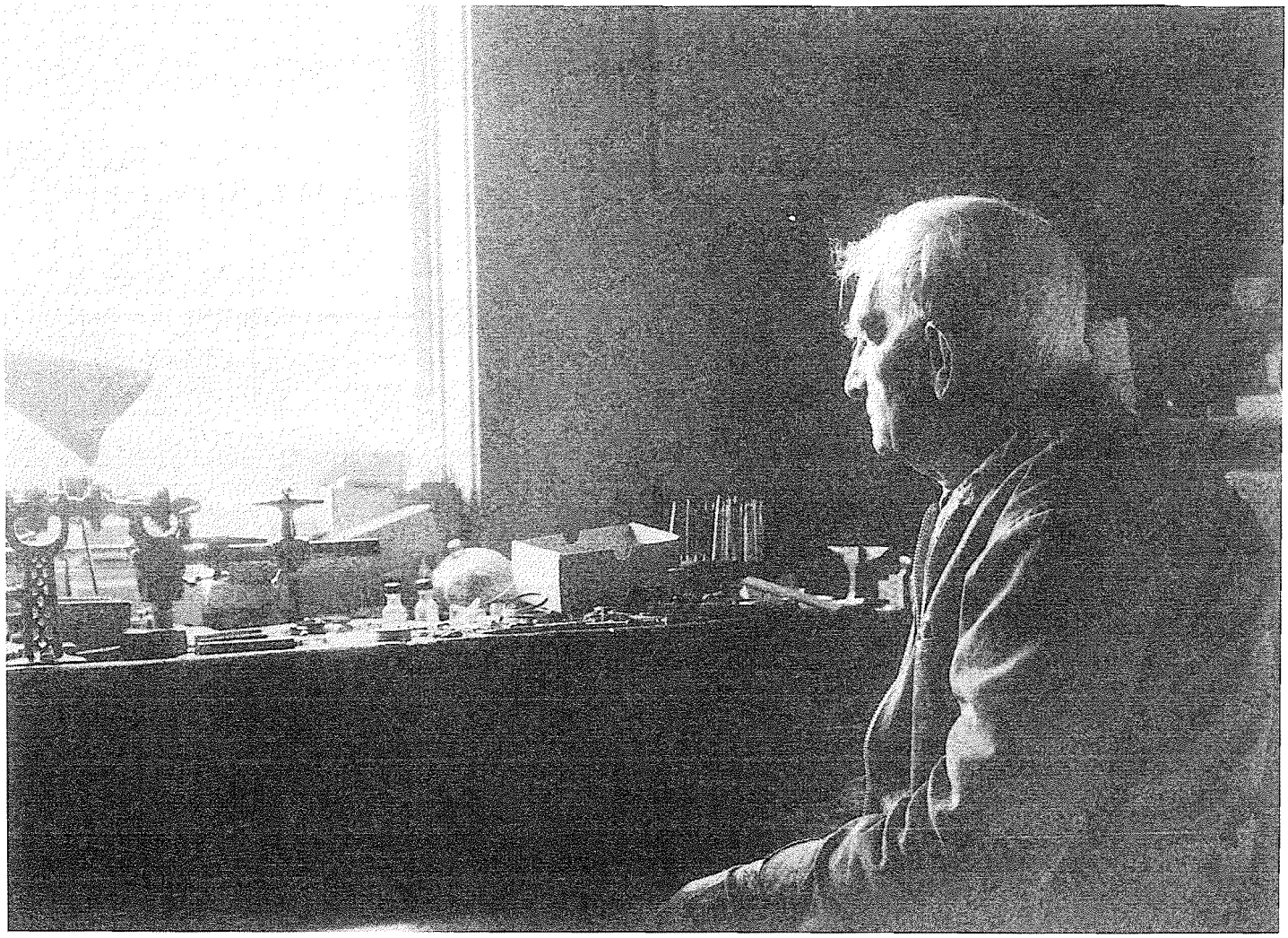
In front of John Dyck's blacksmith shop stands his brother, Isaac. Circa 1948.



P. P. Elias' yard looking southwest. Located at the east end of the village, it is the home of Henry Elias today.



Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Harder with (L-R): Nick, George, Bill, Johnny, and Mary. Mr. Harder owned a blacksmith shop and repaired village implements during the 1930's. Later the family moved to British Columbia. The George Heide family lives on the former Harder place.



Peter P. Elias sitting in front of his workbench. Mr. Elias is well known as the watchmaker of Blumenfeld. He is also the oldest living resident of Blumenfeld at the time of this writing.

From his father, Peter P. Elias, he also learned watchmaking skills. His excellent workmanship made him a popular watch-repairman in the West Reserve. If necessary he would create the part in order to complete a job. He was skilled at repairing old clocks, including those imported from Russia. Other members of his family have learned the watch-making craft from him.

For many years he operated a threshing outfit which did custom work in the Pembina Hills among the Norwegian farmers as well as among the Mennonite farmers on the fringe of the Reserve.

C. J. Dyck, Hauling

C. J. Dyck has been in the trucking business for over 30 years. In 1948, he bought a 1 ton, 1938 Chevrolet truck which he used to haul coal. In the winter he hauled eggs and cream to Winkler by horse. The following year, the Chevy broke down and he bought a new Fargo half-ton truck on which he put a three-yard gravel box with a central drop. It had a bottom that folded down underneath to drop the load. He hauled gravel for $1.95 a cubic yard from Osterwick to Altona for the construction of Highway #14A. His next truck was a three-ton with a hydraulic hoist.

Most of the gravel hauling has been done for the municipality. Increased prosperity in the area made more money available for upgrading the local roads. When the municipality cut back on its road work in 1980 due to a poor harvest, C. J. Dyck expanded into the grain

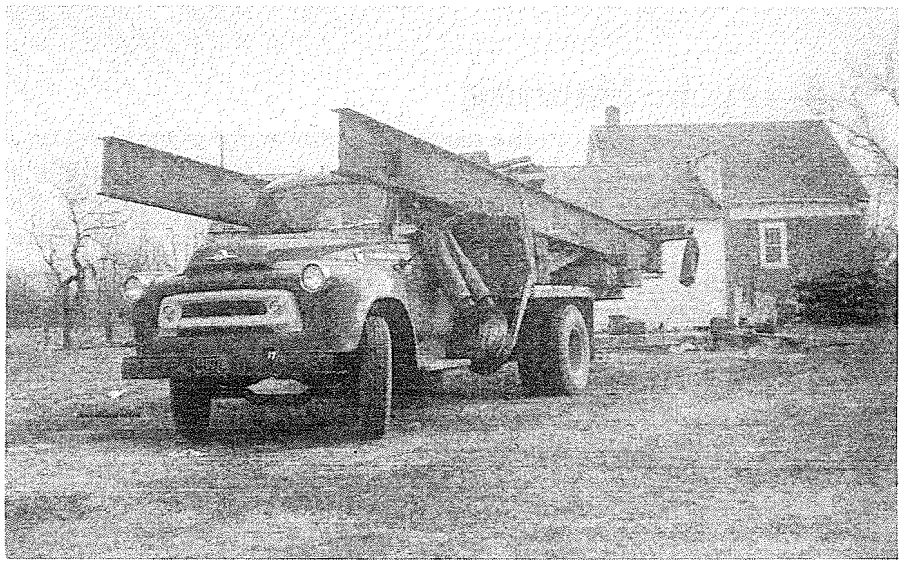
C. J. Dyck and his sons operate a trucking business. Although most of their business is in gravel hauling, this unit is equipped with a grain trailer.



hauling business. As his sons became old enough to join their father in the hauling business, Dyck secured additional trucks. At present he owns two tandems and one tractor-trailer unit which are operated by John, Jack and Harv Dyck. Until recently, Dyck did all the mechanical work on the trucks himself. He enjoys the feeling of accomplishment in operating a successful business.

Stanley Transfer

Stanley Transfer was begun in May, 1955 by Bernie Elias. This transport business operated from Blumenfeld until 1961, when Elias married and moved the operation to Reinland. The transfer made stops at several villages to pick up livestock to be shipped to Winnipeg. By 1961, Stanley Transfer shipped up to one hundred hogs and fifty head of cattle to St. Boniface stockyards each week. On the return trip, it brought supplies to the stores in the villages and to the local industries.[1]



The Blumenfeld store was the depot for Stanley Transfer for several years before the operation relocated to Reinland. A truck scale is being delivered to C. C. Reimer, Haskett.

Friesteel Products

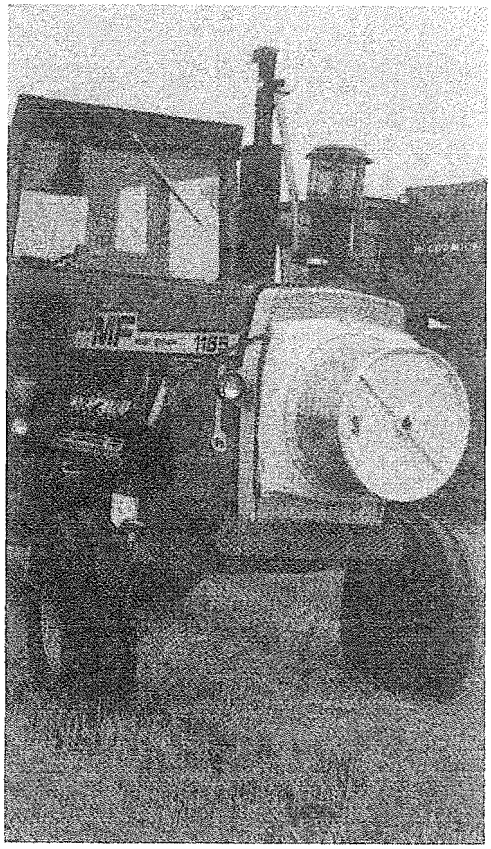
In 1974, Peter Friesen's family moved from British Columbia to Blumenfeld. By the summer of 1975, Friesen was ready to open a plastic manufacturing business. He began by producing plastic products and by doing custom drafting for local businesses. In 1976 his staff had increased to six workers. There were 10 employees in 1980.

Friesen developed the plastic production to manufacture up to one-hundred different kinds of products. These included cardiograph components that are used in the field of medicine. Another product is the "screen-o-matic" rotary radiator screen for farm tractors. A local implement dealer approached him for help. Using his experience with plastics, Friesen designed the first screen. These screens have found their way to Africa, as well as to all parts of Canada and the United States.

The plastics production involves two basic processes. One of these is known as vacuum molding. The sheet of solid plastic is heated and formed over a pre-formed mold. An example is the type of holding tanks used by Triple E Manufacturing of Winkler. The other type of mold is called rotational molding. Raw plastic powder is molded inside a cavity in the forming machine. Friesteel makes telephone components for underground protective cases using this method.

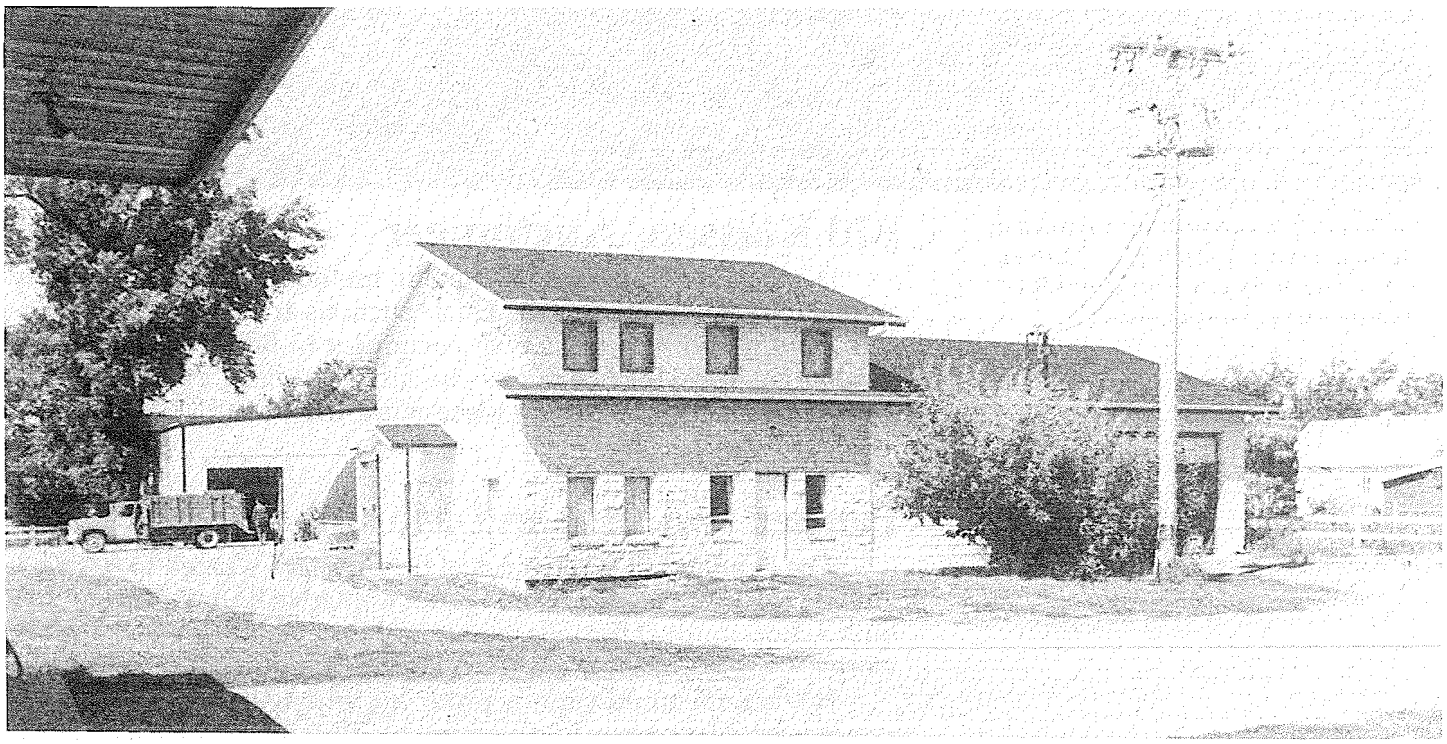
Mr. Friesen chose Blumenfeld to establish his business because of the availability of workers. It was a quiet location to live. Friesen is concerned about good relations between his business and the village. His industry provides an alternative to those in the area who are not farmers and who do not wish to commute to Winkler to work.

In 1977 a 50' x 80' expansion was erected. A building of identical size was added in the fall of the same year. As proof of an expanding market, a two-storey office building and a 70' x 70' shop were added in the winter of 1978. The present space of 15,000 square feet includes shop, offices and warehousing. At present further expansion is planned. This will involve building another plant in Winkler.



The radiator screen is one of many different plastic products manufactured at Friesteel Products Corporation.

Two-story office building at Friesteel with shop annex. Photo credit David Goertzen II.





The Klassen Consignment Auction of farm machinery at the J. D. Klassen farm in the spring of 1981 provides a valuable service to the area.

Bill Klassen, Auctioneer

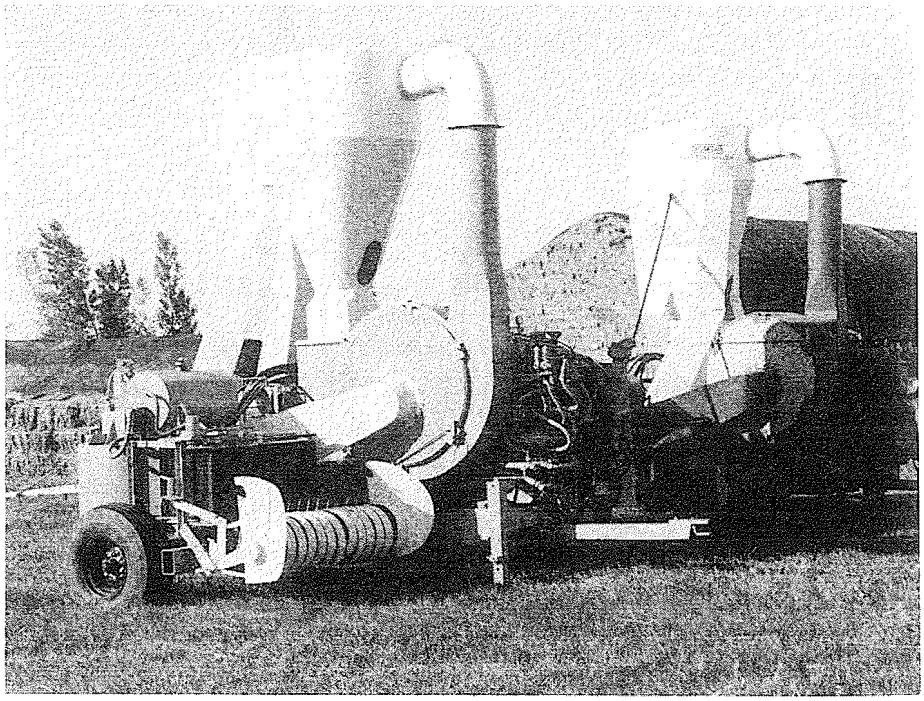
The auction has been a popular method of selling property among the Mennonite people. Estate auctions are common. Blumenfeld has enjoyed having its own auctioneer in Bill Klassen. Besides conducting most local auctions, he also organizes an annual consignment auction which takes place at his father's yard, J. D. Klassen, in Friedensfeld.

Penner Welding and Manufacturing

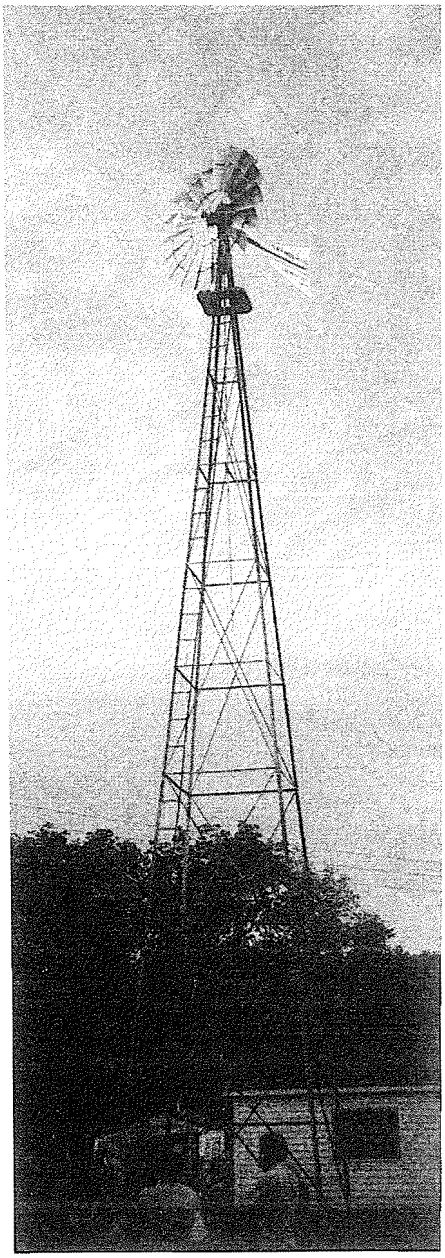
Abe Penner had some ideas of his own and wanted to try them out. He was interested in welding, but wanted to be independent. He built a shop south of the village in 1977. Most of his work was contract work.

He manufactured various products, among them hydraulic soil samplers and flax decording equipment. The latter item takes the flax

straw, separates the shives and bales the fibre. A large flax straw company, Domtar, uses his product. The business terminated in 1981.



These units were built by Abe Penner of Blumenfeld. The portable flax fibre separators were purchased by Domtar.

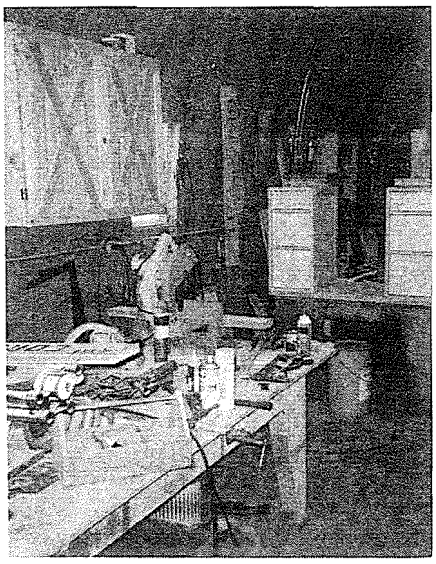


Elias Woodworking and Manufacturing

Peter Elias began his woodworking and manufacturing industry in the spring of 1978 at the north end of Friedensfeld. In July of the same year, he moved to his present location in Blumenfeld. He manufactured cabinet doors for a Winkler cabinet-maker. In 1979, Peter Elias entered a partnership with his son, Abe. In the spring of 1980, they converted a dairy barn into a workshop and built an addition.

The products manufactured by Elias Woodworking and Manufacturing include custom kitchen cabinets, china cabinets, cabinet doors and custom furniture.

A unique aspect of the Elias business is the imported windmill which was set up in July, 1978 as a generator of electricity.



Elias Woodworking of Blumenfeld makes furniture and cabinets.

This windmill was moved from North Dakota to the Elias yard. It is representative of the windmills that were used to harness the wind for pumping water.



The Family Foundation

CHAPTER 7

> Amidst the changes in economic and community life, in education and even in the expressions of religious convictions, the family remained the foundation and the nucleus of the Mennonite group.[1]

The family is both the centre and the circumference of the Mennonite group. In a century of life in Canada, the strength of the Mennonite family circle has not diminished. It is within the family circle that the traditional values of the group are communicated and that a sense of personal and corporate identity is shaped.

Family relationships run deep. Loyalty to one's family brings adults back for frequent visits to parents and *Jeschwista* (brothers and sisters). The relationships of adult children to their parents is characterized by the same obedience which governed their relations in childhood.

> Susan had been baptized in the Old Colony Church in Blumenfeld. But upon her marriage to Isaak, she joined the Reinlaender Church where his parents were members. Soon a family of four children had to be fed and clothed. Susan was anxious to apply for the Family Allowance benefits which the government makes available to all mothers. But her husband's promise to his father that he would never accept aid from the government was stronger than Susan's wishes. That promise was respected even though it meant severe austerity in running the household.[2]

The family structure is decidedly patriarchal. Decisions regarding how time and money are spent rest with the men. Women take pride in running an efficient household and in nurturing the children with which they are blessed.

The extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins plays an important social function. Indeed, all Mennonites see themselves as distantly related to each other. This contributes to the feeling of kinship which binds the communities together.

Family Size, Blumenfeld 1981

0-4 children	42.4%
5-8 children	46.1%
9-12 children	7.7%
13+ children	3.8%
Total	100 %

Source: Survey of Blumenfeld District, 1981.

It was common practice to refer to aunts and to special family friends by their first name. Aunt Katherina was addressed as *Trientjemum* and Aunt Susanna was known as *Sauntjemum*. First names were frequently abbreviated within the family. Maria was often called *Mitch*, Agatha was known as *Oat*, and Aganeta was *Neet*. Although these names sound peculiar to the ear of a non-Low German speaking person, they are commonplace to the people of Blumenfeld.

Women in the village were identified by their husband's name. Mrs. Anna Reimer is known as *de Welm Reimasche* even though her husband is deceased. Neighbourng women address each other as *de Wiebsche* or *de Kloasche*. Sometimes they remain ignorant of each others' first names. This writer encountered several obstacles in finding the Christian names of women who had lived in the village community for as long as thirty years.

Men call each other by their last names. Their names are shortened, as well. Jacob is usually known as *Jaep;* Heinrich is called *Hein;* Abraham was commonly pronounced *Obrom*. Children are regarded as the possessions of their parents until marriage. A single adult is known as *Reimasch Aun* or as *Pannasch Peeta,* even after they have carved out their own niche in the life of the community.

The village community, regarded as an extension of one's kinship, is respected in a manner that defies the trend toward individualism in the present society. The conservative villages south of Winkler appear to have a stronger social cohesion than some of the other villages east of Highway #32. As long as a Mennonite lives in a village community in which the traditional values are still upheld, the influence of the secular world or the sin of unbelief cannot altogether destroy the regilious heritage or the social controls of the community.[3] This is true even for those Mennonites whom religion has become a shallow and routine experience. There continues to be a feeling that one must account for one's actions, even to neighbors and villagers. The community represents a corporate image of the family, and for this reason, the attitudes and opinions of the community are given the respect due any senior member of the family. Thus the community, like the family, acts as the instrument of the church in holding to the traditions.

The Mennonites of the conservative villages south of Winkler have guarded the culture of their group by controlling whom one married. In the history of Blumenfeld, no villager has married a non-German speaking person and remained to take up residence in the village. Only occasionally have there been marriages between Mennonites and the German-Lutherans who shared a similar cultural background.

The term, "mixed marriage", is equally applicable in describing marriages across Mennonite denominations. These mixed marriages occur infrequently. A member of the Old Colony or Reinlaender church rarely marries into the Bergthaler or E.M.M.C. groups. If such a marriage should take place the young couple usually gravitates to the more liberal church. The young men and women from the Sommerfelder Church stand in the enviable position of being free to marry from either group without suffering from feelings of isolation within their own family.

In the following pages the story of the family will be told by photographs. The final section of this chapter pays tribute to several families who influenced the history of Blumenfeld over several generations.

PART I

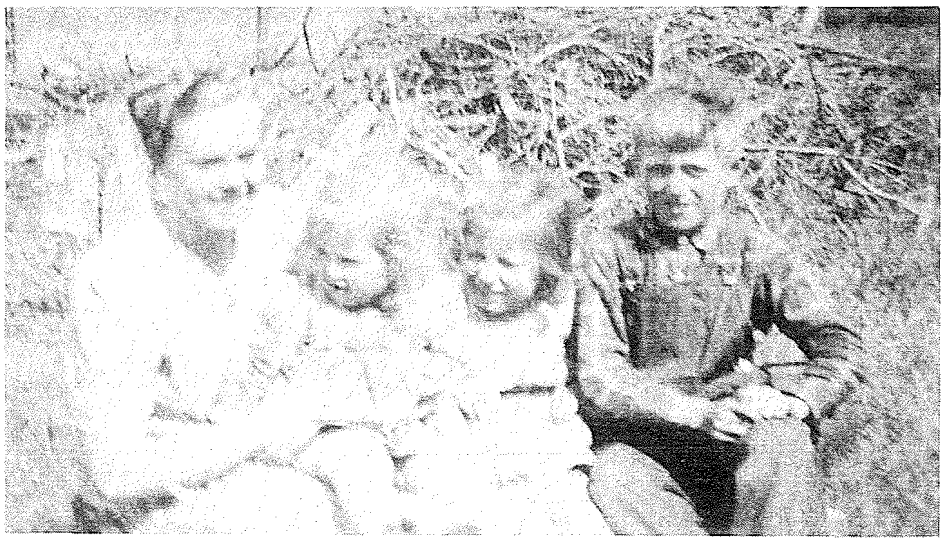
From Cradle to the Grave



An apprehensive father wheels out the carriage for yet another addition to the family.

Bill and Karen Klassen celebrate the birth of their first child. Photo: Pembina Times





In the summer, women worked in the fields during haying and stooking seasons. They raised chickens in spring to fall months and tended the livestock. Sometimes a young woman from the village was hired to help with the housework. The Kaeijksche (maid) became a favorite friend of the family. Elizabeth Fehr is pictured here with the Peter G. Elias family in 1948.


M. Wankentine

Frank Elias proudly displays a bow and arrow he made with his father, Peter G. Elias.





In former days, large families were necessary in order to provide a labour force for the farm. Older children helped with the livestock chores and younger children had household tasks. Everyone had to help in order to allow mother to give the newest baby the care that it demanded and needed.
This daughter stands in front of the summer kitchen where laundry and canning was done.

Children have had to be resourceful in creating playthings. Martin Wiebe built this tractor for his nieces and nephews. Henry Wiebe operates the tractor while Abe Wiebe, Anne Elias, Anna Klassen and John Klassen enjoy the ride.





This car, built by John Wiebe in the early 1950's, introduced John Klassen (now of Janzen Pontiac in Winkler) to fine automobiles. His passenger is Anne Elias.



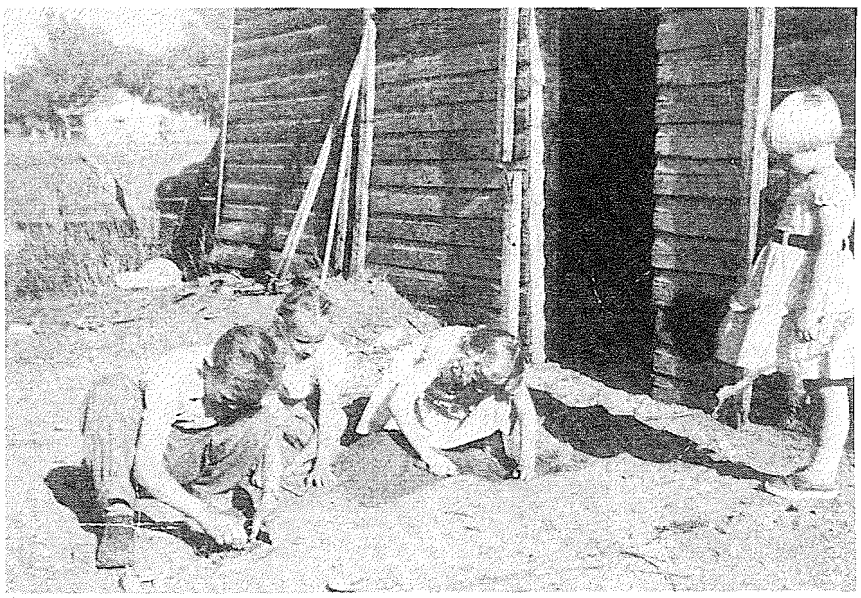
Alvina, Linda and Norma Dueck have a moving playhouse.

It was a special occasion when children could accompany their parents to Winnpeg to do Christmas shopping. The stars in John Klassen's eyes reflect a child's delight in meeting Santa and placing a Christmas order in person.



The children of J. V. Neufeld: Pete, Mary and Jake.

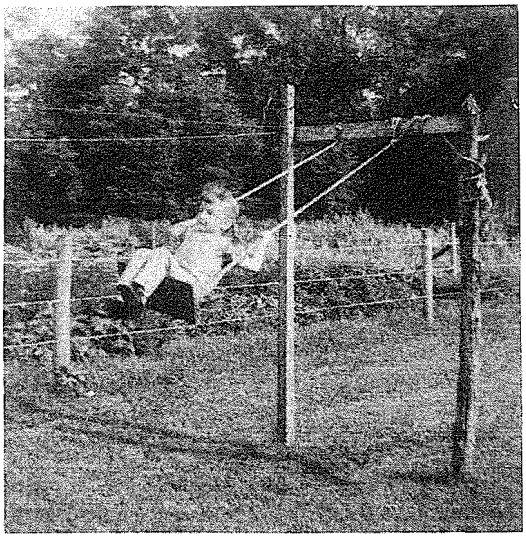




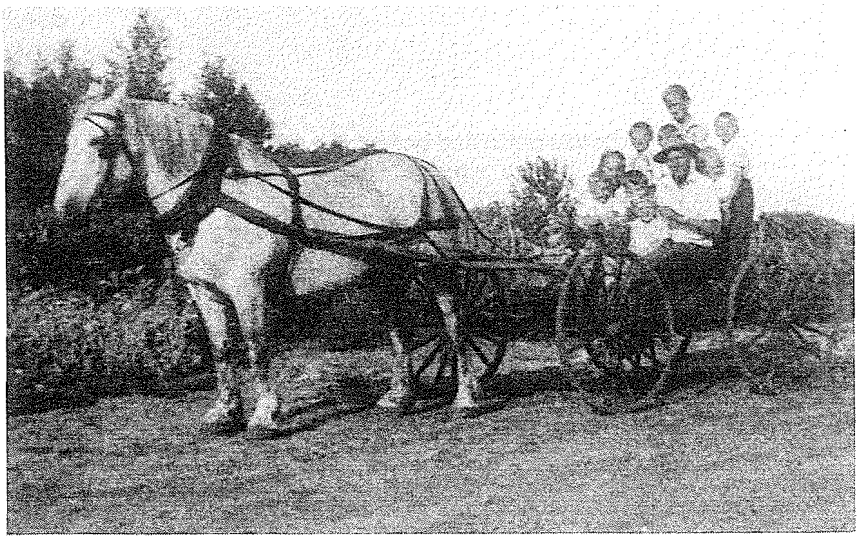
The sandbox was a favorite summer spot for Tina, Abe, Evelyn and Grace Dyck.



Mary Friesen with a pet.



Martha Klassen.



Cousins developed special friendships because there were many opportunities to play together. These cousins are enjoying a ride with Uncle Abe Wiebe on the Martin Wiebe farm: Betty Wiebe, Isaac Elias, Peter Elias, John Klassen, Henry Wiebe and others.

Seeking a Wife

The following story of Jake and Tina might describe the courtship of any Blumenfeld couple married in the pre-1950 era.

Jake and Tina had known each other since childhood. In school they had been in the same class. Their families had lived in the village for several generations. There was little that one did not know about the other's life.

For a year, Jake had been singling out Tina for those after-dark walks down the village street on Sunday evenings. Finally, one Sunday in November, Jake found the courage to visit her at her home. Her parents welcomed him warmly. He had often been there to visit the boys and was no stranger to the family. Yet he felt somewhat awkward and shy in his new role as a suitor. The happiness in Tina's face and her smile helped him to feel that all was well. She made the time go quickly by inviting several members of the family to play Chinese checkers with them until the night-lunch was served.

The following Sunday, Jake went again, and the next Sunday too. Soon the visits were more relaxed. Sometimes the young couple would visit at the home of Tina's sister who had been married that summer.

Jake became more confident as he realized that Tina was returning some of his feelings. She, too, seemed to anticipate a time when they would make a home of their own. He was delighted to receive a knitted sweater from her as a Christmas present. He had bought her a gift too, and a card with many words of endearment which he whispered in his heart but had not the courage to speak to her.

In the months of January to March, Jake spent not only his Sunday evenings at Tina's home, but also Wednesday evenings. This was a sign to all concerned that his intentions were serious. He was only waiting for the appropriate moment to "pop the question". That opportunity came in May when the young people of the village went to Walhalla for a picnic and baseball game. Tina responded to Jake's proposal with the confidence that this was the life-time committment that she had been waiting for. Over the next months, Jake and Tina planned and plotted in secret. Jake spoke for a house in the village and pledged the owner to secrecy. They planned a July wedding, after seeding was completed.

The first Sunday in July, Jake had the unnerving task of talking to Tina's parents. But they had come to like him, and gladly gave their blessing to the marriage. On Wednesday, Jake and Tina drove to Winkler for blood-tests and to Hochfeld to talk to Rev. Wiebe of the Old Colony Church. He consented to perform the ceremony. The following Sunday, the engagement was made public in the church when the banns were read for the first time. The engagement celebration was held at the home of Jake's parents. Tina's parents, and all her married brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews were there for dinner and *Faspa*.

During the next week, the engaged couple did a whirlwind tour of their close relatives. On Mon-

day, they visited Jake's grandparents in Blumenfeld and Neuenberg. On Tuesday, they announced their wedding to Tina's grandmother who lived in the Salem Home in Winkler. An uncle and aunt in Altona were visited, as well as relatives in Plum Coulee. On Thursday, they finalized the agreement to rent the Friesen home in the village and visited several cousins that same evening.

The next Sunday, the banns were read again. Tina's family hosted the groom's relatives for Sunday dinner. During the next week, Jake and Tina continued their round of visits until all uncles, aunts and cousins of the bride and groom were personally invited. Many friends were visited as well. Tina's mother and sisters, meanwhile, were busy preparing for the wedding meal.

Jake and Tina's wedding day came. The bride and groom were married in the Old Colony Church in a short afternoon service. Afterwards all the friends and relatives were invited to the wedding meal at the bride's home. After the meal, Jake and Tina opened the many wedding gifts. Some close relatives and dear friends were invited to stay for the *Noa-Tjast* (after-wedding party). A light lunch was served and everyone enjoyed visiting until the young people announced that the games were beginning outside. There was much laughter and gaiety as the young people played the circle games, *Gruenes Grass*, Here Comes Topsy and others. The games ended with a rousing turn of Bingo, the favorite folk-dance of the young people. The bride and groom were escorted to their new home mid cheers and teasing.

On the Saturday before the wedding, the village women sent a pound of butter to the bride's home to help with mixing the *Zwieback*. Several women got together to mix and knead the dough for the buns. Then the dough was divided into portions for those who had offered to help with the baking. When the buns were done, they were carried to the church or to the place where the wedding reception would be held. (This same community spirit assisted in the preparation for funeral meals.)



John Klassen and Anna Wiebe, "going steady".

Until recently, dating was considered a courting practice from the outside society, and therefore sinful. The traditional courtship pattern was for young men and women to develop their acquaintance within the village limits and under the watchful supervision of adult chaperones.

On Sunday evenings, young people walked back and forth along the village street in separate groups of men and women. As the evening fell, the groups drew closer together and by the time it was dark, they would be paired off in couples.

When a young man "became serious", he visited his girl at her parents' home. The couple would be allowed some private time in the sitting room. One cautious mother ushered her daughter and the suitor into the sitting room with the stern admonition, "*Bie uns doa je nicht daut Licht ujt pusten*" (At our house, you don't blow out the light.)



Wertgeschätzte Freunde!

Da unsere Tochter Anna mit unserem Sohn David sich in ein Christliches Eheverlobnis eingelassen haben, u. wünschen Sonntag, den 24. Mai 1936, ihre Ehe von Priesterlicher Hand bestätigen zu lassen; laden wir Euch nebst Angehörigen zum besagten Tage zu halb 3 Uhr nachmittag in die Behausung der Eltern der Braut auf der Farm, eine Meile Osten von dem Dorfe Blumenfeld gefälligst ein, um mit uns den Stifter des Ehestandes um eine gesegnete Ehe anzuflehen und um nach vollzogener Verbindung sich von uns mit einem geringen doch wohlgemeinten Gastmahle bedienen zu lassen.

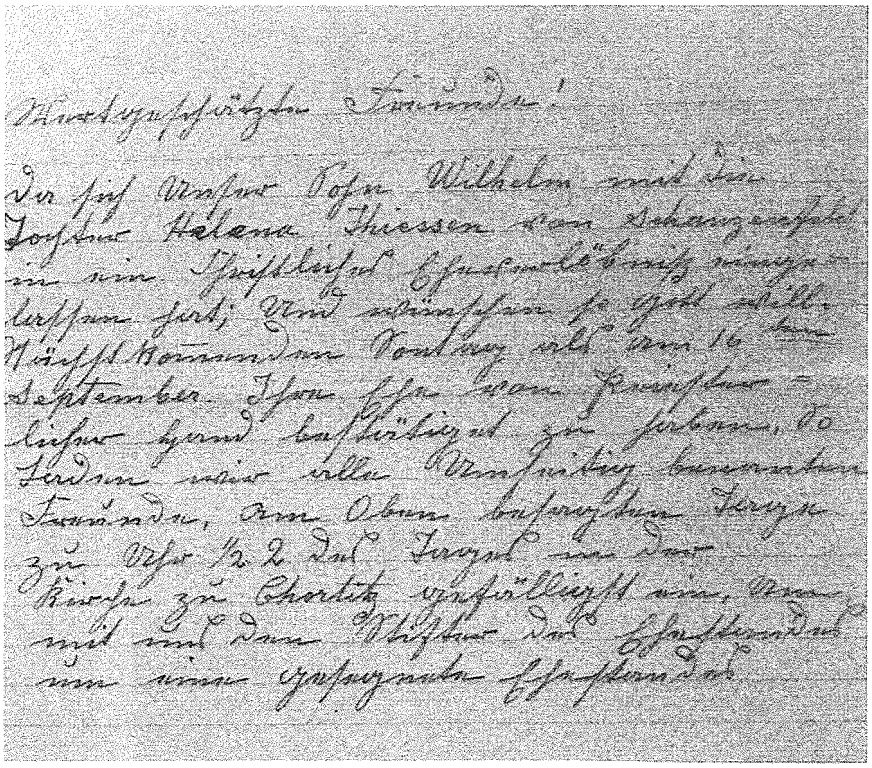
Für solche Liebe werden wir uns zu jeder Zeit dienstschuldig erkennen und harren indessen

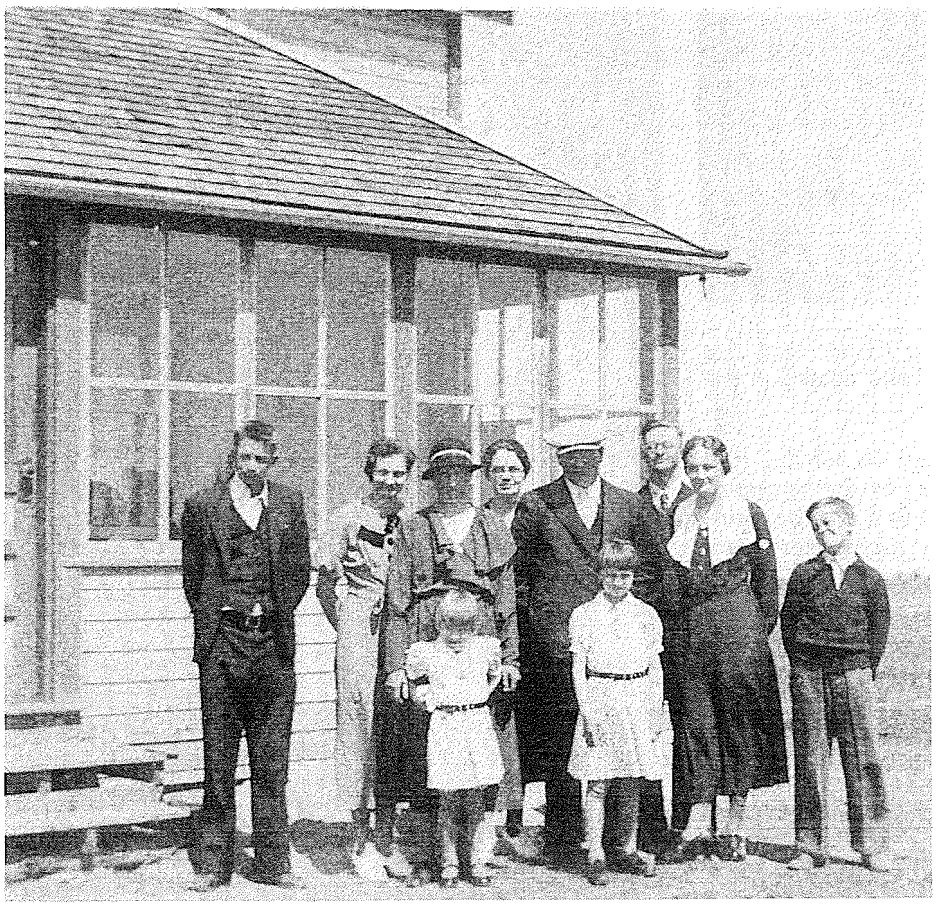
Eure Freunde

Wilhelm und Anna M. Elias,
Eltern der Braut.

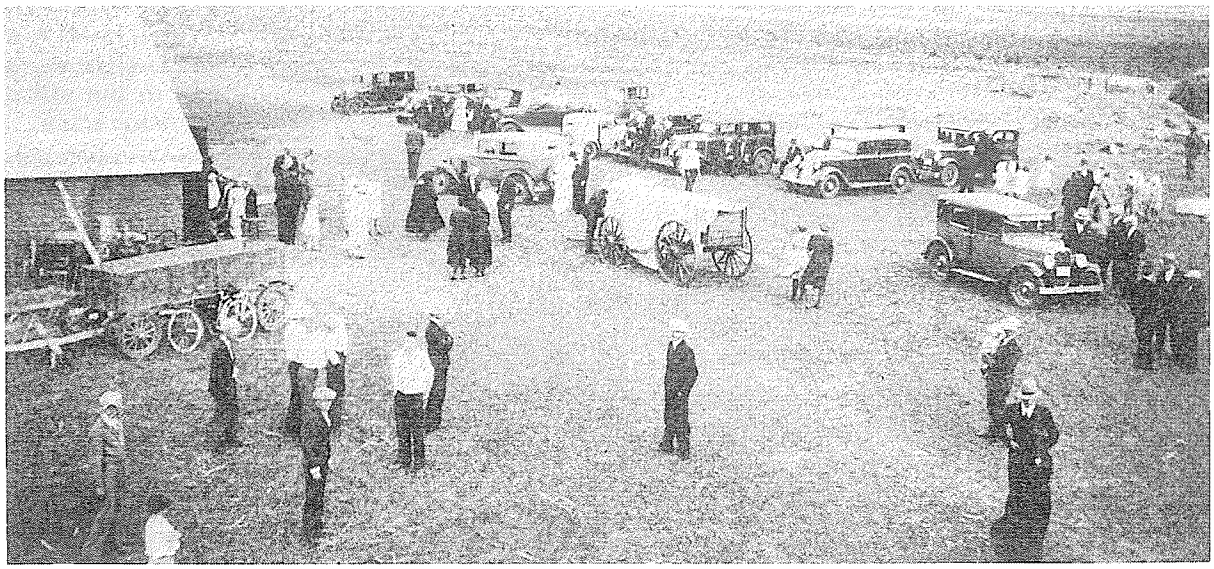
David und Maria D. Fehr,
Eltern des Bräutigam.

The villagers were invited by a handwritten invitation which was carried from neighbour to neighbour. Everyone in the village was invited and everyone came.

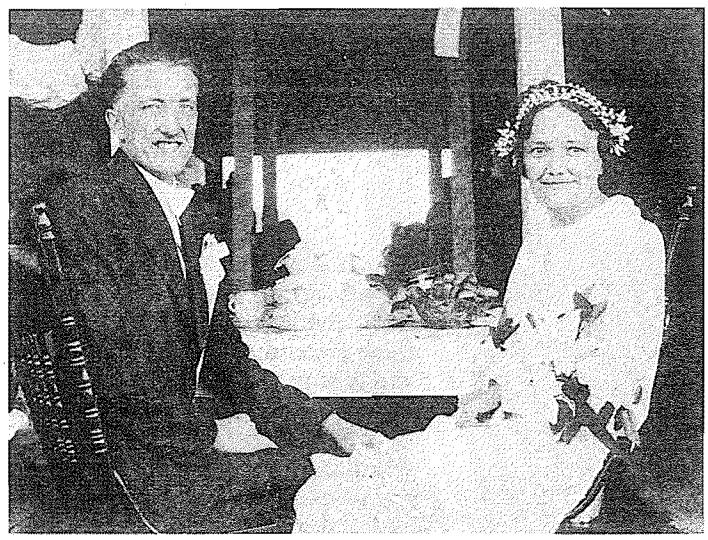




The forthcoming wedding was officially announced when the banns were read for the first time. That same afternoon, relatives of the bride and groom would visit at the home of the groom. *Velafnis* was an afternoon devoted to visiting and a semi-formal religious service in honor of the engaged couple. In the photo, Annie Elias, the bride, stands beside her father, W. M. Elias, before going, with her family, to the Sommerfelder Church in Reinland where her engagement to David A. Fehr is to be announced.



Guests arrive at the W. M. Elias farm for the wedding of Annie Elias and D. A. Fehr.



The bride, Annie Elias, and the groom, David A. Fehr, seated at the place of honor.

The bride, dressed in white, had sought the blessing of the Sommerfelder minister in breaking the tradition of black bridal dress. Her dress, the most expensive one in the Eaton's catalogue, cost $3.95.

The tradition of dark colors for wedding attire was based on the belief that vanity must be avoided even on such an important occasion as a wedding. The Old Colony Church granted brides the privilege of wearing pastel colors when Rev. Penner became bishop. The Reinlaender Church continues to require a black wedding dress.





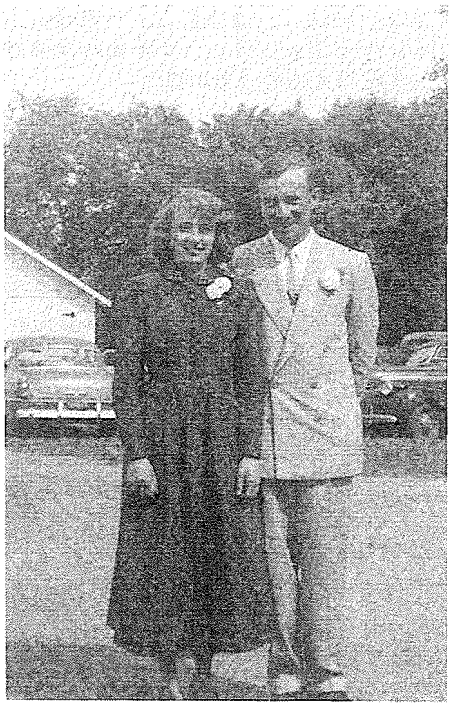
It was a special wedding. The grainery had been decorated with willow branches cut by the village boys. There was a bridal cake, baked and decorated by the bride herself. And there was enough cake and cookies for everyone.



David and Annie Fehr enjoyed a two-week honeymoon in the United States and at Clear Lake. The tent was borrowed from the Haskett school teacher, Jacob D. Siemens.



Newlyweds, Peter G. Elias and Katherine Banman, 1938.



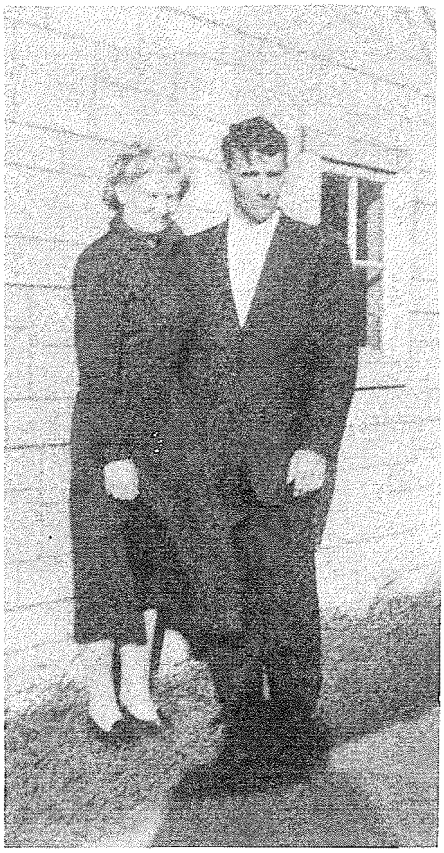
The wedding of Helen Janzen and Isaac Friesen, 1956.



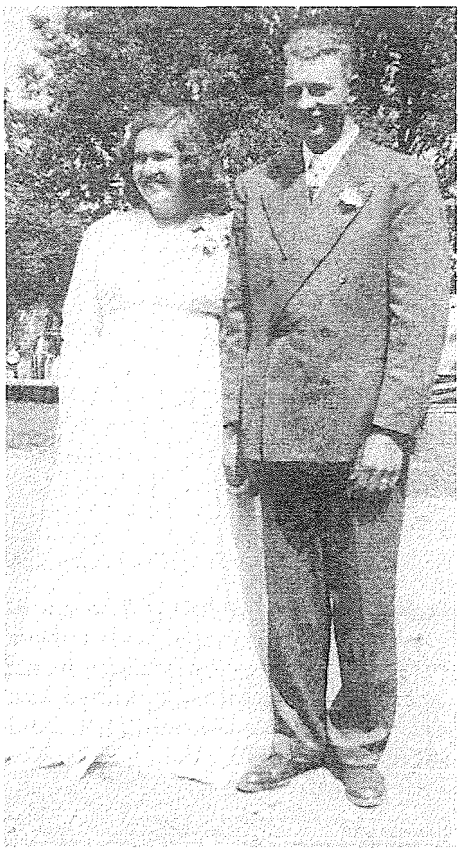
Helen Dyck and David Wall at their wedding.



Tina Janzen and Abe Hildebrand were married in 1953.



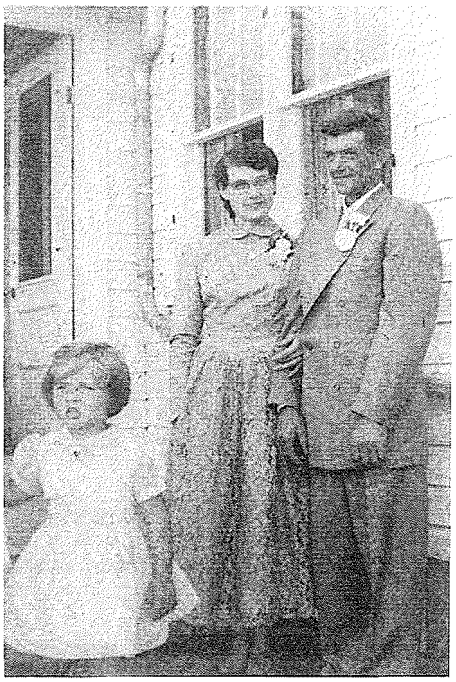
Helen Elias and Martin Wiebe at their wedding. They were married in the Old Colony Church.



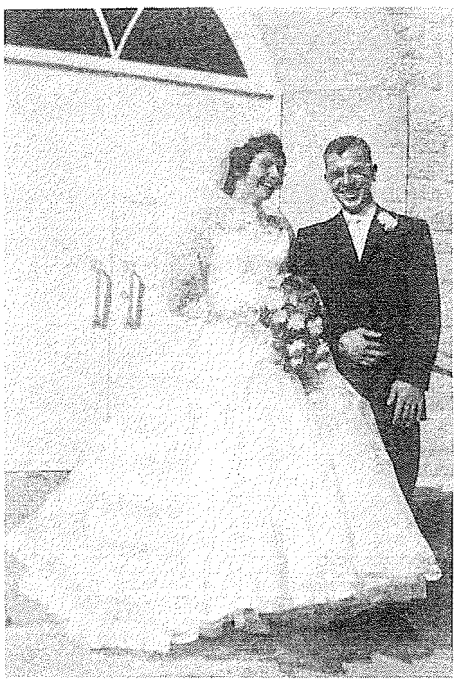
Peter and Gertie Reimer were married in 1949.



Peter Dueck and Margaret Letkeman, 1950.



Mary Janzen and John Warkentin were married in the Rudnerweide Church in the early 1950's. Mary is the artist of several drawings in this book.



This bride, Helen Fehr, wears the hooped white gown which was fashionable in 1959. The wedding took place at the Blumenorter Church in the village of Rosetown. The groom, John Reimer, lived with the W. W. Reimer family for many years.

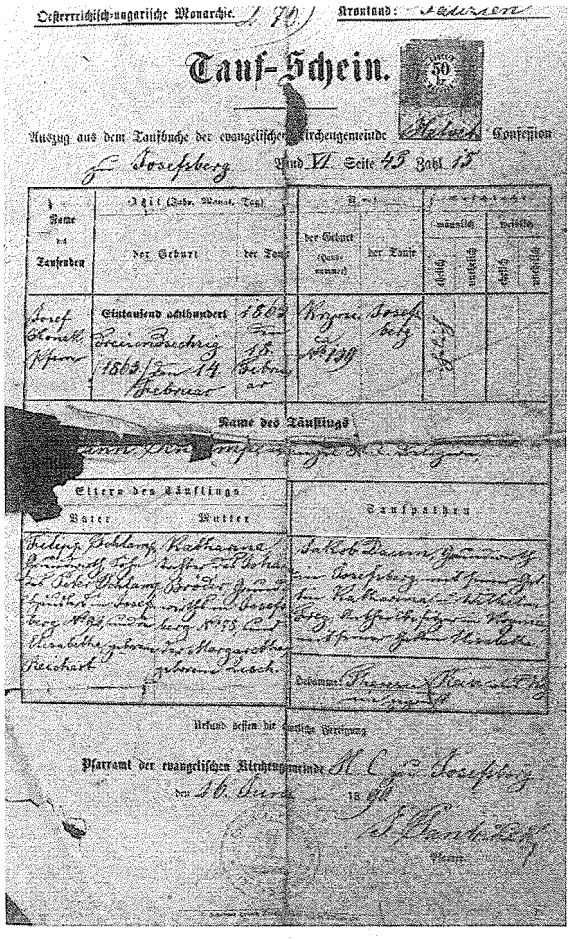


Anne Reimer is a single woman and a paraplegic. By her enthusiasm for life and her wealth of knowledge of Blumenfeld's history, she contributes signifcantly to the life of the community.

William Peters was a single man who lived in his own home. The story is told of his first attempt to drive his first Model T. As he approached the garage, he could not disengage the car from high gear and to the wonder of several observors, he passed right through it amid flying dust and boards. Once in the open field, he drove in circles until he ran headlong into a manure pile.

Henry Wieler was known as the Lone Ranger. He stayed in Canada when his parents moved to Mexico. He was crippled and of simple mind. He made his home with the families who were willing to take him in.





Oesterreichisch-ungarische Monarchie. Kronland:

Tauf-Schein.

Auszug aus dem Taufbuche der evangelischen Kirchengemeinde Confession

Josefsberg Band VI. Seite 43 Zahl 15

Name des Täuflings	Alter (Geb. Monat, Tag)		Name			
	der Geburt	der Taufe	der Eltern (Geschlechtsname)	der Taufe	männlich	weiblich
Josef Schlamp	Eintausend achthundert	1862	Johann Schlamp			
Pfarrer	Forstwirthstochter	15.	Katharina			
	1862 Jahr 14	Februar	geb. Isaak			

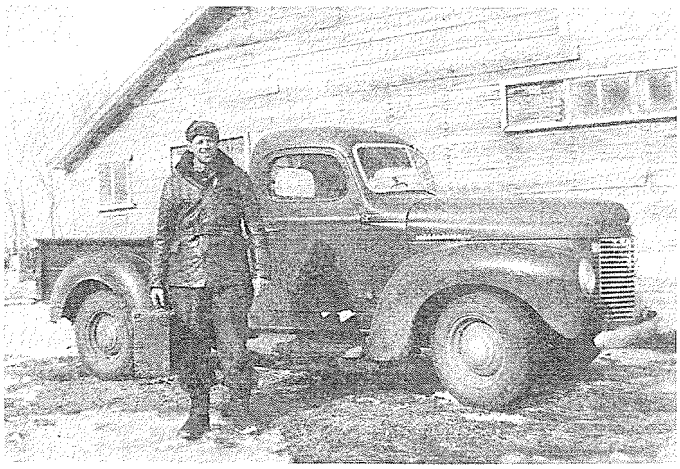
Name des Täuflings

Eltern des Täuflings — Vater — Mutter — Taufpathen

Pfarramt der evangelischen Kirchengemeinde M. C. Josefsberg

den 16. Juni 1862

Pfarrer

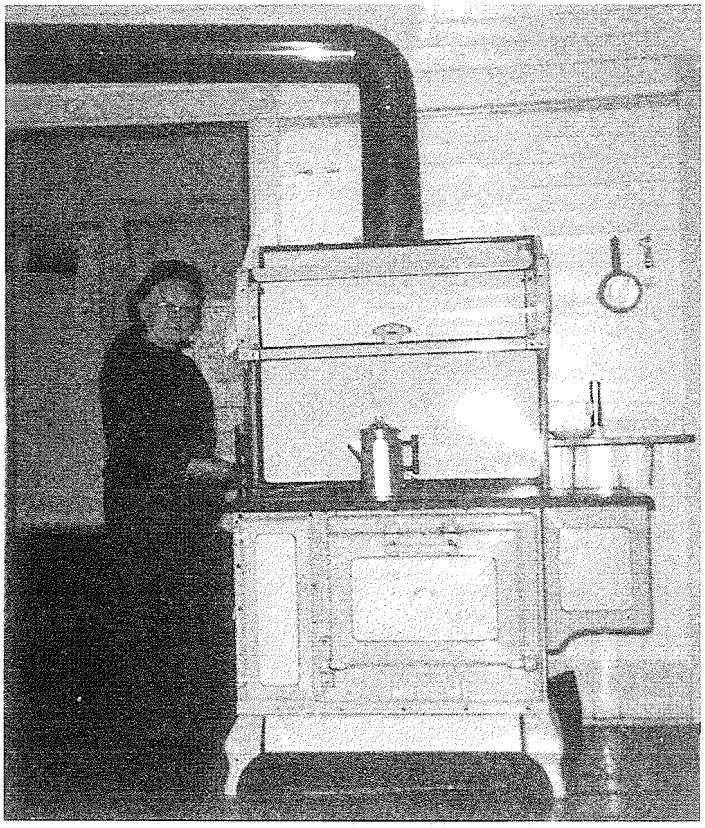


The baptism papers of Johan Schlamp, a German-Lutheran who made his home in the village and served as a local *Schusta* (shoemaker).

Schlamp was a single man who lived for a short time in a room in Isaak Dyck's barn. Later he bought two lots in the village. He moved into one house and rented the other to the Johan Wolfe family. The only rent he exacted from his tenants was a weekly supply of fresh home-baked bread. When Schlamp became ill, the Wolfe's moved in with him and cared for him in his last days. At his funeral in the Old Colony Church, Bishop Froese served the funeral message even though Schlamp had never become a Mennonite. This was indeed a tribute.



Taking in the wash.



Grandma Klassen at her cookstove which was purchased for $37.00.

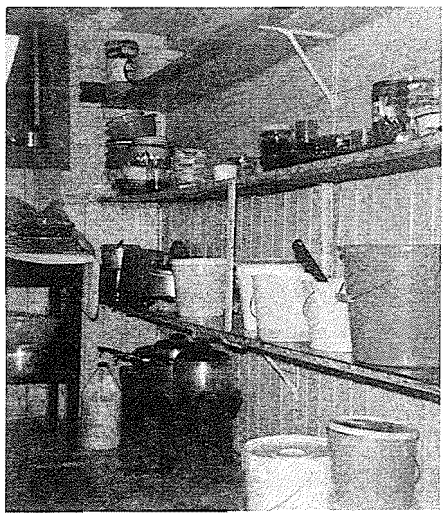
Electricity came to the village in 1950. People installed it as they could afford it. The convenience of refrigerators, freezers, electric stoves and washing machines greatly reduced the workload of women.

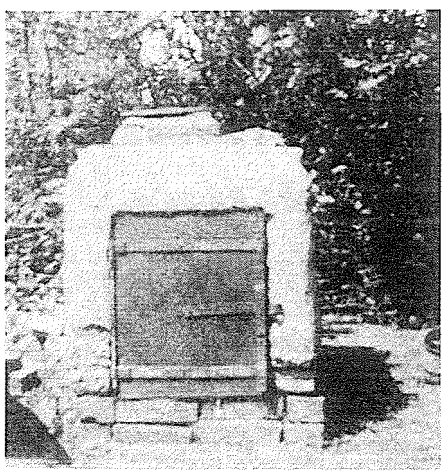
Grandma Klassen's pantry. Little canning was done until the 1940's. Up to that time, the winter diet included sauerkraut, pickles, root vegetables and pork. Sauerkraut was made in wooden barrels and put outside to freeze. When sauerkraut *Borscht* was planned for a meal, the cook would have to chop off enough for the soup. Watermelon pickles were also made in a barrel or crock and kept in the basement.

In fall, a supply of apples would be bought at the Haskett store. The varieties included Spy, Baldwin and Russets.

Four pigs were slaughtered for a large family 's winter meat supply. Hams were salted, smoked and hung in the *Scheen* or in the summer kitchen, together with the smoked farmer sausage. *Zilt fleesch* was pork meat, pickled in salt brine and kept in a crock. It included tongue, heart, pigs' feet and headcheese. Pork chops and roasts were also kept in salt brine and frozen outside.

Beef was killed only after freeze-up so that the meat could be kept frozen outside.





An outside brick oven used for baking bread in summer.



Katherine (Banman) Elias carries a lamb, 1938. As a young woman she did a lot of spinning.

Grandma Klassen reading the newspaper in front of her home, 1973. Grandparents may become part of their children's families rather than moving to Winkler's Salem Home for extended care. Mrs. Peter F. Klassen has lived with the George P. Klassen family for about 10 years.



Christmas at the grandparents. Seated are Mrs. Peter F. Klassen and Mrs. W. W. Reimer. The afternoons of religious holidays are set aside for family visiting. Many families can visit both set of grandparents in a single day. The family gatherings may include twenty or more relatives, some of whom have travelled hundreds of miles to be present.







While Grandpa Janzen and the uncles retire to the living room after Faspa, the women sit down to enjoy theirs.

Grandma Wiebe, as she was known to nearly every family in Blumenfeld, mothered ten children. All but a few of her 48 grandchildren live in the Blumenfeld district.

Franz Klassen was married to Catharina Hoeppner, the sister of Jacob Hoeppner who became a bishop in the Bergthaler Church. Although she supported her husband in his allegiance to the Reinlaender Church, she experienced some pain and trouble because of her families ties with the Bergthalers. At the funeral of her young child, the Reinlaender *Ohms* found an excuse to call a meeting at Isaak M. Dyck's house until the Bergthaler minister and other relatives had finished their meal and departed. The bereaved mother was sorrowed and angered by this obvious animosity even at the funeral of an innocent child. When the Reinlaender *Ohms* arrived to eat their meal, Mrs. Klassen chastized them by asking if there would be separate eating facilities for the Bergthaler and the Reinlaender in the heavenly home.



The Blumenfeld School was the scene of funerals in the years before the Old Colony Church was constructed. It was tradition that people sang several songs as the coffin was carried out of the building.



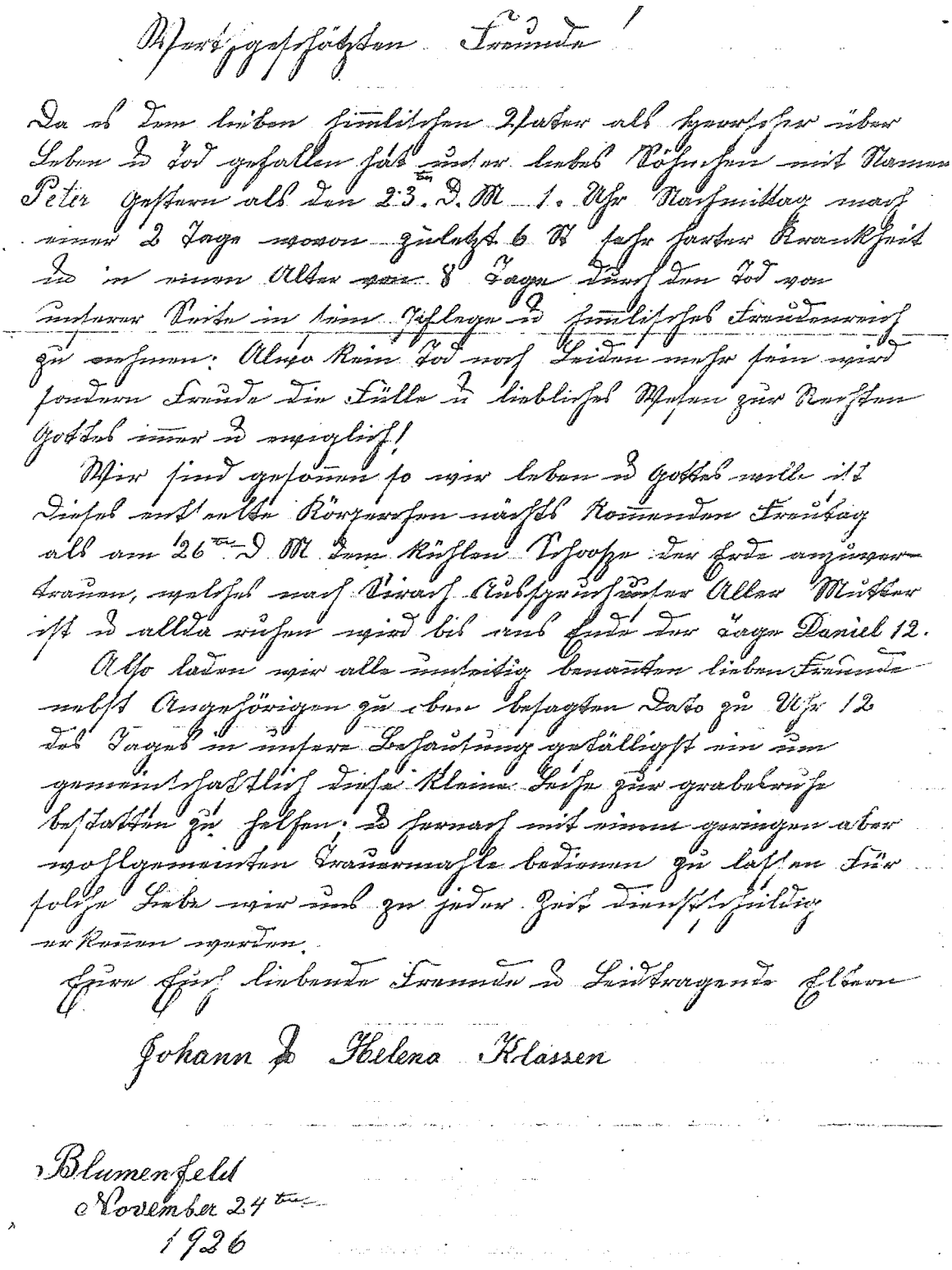
Funeral procession returning from the cemetery.



Digging a grave in winter, Blumenfeld cemetery.



The local cemetery is located at the west entrance of the village.



Werthgeschätzten Freunde!

Da es dem lieben himmlischen Vater als Herrscher über Leben u. Tod gefallen hat unser liebes Söhnchen mit Namen Peter Gestern als den 23ten d. M. 1. Uhr Nachmittag nach einer 2 Tage wovon zuletzt 6 St. sehr harter Krankheit u. in einem Alter von 8 Tage durch den Tod von unserer Seite in sein Pflege u. himmlisches Freudenreich zu nehmen. Also kein Tod noch Leiden mehr sein wird sondern Freude die Fülle u. liebliches Wesen zur Rechten Gottes immer u. ewiglich!

Wir sind gesonnen so wir leben u. Gottes wille ist dieses entseelte Körperchen nächst kommenden Freitag als am 26ten d. M. dem kühlen Schooße der Erde anzuvertrauen, welches nach Sirach Ausspruch unser Aller Mutter ist u. allda ruhen wird bis ans Ende der Tage Daniel 12.

Also laden wir alle umseitig benannten lieben Freunde nebst Angehörigen zu oben besagten Dato zu Uhr 12 des Tages in unsere Behausung gefälligst ein um gemeinschaftlich diese kleine Leiche zur Grabesruhe bestatten zu helfen, u. hernach mit einem geringen aber wohlgemeinten Trauermahle bedienen zu lassen. Für solche Liebe wir uns zu jeder Zeit dienstschuldig erkennen werden.

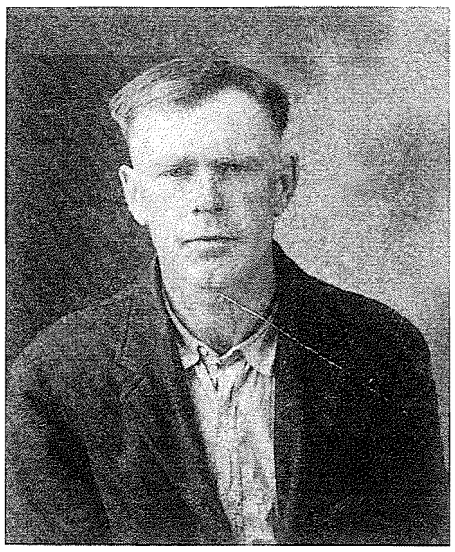
Eure Euch liebende Freunde u. Leidtragende Eltern

Johann u. Helena Klassen

Blumenfeld
November 24ten
1926

When death occurred in a family a notice of death and a brief obituary were sent through the village as a circular letter. The notice contained an invitation to the funeral.

Blumenfeld. zuerst Achtb.
" Franz Klassen Anna Selbst
" Diedrich Klassen
" Cor Reimer
" Peter Klassen Wilhelm "
" Jacob Klassen
" Tobias Schmidt
" Daniel Schmidt
" Heinrich Giesbrecht Peter "
" Jacob Neufeld
" Peter Elias
" Johan Wolf
" Johan Friesen
" Jacob Peters Witwe Wilhelm "
" Gerhard Elias
Kronstahl Ehrsamer David Stoesz wird gebeten die Leuchen rede zu halten



Peter P. Penner, born 1905, known locally as *Pannash Peeta.*

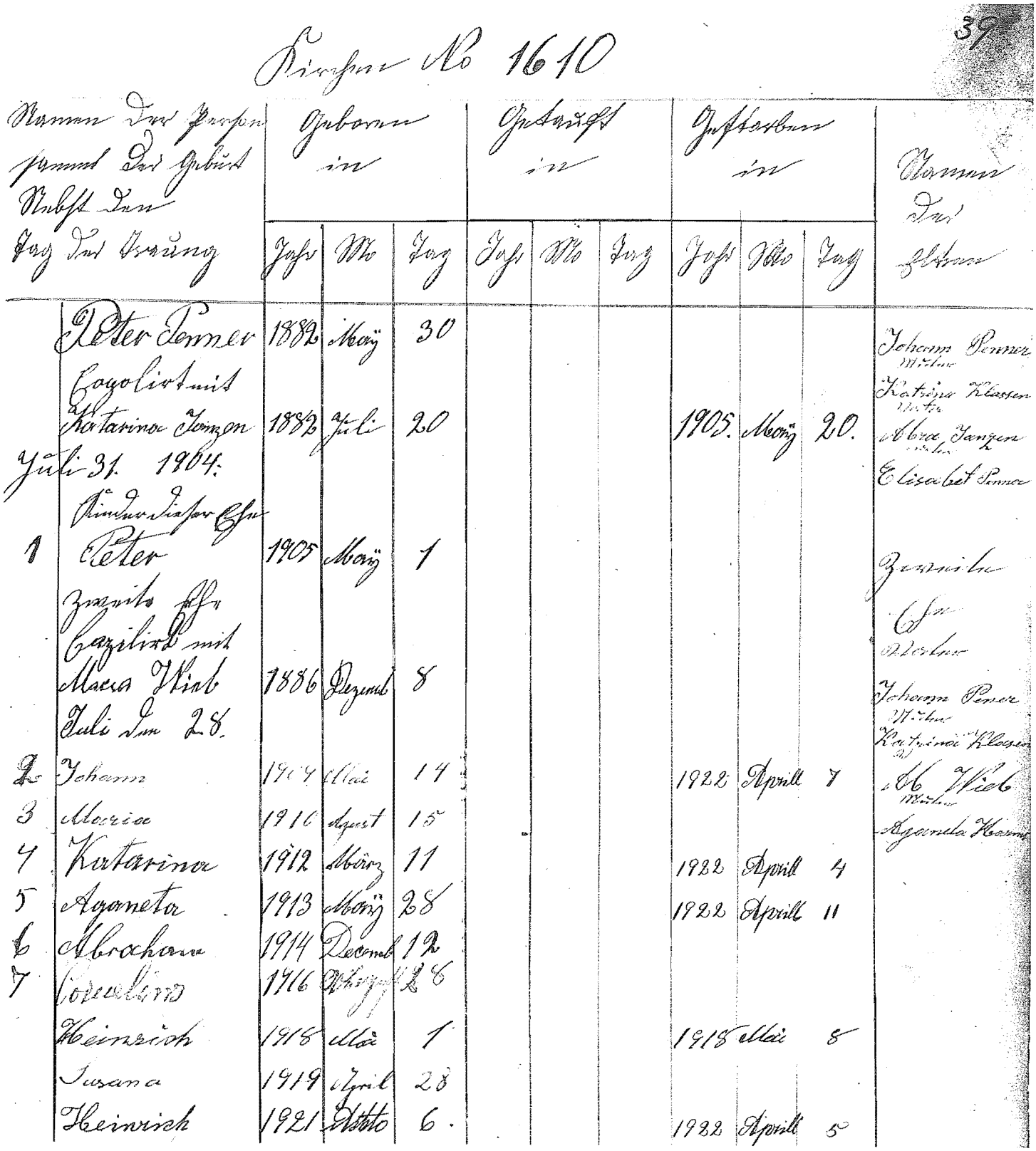


Peter Penner was a heart-broken man after losing four children to the measles epidemic of 1922. After the death of his second wife in 1926 he gave the care of his remaining five children to others and lived for several years as a recluse. In 1941, he was remarried to Anna Toews. His oldest son, Peter Penner, lives in Gnadenthal with relatives and is known for his daily walks to Winkler.



Many people died of the flu epidemic in 1918. Cornelius Wiebe, 18 years old, was a victim.

Sample entry in the Blumenfeld
Dorfsbuch.



39

Kirchen No 1610

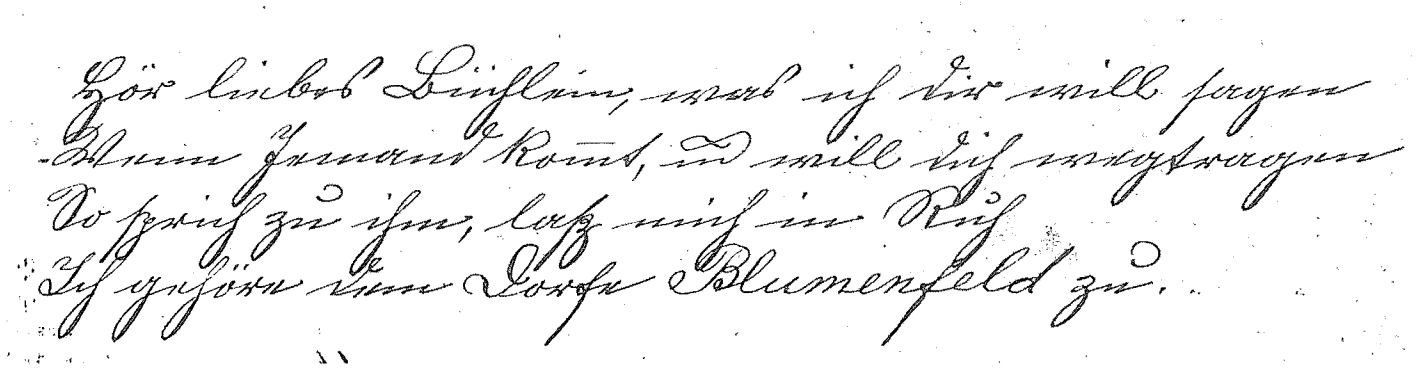
Namen der Person sammt der Geburt Nebst den Tag der Trauung	Geboren in			Getauft in			Gestorben in			Namen der Eltern
	Jahr	Mo	Tag	Jahr	Mo	Tag	Jahr	Mo	Tag	
Peter Penner	1882	Mai	30							Johann Penner Mutter
Copolirt mit Katarina Janzen	1882	Juli	20				1905.	Mai	20.	Katrina Klassen Vater Abra Janzen Mutter
Juli 31. 1904:										Elisabet Penner
Kinder dieser Ehe										
1 Peter	1905	Mai	1							Zweite Ehe
Zweite Ehe Cazilirt mit Maria Wiel	1886	Dezemb	8							Vater Johann Penner Mutter
Juli den 28.										Katrina Klassen
2 Johann	1909	Mai	14				1922	April	7	A. Wiel Mutter
3 Maria	1910	August	15							Aganeta Harms
4 Katarina	1912	März	11				1922	April	4	
5 Aganeta	1913	Mai	28				1922	April	11	
6 Abraham	1914	Decemb	12							
7 Cornelius	1916	Augusti	28							
Heinrich	1918	Mai	1				1918	Mai	8	
Susana	1919	April	28							
Heinrich	1921	Octo	6.				1922	April	5	

Part II

Blumenfeld Families

The following pages will highlight the families whose lives in the village spanned several generations. In order to clarify the family relationships, some genealogical information has been added. The sources of this information are the Blumenfeld *Dorfsbuch* and the records submitted by the Blumenfeld residents today.

To the best of our ability, the information is accurate but discrepancies are inevitable. For the sake of brevity, the names of children deceased in infancy and childhood have not been included. The information is by no means exhaustive, since it relies so heavily on the *Dorfsbuch* which was discontinued in 1923 with the migration to Mexico. Readers are encouraged to make corrections and additions in their books.



Title piece of the Blumenfeld *Dorfsbuch*.

DYCK

FIRST GENERATION

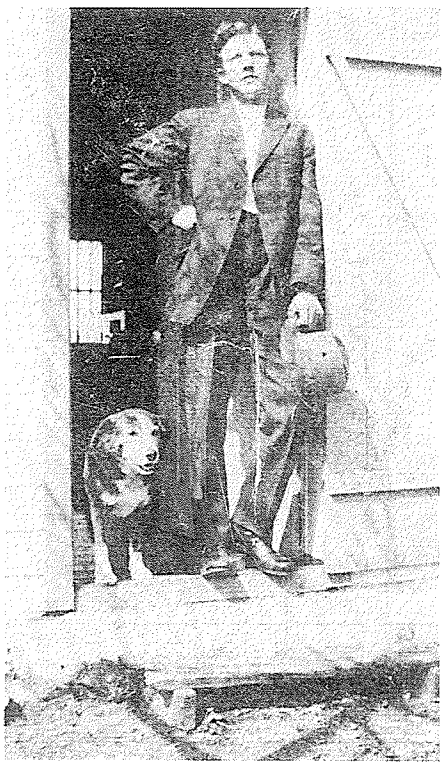
Isaak Dyck	
Maria (Martens) Loepki	1858
Johann Loepki	1850-1882

SECOND GENERATION

1. Katharina Loepki	1879-1884
2. Susanna Loepki	1880-1884
3. Johann Loepki	1882
4. Susanna	1884
5. Abraham	1885
6. Maria	1887
7. Isaak M.	1889
Susanna Peters	1889
8. Elisabeth	1892
9. Peter	1894
Justina Friesen	1898
10. Margareta	1897
11. Katharina	1899
12. Jacob	1901-1918

THIRD GENERATION

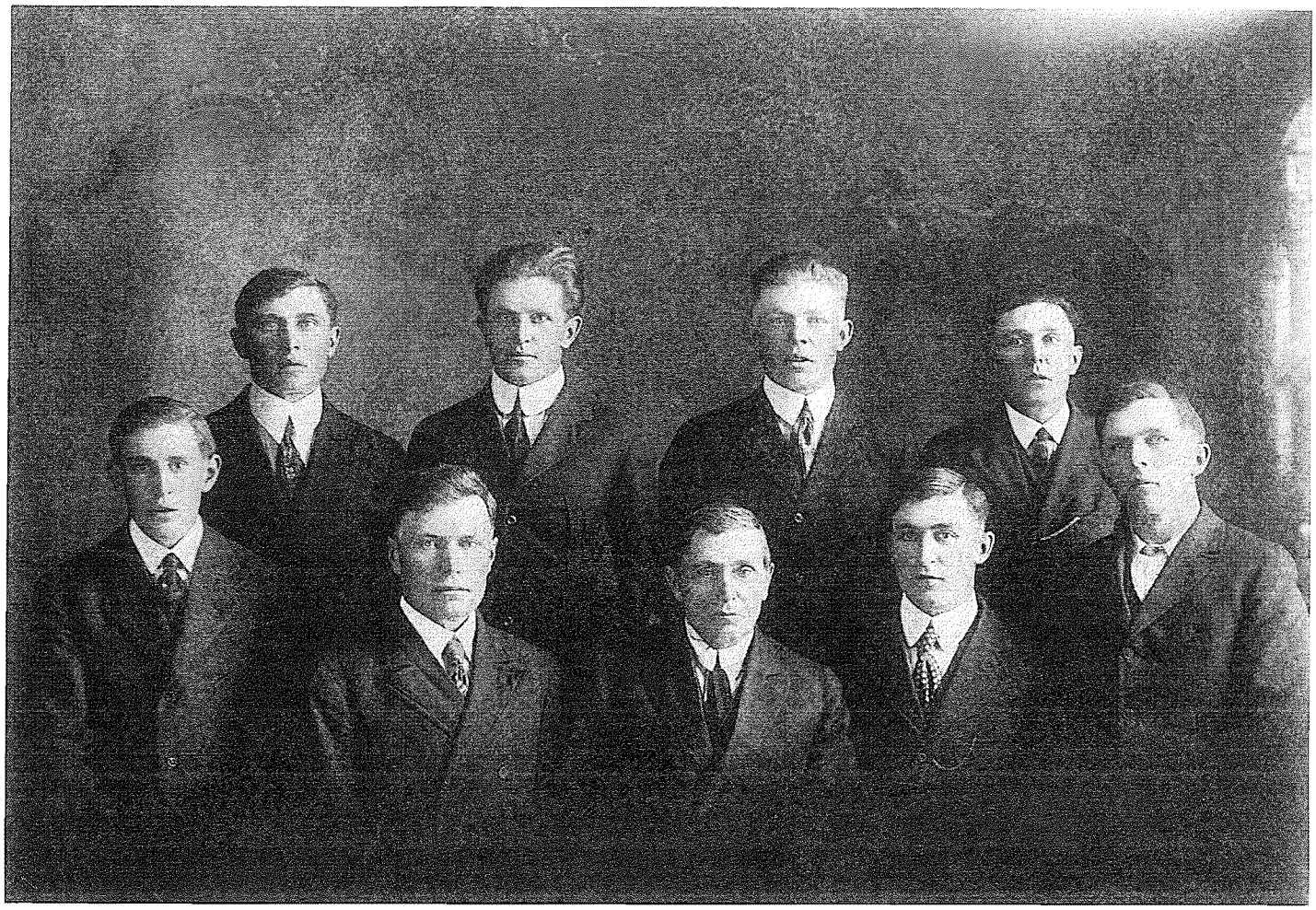
7. Children of Issak M. and Susanna Dyck	
a. Isaak	1915
b. Susanna	1918
c. Benjamin	1920
9. Children of Peter and Justina Dyck	
a. Isaac	1919
b. Cornelius	1921
c. Maria	1923



Peter Dyck (b. 1894) as a young man.



Justina (Friesen) Dyck's passport photo, circa 1925.



DRIEDGER

FIRST GENERATION	
Peter Driedger	1831-1919
Maria Olfert Wieler	1829-1902
Justina Neufeld	
SECOND GENERATION	
1. Jacob Wieler	1857
2. Katharina	1858
3. Johann	1859-1920
Katharina Martens	1864
4. Peter	1865
5. Cornelius	1867
6. Heinrich	1869
7. Diedrich	1871
Katharina Friesen	
Mrs. Peter Wieler	
THIRD GENERATION	
3. Children of Johann and Katharina Driedger	
a. Peter	1882
b. Maria	1883
c. Johann	1885
d. Abraham	1887
e. Jacob	1889
f. Cornelius	1891
g. Katharina	1893
h. Heinrich	1897
i. David	1900
j. Diedrich	1902
7. Children of Diedrich Driedger	
a. Diedrich	
b. Katharina	

Johann Driedger (front centre) and sons, L-R: Diedrich, Cornelius, Peter, Henry, David, Abram, John, Jacob. Circa 1919.

Born in Chortitza, Russia, Johann Driedger came to Blumenfeld with his parents in 1875. He married Katharina Martens on September 11, 1881. They lived in Blumenfeld where he served as *Schult* for several years and became a successful farmer and businessman. He operated a store out of the family home in Blumenfeld. This home was located east of the existing store.

All except Diedrich of Johann and Katharina Driedger's children were born under the thatched roof of their home in Blumenfeld.

In 1902, Peter, Johann's oldest son, moved to the Hague-Osler area. Two years later, his parents followed. At Clarks Crossing and Osler, Johann farmed and operated a small general store. He was also a cattle-buyer.

A man of strong convictions, Johann Driedger was in conflict with the Reinlaender Church for many years. These conflicts were reconciled shortly before his death in 1920.

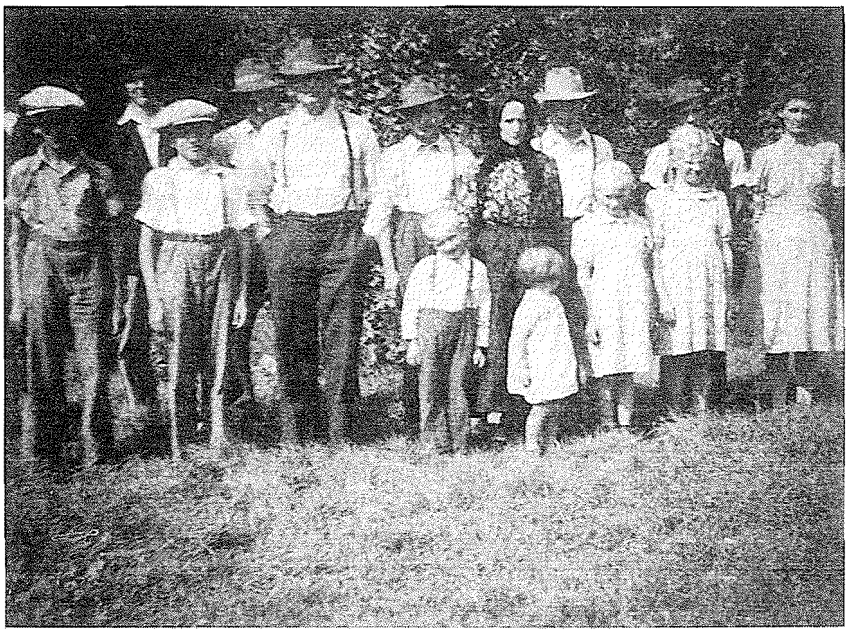
Peter Elias V pioneered at Hochfeld after spending the first winter in Rosengart, the second in Blumenfeld, and some years in the Gruenfeld area. His son, Henry Elias, is pictured here in a wedding photograph. The bride is Maria Kroeker.





Peter Elias VI (1872-1955) and his wife with an adopted son, Peter Elias. The boy became known as *Groutfoadash Peeta* since he was virtually raised by his elderly father. Peter Elias VI homesteaded at the east end of the village. His son, John P. Elias, took up residence there from 1938-1968. The farm is presently owned by Henry A. Elias.

Peter Elias' knowledge of the Scripture gave him authority in the disputes with the church leaders. At Christmas family gatherings, the Elias men would frequently discuss the Scriptures.



Peter Elias VII (b. 1898) and his wife, Sarah Janzen (1902-197) raised their family of thirteen children in Blumenfeld. L-R: Peter, Bernie, Abe, William, Henry, Father, Isaac, Mother, John, Jacob, Tina.

ELIAS

FIRST GENERATION
Peter Elias III 1819-1903
Aganetha Rempel 1821

SECOND GENERATION
1. Peter Elias IV 1843-1925
   Katharina Martens 1846-1928
2. Jacob 1844
3. Johann 1849-1913
4. Gerhard A. 1852-1952
   Maria Dyck
5. Helena 1859
6. Margareta 1864

THIRD GENERATION
1. Children of Peter and Kath. Elias
   a. Aganetha 1867
      Franz Guenther
   b. Johann 1869
      Anna Friesen
   c. Peter V 1872-1955
      Maria Fehr 1878
      Anna Letkemann
   d. Maria 1874
      Johann Friesen
   e. Katharina 1876
      Herman Neufeld
   f. Helena 1878
      Johann Wiebe
   g. Jacob 1881-1918
   h. Abraham 1883
      Anna Froese
   i. Agatha 1885-1937
      Peter F. Klassen
   j. Elizabeth 1889-1918
   k. Heinrich 1891-1965
      Maria Kroeker

FOURTH GENERATION
1C. Children of Peter Elias V
   1. Peter VI 1898
      Sarah Janzen 1902
   2. Maria 1901-1972
      Jacob V. Neufeld 1893-1945
   3. Jacob 1905
      Sarah Schroeder
   4. Johann P. 1906
   5. Katharina 1908
   6. Aganetha 1910
   7. Heinrich 1912-1965
   8. Peter Elias (adopted)

FIFTH GENERATION
1C1. Children of Peter VI and Sara Elias
   a. Katharina 1921
   b. Peter 1923
   d. Jacob 1924
   e. Abram 1925
   f. Isaac 1926
   g. Johann 1928
   h. Heinrich 1929
   i. Bernhard 1931
   j. Wilhelm 1933
   k. Maria 1935
   l. Helena 1936
   m. Gerhard 1939
   n. Sarah 1943

THIRD GENERATION
4. Children of Gerhard A. and Maria Elias
   a. Gerhard M. 1883-1973
      Maria Janzen 1887-1955
   b. Wilhelm M. 1885-1955
      Anna Thiessen 1892-1960
   c. Jacob

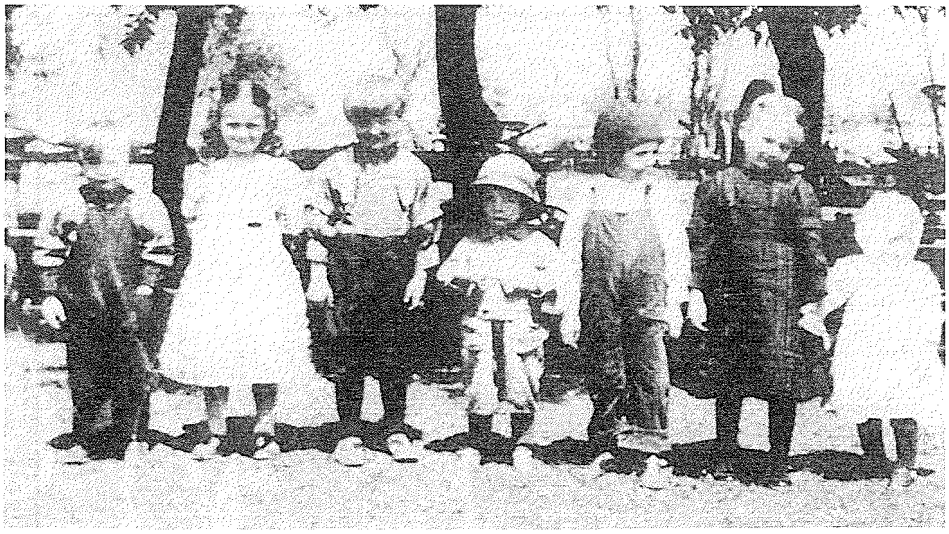
FOURTH GENERATION
4A. Children of Gerhard M. Elias
   1. Gerhard W. 1914
      Katharina Klassen
   2. Maria 1915
      C. C. Reimer
   3. Peter 1917
      Katharina Banman
   4. Wilhelm 1919-1945
   5. Johann
4B. Children of Wilhelm M. Elias
   1. Annie
      David A. Fehr
   2. Maria
   3. Wilhelm
   4. Aganetha
   5. Peter
   6. Edward
   7. Rosabel
   8. Margaret



Agatha Elias and her sister, Elizabeth (1889-1918).



Agatha Elias (1885-1937) married Peter F. Klassen.



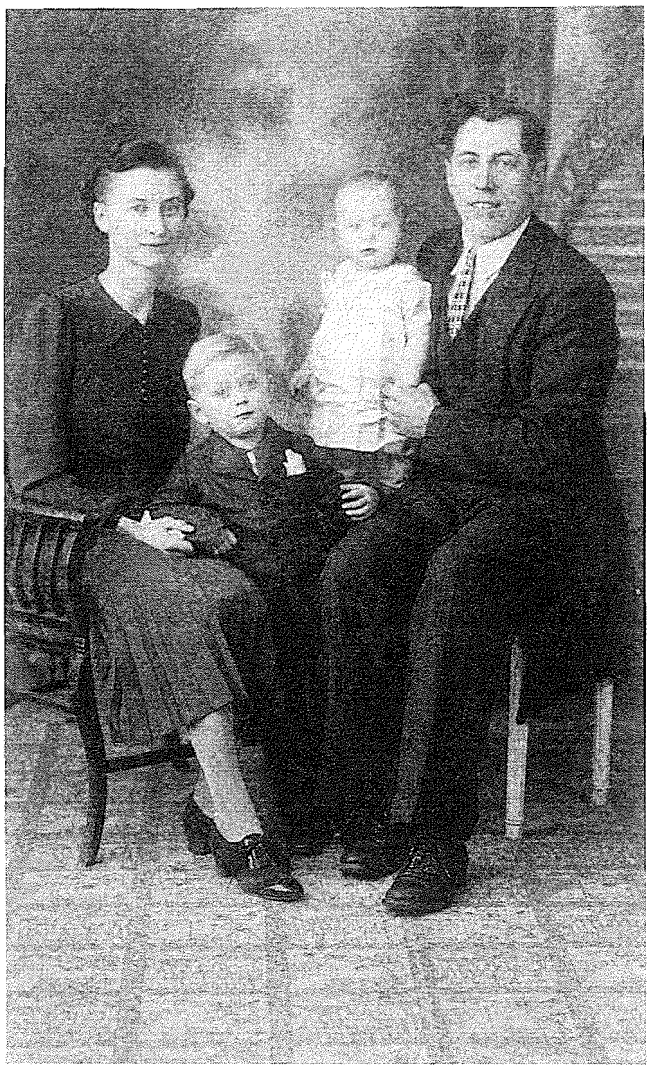
Grandchildren of Peter and Sarah Elias, 1927. L-R: Peter Neufeld, Mary Neufeld, Jake E. Neufeld, Jacob J. Elias, Peter Elias, Tina Elias, Abe Elias.

Grandchildren of Peter and Sarah Elias, 1958.





Grandchildren of Gerhard M. and Maria Elias, 1956.



Portrait of the Elias family, 1941. Katherine (Banman) Elias, Frank, Katherine, Peter G. Elias. The family lived where the store is presently located. Peter was the son of Gerhard M. Elias (1883-1973) and the grandson of the centenarian, Gerhard A. Elias (1852-1952).



Johann D. and Susana Fehr with their children, Susanna and Johann. They moved to Mexico in the 1920's.

FEHR

FIRST GENERATION	
David Fehr	1857-1926
Justina Neufeld	1856-1934
SECOND GENERATION	
1. David D.	1879-1965
Maria Dyck	1887-1972
2. Jacob	1882
Susanna Dueck	1884
3. Benjamin D.	1884-1968
Katharina Fehr	1885
4. Johann D.	1885
Susanna Neudorf	1890
5. Heinrich	1888-1959
Helena Elias	
6. Isaak D.	1891-1963
Katharina Janzen	1893-1964
7. Peter	1894-1964
Agatha Martens	
8. Cornelius	1897-1962
Sara Peters	1891
THIRD GENERATION	
1. Children of David D. and Maria Fehr	
a. Justina	1908
b. David A.	1911
Annie Elias	
c. Maria	1912-1977
David Fehr	
d. Isaak	1915
e. Jacob	1918
f. Susanna	1920
g. Johann	
h. Abraham	

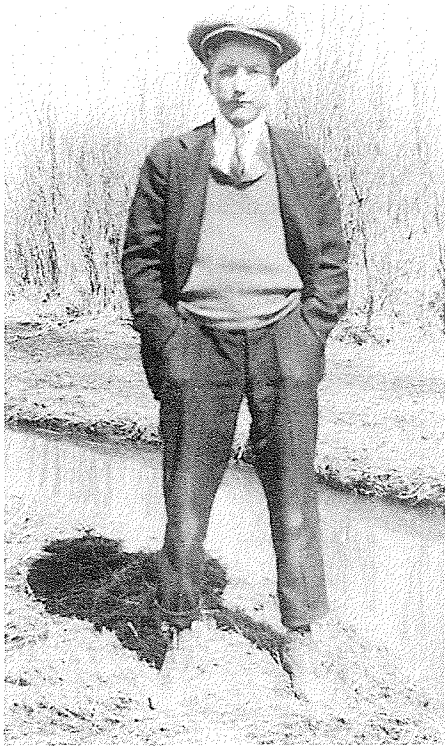


Benjamin D. (1884-1968) and Katharina Fehr, with their children. They moved to Mexico in the 1920's.

David D. Fehr, 1879-1965.



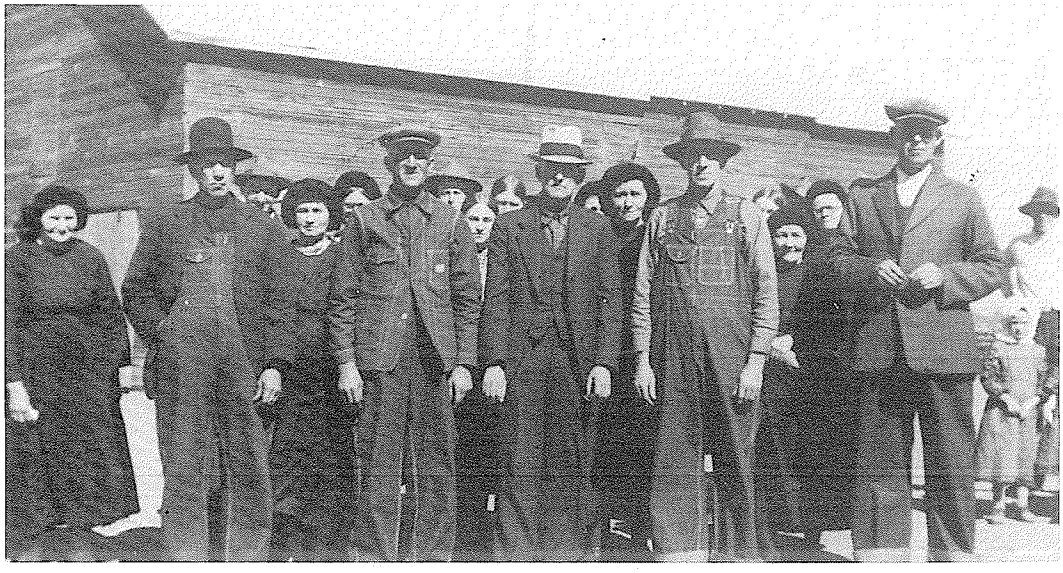
David A. Fehr, as a boy of 16 years, was anxious to learn English. His family moved to a farm in the Haskett area in 1927. Then he discovered that the Haskett school offered instruction in English. During the winter of 1927, David spent three months in school with the lower grades, learning to read and write English. The following winter he spent another three months in school, this time with the higher grades. He astonished his classmates with his mathematical ability. Joe Walkof was a teacher who affirmed the strengths of his students. He encouraged D. A. Fehr to enter a career in business.



Isaak D. (1891-1963) and Katharina Fehr with their family. They moved to Mexico in the 1920's.



A memorable visit of the Fehr clan took place in Mexico, circa 1947. L-R: Front Row: Katharina and Benjamin Fehr, Mrs. and Johann Fehr, Isaak Fehr, Agatha and Peter Fehr, Sara and Cornelius Fehr.





Abraham P. Janzen (1896-1967) and his wife, Elizabeth Wall, who died in the flu epidemic of 1918.



Abraham P. Janzen and his second wife, Anna Neudorf, with two grandchildren. The Janzens moved to Mexico in the late 20's and returned to Blumenfeld in the 30's.

JANZEN

FIRST GENERATION
Johann Janzen
Elisabeth Driedger

SECOND GENERATION

Peter Janzen	1854-1920
Susanna Martens	1859-1897

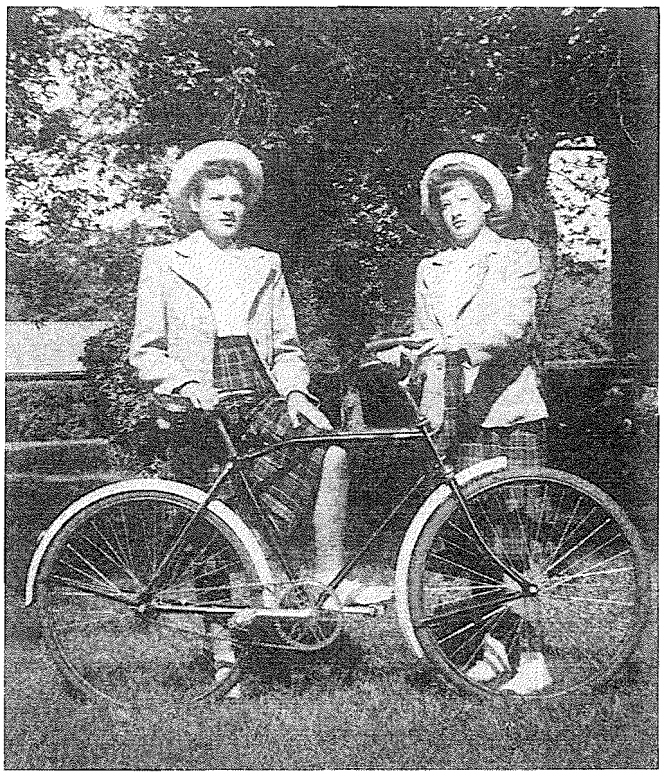
THIRD GENERATION

1. Peter	1878
2. Susanna	1879-1907
Peter Harder	
3. Elisabeth	1883-1903
4. Johann	1885-1917
Maria Blatz	1886
5. Maria	1887-1955
Gerhard M. Elias	1883-1973
6. Helena	1889-1966
Johann Klassen	1886-1966
7. Katharina	1892-1938
Johann Friesen	1892-1960
8. Justina	1894-1938
Abraham Wall II	1891-1964
9. Abraham P.	1896-1967
Elizabeth Wall	1896-1918
Anna Neudorf	1892-1967

FOURTH GENERATION

4. Children of Johann and Maria Janzen	
a. Susanna	1908
b. Maria	1910
c. Katharina	1914
d. Gertruda	1916
5. Children of Gerhard M. and Maria Elias	
a. Maria	1915
C. C. Reimer	
b. Peter	1917
Katharina Banman	
c. Gerhard	1914
Katharina Klassen	
d. Wilhelm	1919-1945
e. Johann	
6. Children of Johann F. and Helena Klassen	
a. John	1923
7. Children of Johann and Kath. Friesen	
a. Johann	1920
b. Peter	1921
c. Elisabeth	1924
d. Mary	
e. George	
f. Katharina	
8. Children of Abraham II and Justina Wall	
a. Abraham III	1916
b. Peter	1918-1974
c. Johann	1919
d. Katharina	1921
e. Susanna	1922
f. Justina	1924
9. Children of Abraham P. Janzen	
a. Peter	1918
b. Anna	1920
c. John	
d. Mary	
e. Tina	





KLASSEN

FIRST GENERATION

Franz Klassen	1853
Catharina Hoeppner	1853-1893
Mrs. Peter Unrau	

SECOND GENERATION

1. Gerhard F.	1877-1962
Susanna Loeppky	
2. Jakob	1879
Katharina Unger	
3. Katharina	1880-1959
Klaus Heide	1959
4. Peter F.	1885-1965
Anna Krahn	1886-1910
Katharina Krahn	1888-1919
Agatha Elias	1885-1937
Elizabeth (Hiebert) Martens	1895
5. Johann F.	1886-1966
Helena Janzen	1889-1966
6. Anna	1889
Peter Loewen	
7. Aganeta	1893
Cornelius P. Reimer	1890

THIRD GENERATION

1. Children of Gerhard F. and Susanna Klassen	
a. Katharina	
B. B. Wiebe	
b. Diedrich	1903
Margaret Neufeld	1903
c. Frank	
d. Jacob	
e. George	
2. Children of Jakob and Katharina Klassen	
a. Jacob	1900
b. Katharina	1904
c. Anna	1907
d. Agatha	1911
4. Children of Peter F. Klassen	
a. Anna	1907
W. W. Reimer	
b. Katharina	1909
G. W. Elias	1914
c. Franz	1910
Maria Goertzen	
d. Helena	1912
Henry Elias	1912-1965
e. Peter	1916
Maria Dyck	
f. Bernhard	1919
Ms. Klassen	
g. John	1923
Anna Wiebe	
h. George	1925
Aganetha Fehr	
5. Children of Johann F. and Helena Klassen	
a. John	1923

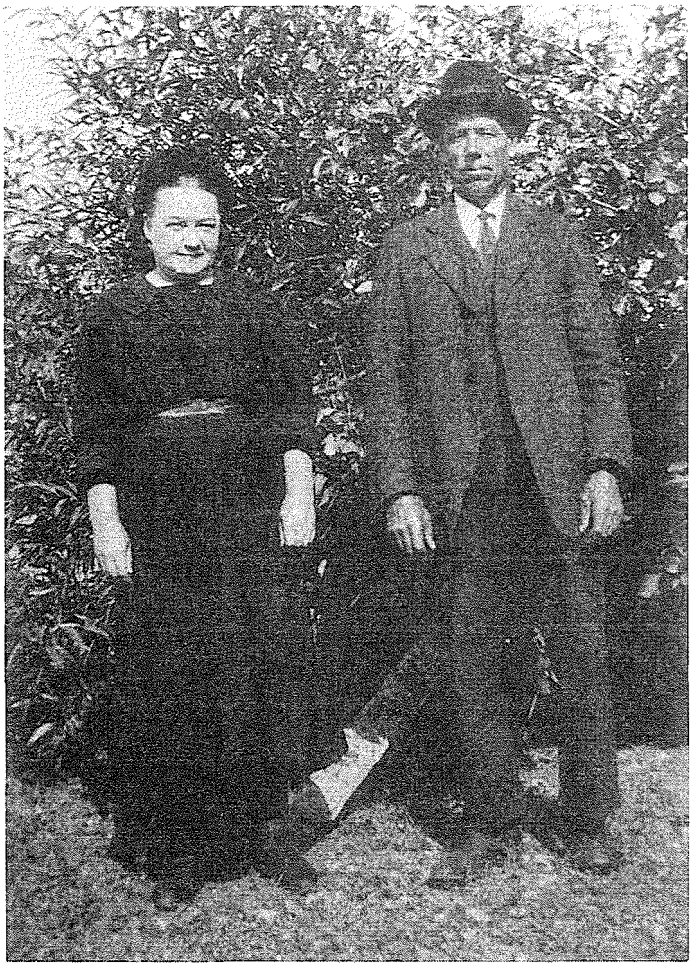
Above
Johann Friesen with some of his children, L-R: Peter, Mary, George and Katherine, circa 1943. Johann Friesen was married to Maria Wall (d. 1918), Katharina Janzen (1892-1938), and Elisabeth (Rempel) Kroeker (1897-1975). The photo is submitted by his son, John, who lives in B.C.

Two Blumenfeld beauties, Mary and Tina Janzen.

Katharina Klassen (1880-1959) married Klaus Heide (d. 1959).



Gerhard F. Klassen (1877-1962) and his wife, Susanna Loepki. She was a Bergthaler from the Altona area of the West Reserve. The family was the only one in the village to be affiliated with the Bergthaler Church.



Gerhard Klassen (b. 1858), pioneer.







Grandchildren of Peter F. Klassen.

Peter F. Klassen (1885-1965) with his third wife, Agatha Elias.



Diedrich S. Klassen (b. 1903) married Margaret Neufeld. They are pictured with their children, L-R: George, Margaret, Susie and Jacob.

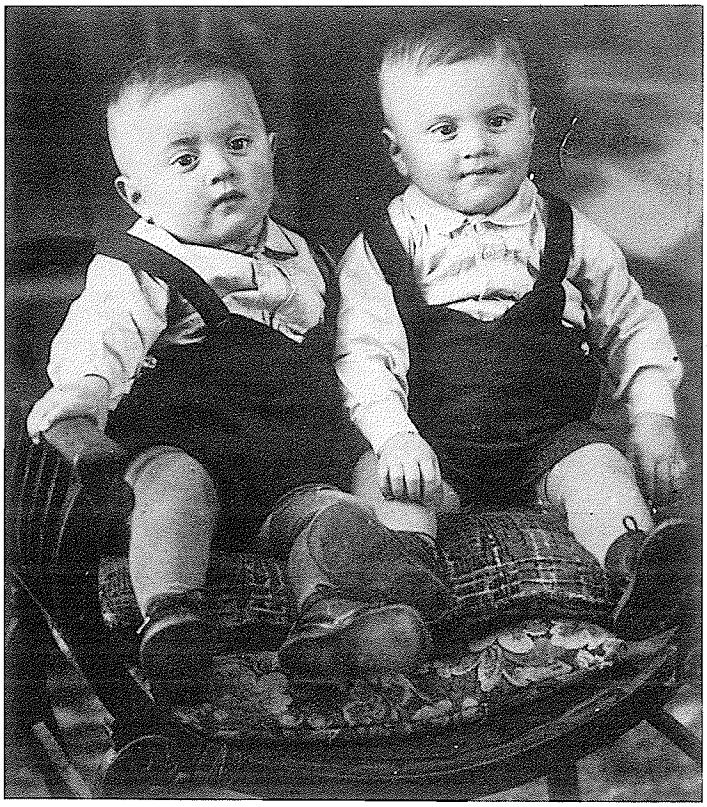


The family of D. S. Klassen in 1969. L-R: Back Row: Jacob, Susie, Margaret, George. Front Row: Tina, D. S. Klassen, Diedrich.



William and Anna Reimer on their 25th wedding anniversary.

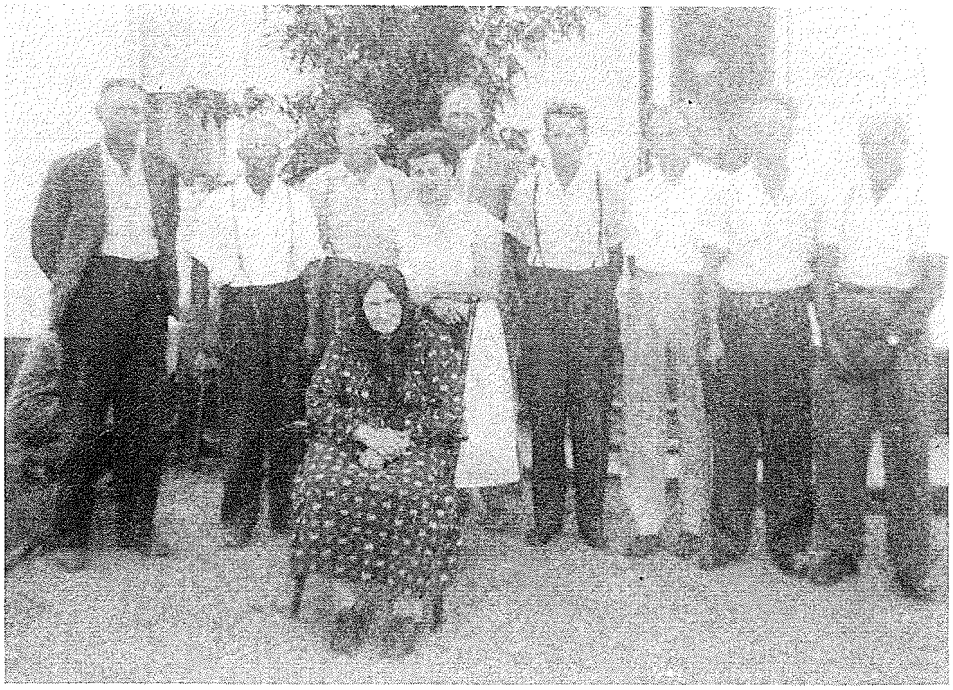
W. W. Reimer (1902-1965) lived with the Peter L. Thiessen family. In 1922 he went to Mexico but returned a year later. He married Anna Klassen,



Henry and Peter Klassen, twin sons born to Mr. and Mrs. Barney Klassen while Barney was working as a C0at Clear Lake during World War II.



Celebrating the birthday of Peter J. M. Klassen. The family lived for several years in Friedensfeld.



The family of Mrs. Jacob Klassen, L-R: Cornie, John, Jacob, Helen, Peter, Abram, Daniel, Henry, David. The boys' reputation as hard workers made them popular farm helpers in Blumenfeld. They were also known for the old cars which they drove. They took Blumenfeld's young men to neighbouring villages to seek eligible young women. If the Blumenfeld youth was "lucky", he paid the Klassen driver 25¢. But if there was no luck, there was no charge.



Abraham Neudorf (b. 1864) built P. A. Janzen's residence in 1910 for $600.00.



Peter Neudorf (b. 1897) and his wife, Helena Harms.

NEUFELD

FIRST GENERATION

Jacob (Niebuhr) Neufeld	1865-1919
Elisabeth Vogt	1870-1926

SECOND GENERATION

1. Jakob V.	1893-1945
Maria Elias	1901-1972
2. Heinrich	1897
3. Peter V.	1899-1947
Katharina Wiebe	1905
4. Elisabeth	1901-1938
5. Margareta	1903
Diedrich S. Klassen	
6. Abram V.	1908
Margaret Reimer	
7. Herman V.	1910
Tina Dyck	

THIRD GENERATION

1. Children of Jakob and Maria Neufeld

a. Jake E.	1921
Ella Neufeld	
b. Maria	1922
c. Peter	1923-1972
d. Elizabeth	1928
e. Katherine	1929
f. Eva	1935



Jacob N. Neufeld (1865-1919) and his wife, Elisabeth Vogt (1870-1926) are photographed with Mrs. Neufeld's sister, Katherina Vogt (left). Jacob N. Neufeld moved to Blumenfeld in 1903. He was a fine carpenter, known for building corner cupboards and coffins. His home was on the present Diedrich Klassen place.



Elisabeth Neufeld (1901-1938) did crafts and needlework in spite of a handicap which prevented her from walking.

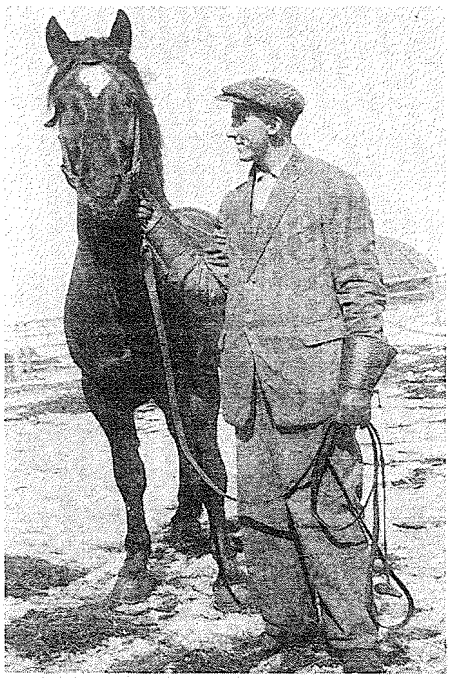
Jakob V. Neufeld (1893-1945) was also a carpenter of repute. He built the school in 1928 with local help. He moved to Blumenfeld in 1925 from the Haskett area.

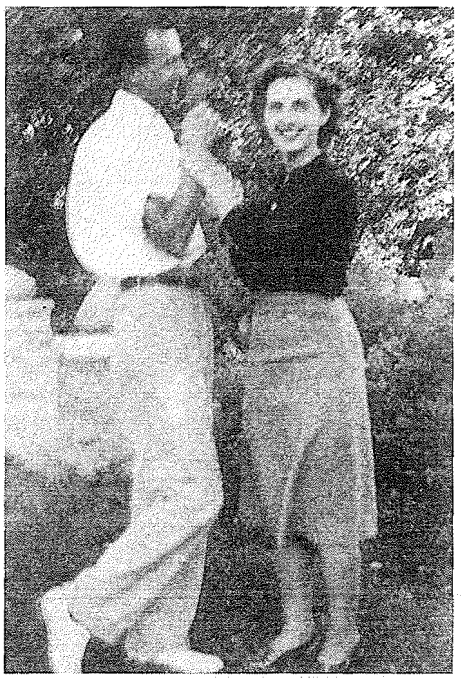


Herman V. Neufeld (b. 1910) and his brother were orphaned at an early age. They stayed with the J. V. Neufeld family, receiving board and room in return for doing chores in winter. They were associated with the *Brummtupp*.



Abram V. Neufeld (b. 1908)



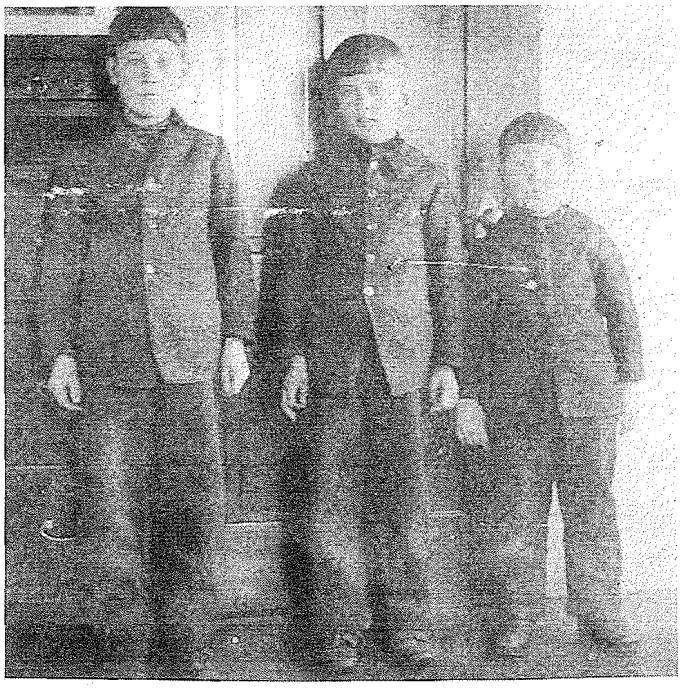


The courtship of a teacher and a storekeeper did not escape the eyes of young students. When Ella Klassen arrived at the village to look for a boarding place during the school year, she walked past the store and noted that the young man working there was good-looking. Her colleague at the school, Tina Penner, made it quite clear, however, that the storekeeper was spoken for. At the end of the school year, it was Ella, and not Tina, who was destined to become Mrs. Neufeld.

During recesses and noon-hours, the young lovers chatted at the gate of the schoolyard or in the foyer. One curious schoolboy, Edgar Enns, hid behind the school door in order to observe the process of courtship from a closer vantage point.

The Schmidt family moved to Swift Current area, Saskatchewan in the early 1900's and returned to the Blumenfeld area before 1922. These children of Isaac and Justina Schmidt, Johann, Samuel and Peter, were born in Saskatchewan.





Posing in front of their Model A, circa 1938, L-R: Tina, Frank, Pete and Anne Reimer.



Isaac (b. 1864) and Justina Schmidt.

SCHMIDT

FIRST GENERATION
Solomon Schmidt 1818
Maria Fehr 1924

SECOND GENERATION
1. Jakob 1853
2. David 1858
Elisabeth Martens 1862-1915
3. Isaak 1864
4. Cornelius
5. Maria 1850
Peter Martens 1848
6. Elisabeth 1860
7. Anna 1869

THIRD GENERATION
3. Children of Isaak and Justina Schmidt
a. Johann
b. Samuel
c. Peter
d. Isaac
Elizabeth Schmidt

FOURTH GENERATION
3C. Children of Peter Schmidt
1. John
2. Tina
3. Isaac
4. Peter



Children of Abraham and Susanna Wall, circa 1918. L-R: Front Row: Justina (Janzen) Wall, Elizabeth (Wall) Janzen, Maria (Klassen) Wall, Katherina Wall, Katharina (Wiebe) Wall. Second Row: Abraham Wall, Abraham P. Janzen, Jacob Wall, Tina Wall, Cornelius Wall. Abraham Wall, Sr. stands centre back.

WALL

FIRST GENERATION	
Abraham Wall I	1867-1954
Susanna Janzen	1869
SECOND GENERATION	
1. Maria	1890
Jacob Reimer	
2. Abraham II	1891-1964
Justina Janzen	1894-1938
3. Susanna	1893-1980
Johann Schellenberg	
4. Cornelius	1894-1968
Katharina Wiebe	1893
5. Elizabeth	1896-1918
Abraham P. Janzen	1896-1967
6. Peter	1897-1959
7. Jacob	1898-1967
Maria Klassen	1901-1940
8. Katharina	1900
Jacob Harms	
9. Heinrich	1902
Katharina Dueck	
10 Aganeta	1904-1976
Franz Hiebert	
THIRD GENERATION	
2. Children of Abraham II and Justina Wall	
a. Abraham III	1916
b. Peter	1918-1974
c. Johann	1919
d. Katharina	1921
e. Susanna	1922
f. Justina	1924
4. Children of Cornelius and Katharina Wall	
a. Abram	1920
b. Katharina	1921
c. Cornelius	1923
d. John	1926
e. Susanna	1930



Justina (Janzen) Wall (1894-1938) and husband, Abraham Wall (1891-1964).

Cornelius and Katharina (Wiebe) Wall went to Mexico in 1926 and returned the same year. In the 1940's they made their home in Friedensfeld where they lived until his death in 1968.



WALL

FIRST GENERATION
Johann Wall I
Anna Neufeld

SECOND GENERATION

1. Johann II	1872
Maria Neufeld	1875
2. Jacob	1878
Mathilda Schlamp	-1903
Maria Klassen	-1914
Maria Boschman	1884-1968
3. Klass	1883
Susanna Neudorf	1882
4. Justina	1885
Johann Neudorf	1887

THIRD GENERATION

1. Children of Johann and Maria Wall	
a. Johann III	1895
b. Anna	1898
c. Maria	1899
d. Susanna	1904
e. Gerhard	1902
2. Children of Jacob Wall	
a. Johann	1902-1964
b. Jakob	1905-1962
c. Elisabeth	1907
d. Peter	1908-1966
e. Cornelius	1910
f. Klass	1913-1957
g. Katharina	1915
h. Maria	1917
3. Children of Klass and Susanna Wall	
a. Jakob	1906
b. Johann	1908
c. Klass	1910
d. Susanna	1912
e. Agatha	1913
f. Abraham	1915
g. Peter	1918



Klass Wall at his home in Blumenfeld, Mexico.



Jacob Wall, just before his move to Swift Current area after the death of his second wife in 1914.



Children of Peter Wiebe, teacher in Blumenfeld's private school, L-R: Peter Wiebe (presently of Hochfeld), A. Wiebe, Johann Wiebe (bishop of the Old Colony Church) and Jacob Wiebe (minister, Zion Mennonite Church).

WIEBE

FIRST GENERATION
Abraham Wiebe I
Maria Kopp
Mrs. Giesbrecht

SECOND GENERATION

1. Abraham II	1865-1919
Aganetha Harms	1859-1924
Peter Martens	

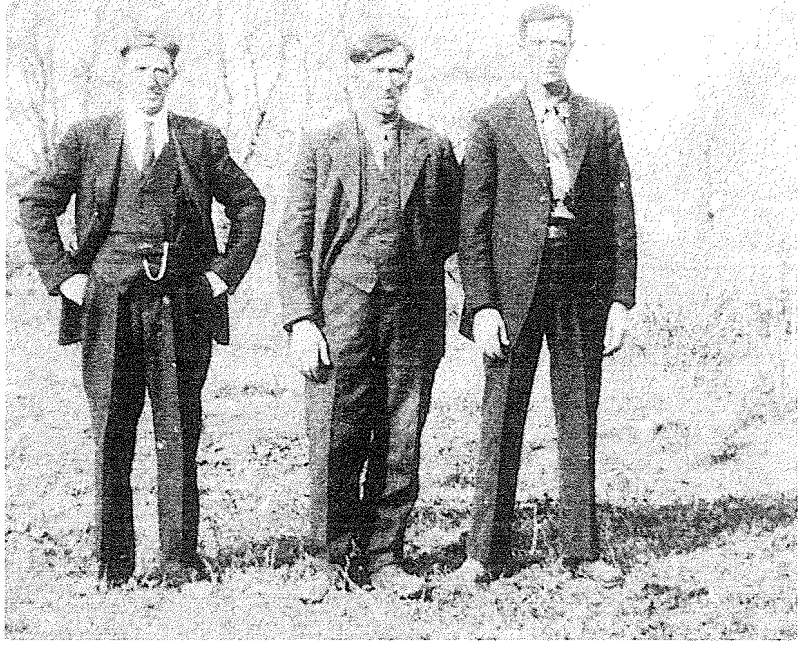
THIRD GENERATION

1. Abraham Wiebe III	1882-1959
Helena Penner	1884-1970
2. Johann	1884-1939
3. Maria	1886-1926
Peter Penner	1882-1964
4. Aganetha	1889-1931
Abram Penner	1888-1928
5. Peter	1891-1957
Katharina Braun	
6. Katharina	1893
Cornelius Wall	1894-1968
7. Cornelius	1896-1918

FOURTH GENERATION

1. Children of Abraham Wiebe III	
a. Katharina	1905
Peter V. Neufeld	1899-1947
b. Aganetha	1906
Mr. Schapansky	
c. Abram IV	1910
Maria Enns	
d. Peter	1913-1978
Margareta Peters	
e. Susanna	1915
6. Children of Katharina and Cornelius Wall	
a. Abram	1920
b. Katharina	1921
c. Cornelius	1923
d. John	1926
e. Susanna	1930

Sons of Abraham and Aganetha (Harms) Wiebe, L-R: Abram Wiebe III, John Wiebe, Peter Wiebe (former teacher in Blumenfeld's private school).



Abraham Wiebe II came to Canada in 1875. He settled at Hochfeld from where he helped his brother, bishop Johann Wiebe, establish the Reinlaender Church. In 1902, he and his wife moved to Blumenfeld where he owned and operated a threshing outfit. Due to illness he gave up this business around 1910, and moved to the *Anwohner* end. Aganetha (Harms) Wiebe was well known as a seamstress of old-fashioned lace bonnets, fur coats and hats.

Aganetha was remarried to Peter Martens from Saskatchewan in 1921. He came to live in Blumenfeld, where he served the community as a coffin-maker and a tinsmith.

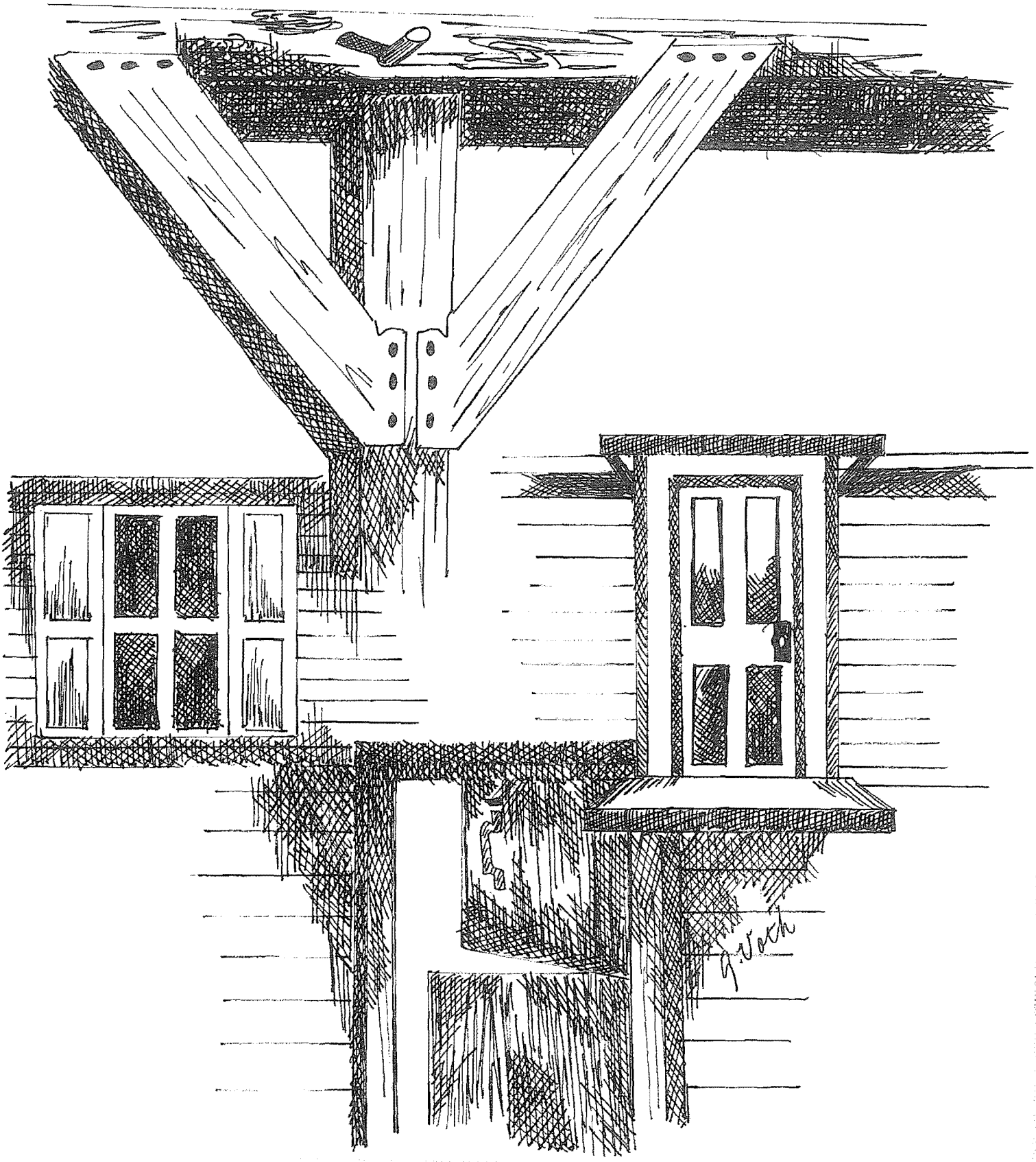
Many children died in the measles epidemic of 1922. Mr. Martens made coffins for most of them. Six of his wife's grandchildren were buried that year. After his wife's death, Peter Martins moved back to Saskatchewan.

Abram Wiebe III (1883-1959) and his wife, Helena Penner (1884-1970) at that 50th wedding anniversary in 1954.



Abram Wiebe III was not a landowner. He operated the threshing outfit formerly owned by his father and was employed as a labourer for local farmers. He hauled goods from Winkler to Haskett for John Letkeman. He and his wife helped at as many as twenty pig-killing bees in one season since he was one of the few people in the village who owned a gun. The Wiebes helped butcher pigs at the Jake N. Neufeld's for 20 consecutive years.

In 1927 they left the Blumenfeld area to live in several districts. They farmed at McCreary for four years but had to give it up. The trip back to southern Manitoba (about 200 miles) took a month by covered wagon. Nettie Wiebe walked all the way back, herding the cows. The family baked bread in a hole dug out of the side of a hill when bread became in short supply. After some years, Abram and Helena Wiebe settled in Chortitz where they took care of the Old Colony Church for a decade.



The Home Place

CHAPTER 8

Who defies the scorching sun of an August heat-wave? Who braves the chilly winds of Autumn? Who dares to challenge a howling winter blizzard? Who can resist the slow, tender, warm embrace of Spring?

The prairie dwellers were forced to create shelters adequate for all the variations of the western Canadian climate. The Mennonite pioneers, in creating their first primitive dwellings, claimed the resources of the earth — wood, sod, reeds, clay. They found their new homes comfortable for they provided the warm security of family love as well as protection from the elements.

The permanent structures built in later years used finished lumber purchased at Emerson or at the emerging trade centres. In the early years, the house-barn structures that lined the village street appeared like impositions that overwhelmed the prairie landscape. Today, however, these structures are hidden behind tall trees. They blend into the landscape as if to say they belong.

The unique architectural design of the Mennonite house and barn reflected an appreciation for simplicity and an emphasis on conforming to a traditional pattern in order to avoid social stratification based on wealth. The design was functional for the large families.

The architectural pattern began to change with the breakdown of the village government and climaxed with the migration of the old-guard to Mexico.

The popularity of the modern bungalow design is an indication of a shift in values and an increasing need for privacy and individual expression.

First Homes

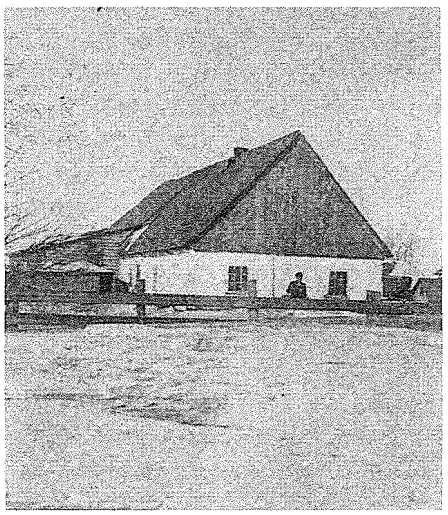
The pioneers who arrived in 1875 built temporary shelters for the coming winter. The nearby Pembina Hills provided most of the lumber for the frame. Sods cut from Blumenfeld fields built up the walls. Reeds from the marsh in section 20 provided thatch for the roofs.

Most pioneers chose the *semlin* to shelter their families and livestock for the first winters. The *semlin* was made by digging a pit

two to three feet deep and building a wall of sods about three feet high around the excavation. Poles were extended across the walls and covered with sod to make the roof. The average size of these dwellings was fifteen feet by thirty-five feet. About twenty feet were used for the family, fifteen feet for the livestock. The family section was lined with shiplap boards purchased in Emerson. These boards were later re-used in the permanent home. The *semlin* was a warm shelter. For the settlers, it was a cozy refuge from the Manitoba blizzards that raged across the open prairie.

Occasionally a farmer chose to build a *sarai* which was a steeply pitched thatched roof whose lower end rested on the ground. The roof, about twenty-five feet square, was set up on poles so that the upper end was about eighteen feet above the ground. Sometimes shiplap was used to line the portion used by the family, or the lower part was filled with logs and the upper part with thatch. Part of the building was used for sheltering stock. This building, because of its height, was colder than the semlin.

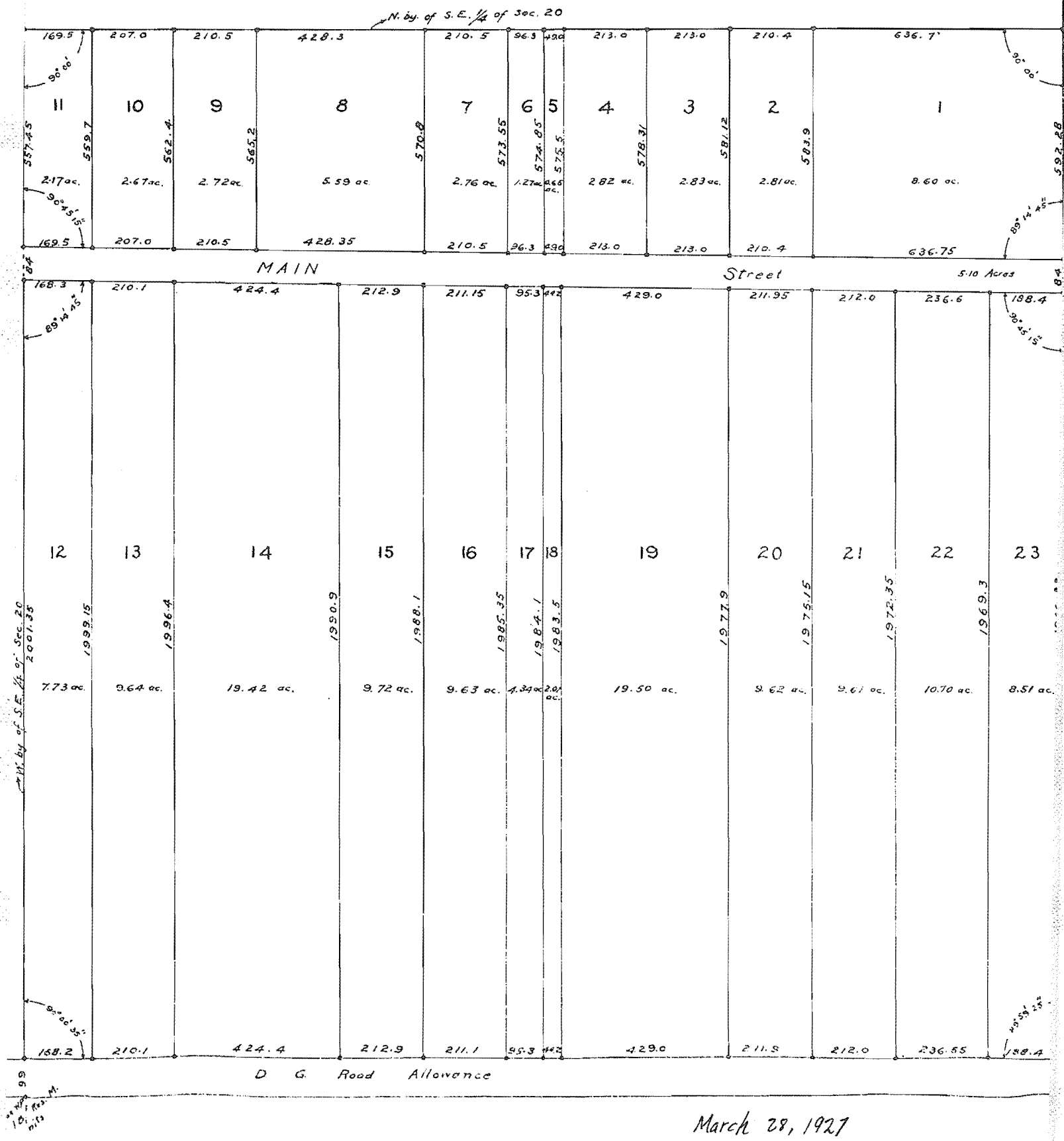
The pioneers of Blumenfeld spent two winters at their location on section 16. Recurring flooding, due to spring run-of from the Pembina Hills, forced them to seek higher ground for their permanent homes. The reader can imagine the disappointment of having to relocate. The hard work of two summers in preparing garden plots and in planting trees was left behind. Ox-carts were piled high with newly-acquired household effects and implements. What a setback to these home-loving people who wanted to find a place where they could sink down deep roots for generations to come. Men had to postpone breaking more land in order to build new shelters. Women had to prepare a new garden plot. It is probable that the prosperous farmers erected permanent dwellings of log construction at this time. Other farmers, however, probably built another *semlin* to replace the one left behind.



William Reimer standing in front of the Peter L. Thiessen house on Lot 10. The following families lived there: Peter Fehr, John Penner, Phillip Klassen, Krause and Albrecht, Jacob W. Reimer and John J. Dyck.

PLAN
of
SUBDIVISION of the VILLAGE of BLUMENFELD
Comprising the S.E. 1/4 of Sec. 20, Tp. 1, R. 4 W of Pr. Mer.
PROVINCE of MANITOBA

Scale : 200ft = 1 inch.



March 28, 1927

Settling In

Homes of log construction were built until circa 1885. The Mennonites had no experience in building log houses, but they followed the advice and example of the neighbouring Ontario settlers who used dove-tailed corners to add strength to the structure. The houses were chinked and plastered on the exterior. Some were also covered with siding. Many of the log buildings were so well constructed that they were occupied until the 1940's.

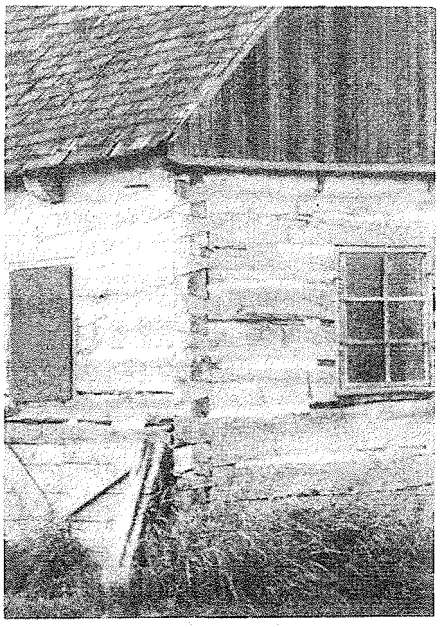
In the 1880's, the log houses were gradually replaced by frame buildings as farmers became more prosperous and as lumber became available from the United States and British Columbia. Most of the framehouses built before 1900 were constructed with walls of 2x4 or 2x6 planks stacked one on top of the other. These solid walls were covered with siding. Initially the houses were unpainted. The weatherbeaten appearance in the winter was broken only by the freshly painted blue shutters. In summer, the flower gardens at the front of each home added a touch of colour to the village scene.

Until circa 1915, the house and barn were connected in the Frisian model used by Mennonites in Prussia and Russia. The advantages of this style were that it was cheaper and that it made the care of livestock in winter very convenient. There were disadvantages too. The fire hazard was greater. Hygiene could be poor if the barn was not meticulously cleaned every day. No manure was allowed to accumulate. The real danger was the well, which was located in the barn. It supplied all the water for the household needs. In those days there were no health inspectors and the cleanliness of the Mennonite homes contributed to the record that no cases of typhoid were reported on the West Reserve.

Most Blumenfeld homes were constructed perpendicular to the street. The uniformity of this model was broken by a few homes where the house was built perpendicular to the barn and parallel to the street. The uniformity of the building style contributed to the

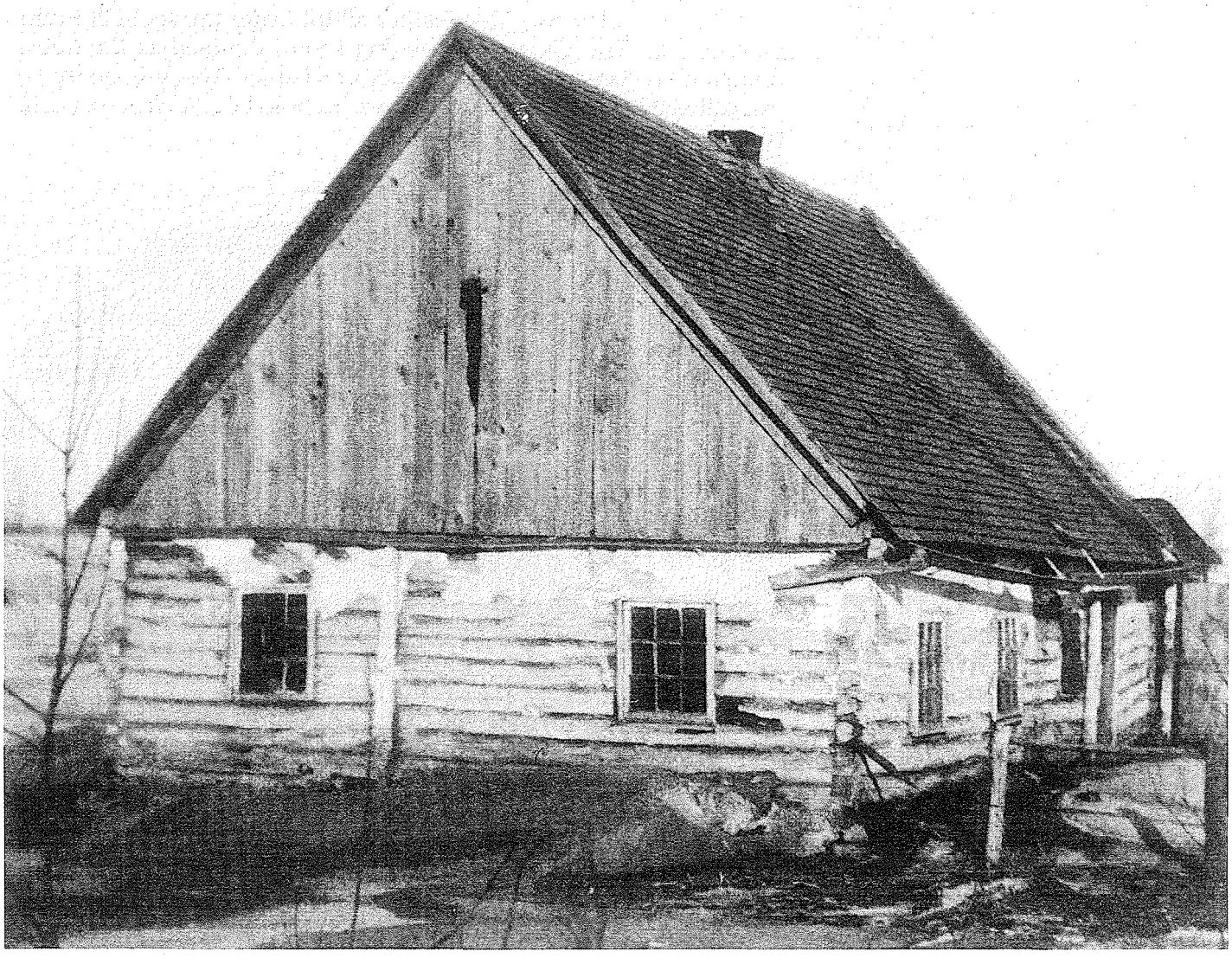
Johann Driedger's first house in Blumenfeld. The house had a thatched roof until 1900. It also served as the village store. After the Driedgers moved to Saskatchewan, the lot was occupied by Peter P. Elias, Mantler Fehr, John Klassen, John A. Janzen, Isbrandt Peters, Peter P. Klassen, Peter B. Klassen, Jacob Friesen and Frank Goertzen. Peter A. Janzen is the present owner.

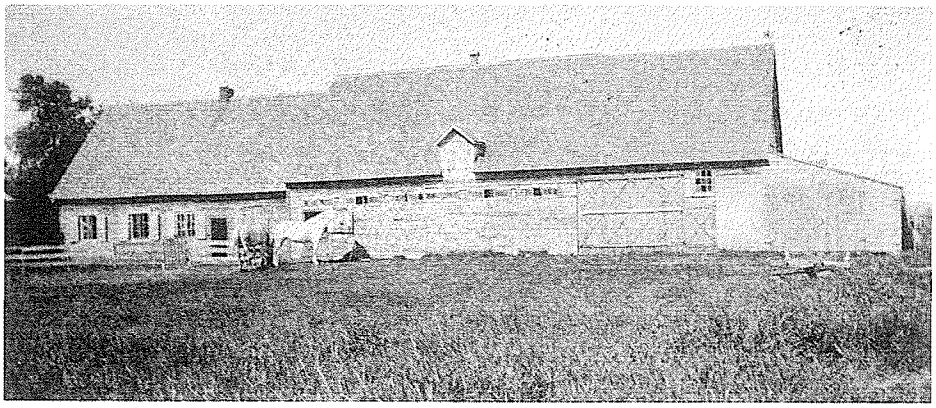




Detail of the dove-tailed corners of this squared log house.

The Peter L. Thiessen log house.





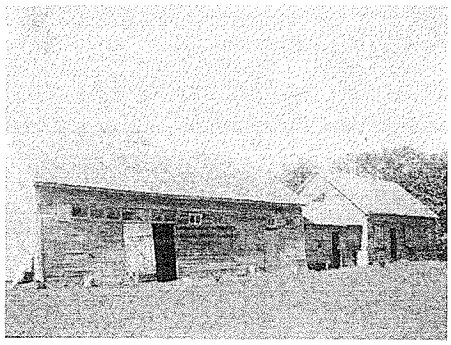
This house and barn were built by Jacob N. Neufeld when he moved to Blumenfeld in 1903. The large barn doors are for unloading hay directly from the racks into the *Scheen*. The lean-to at the end is for implement storage.

feeling of pride in the appearance of the village. It also precluded a similarity of lifestyle and served as a check against the display of greater wealth.

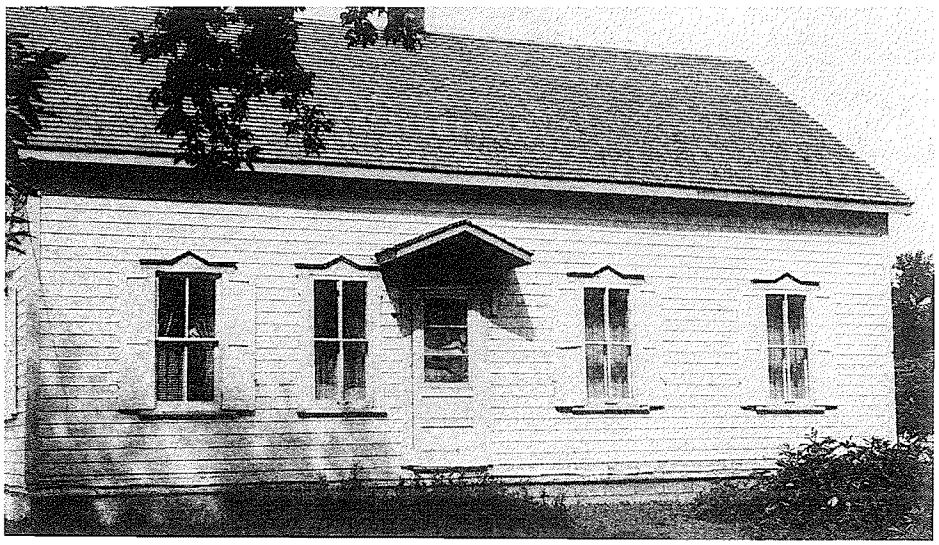
In the conventional model, the *Gang* was simply a small hallway between the house and barn. It was part of the interior design and did not affect the exterior design. In the non-conventional model, the *Gang* was like a porch connecting the two larger buildings. Its separate roofline made this section of the house a distinctive feature.

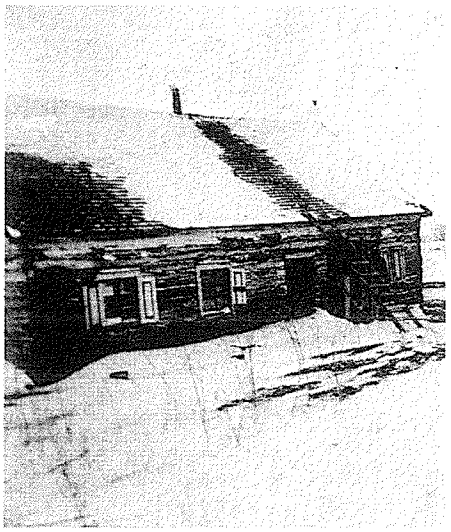
Although the houses were built with second storey windows, the second floor was never used as living space. Instead it served as a dry storage space for grain and fodder.

The floor plan was identical for all the older homes built in the pre-1915 era. The *Groote Schtov* (big room) doubled as the living room and the bedroom of the parents and babies. The girls' bedroom was called the *Schlop Schtov.* The boys occupied the *Ajck Schtov,* and sometimes also the *Fae t'Hues.*



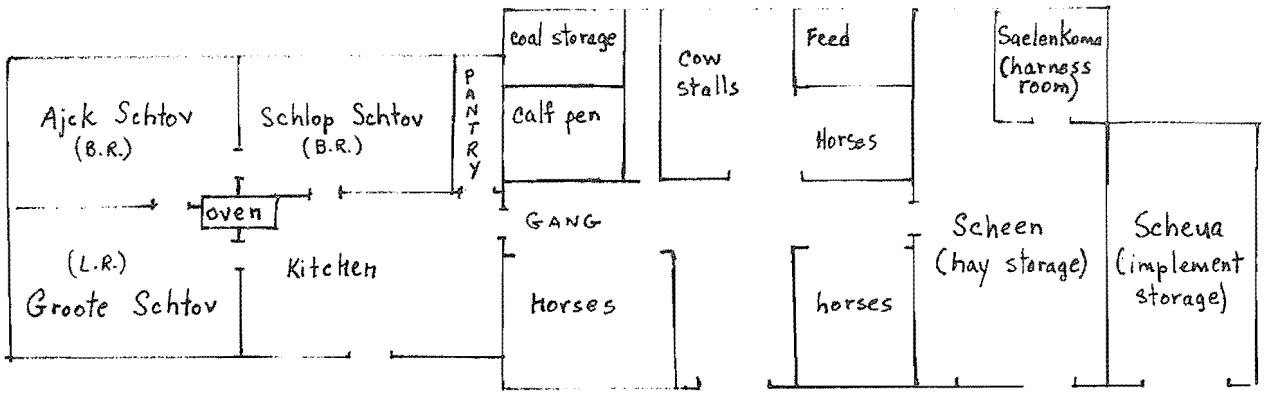
This home has the *Gang* as a connecting porch with a separate roofline. This place was built by Johann Fehr, and occupied later by David Schmidt, Benjamin D. Fehr, Johann Schlamp, Johann Wolfe, Peter P. Klassen, John Dueck, Abe Unrau and Peter A. Elias.



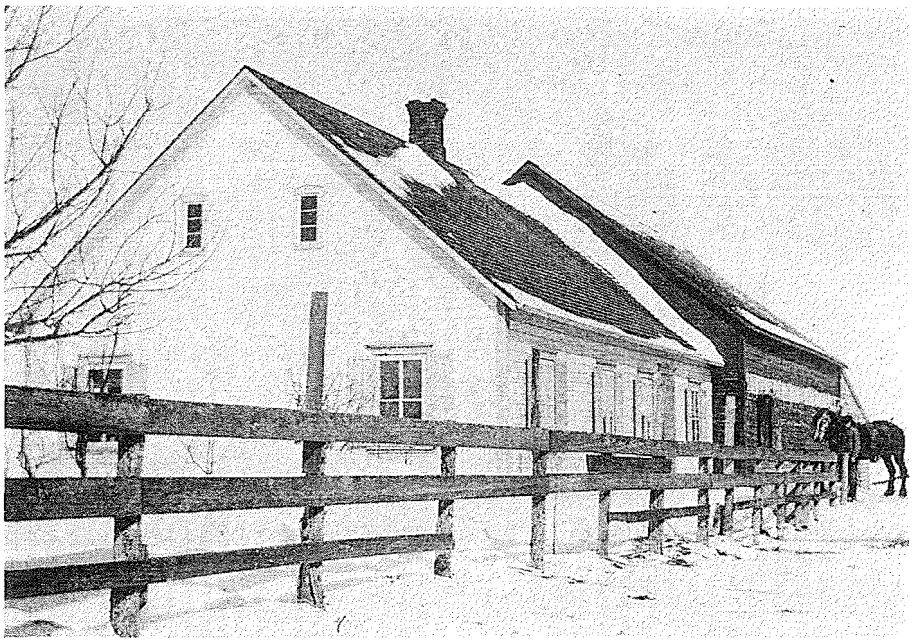


The original log house of Henry K. Giesbrechts on part of Lot 7. Some former occupants were Jacob Fehr, Johann M. Wiebe and Peter Friesen.

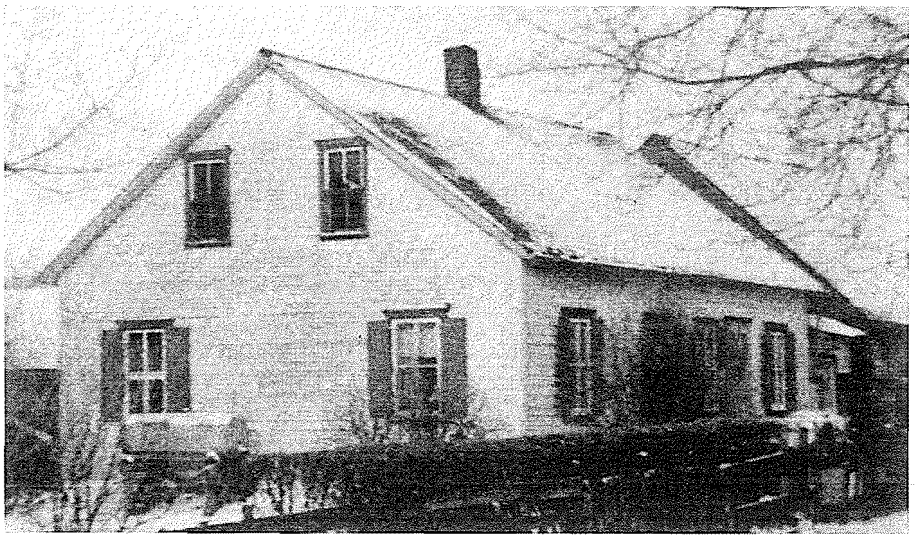
Diedrich and Margaret Klassen moved a different house onto the Jacob N. Neufeld place. The window and door frames are constructed with more detail.



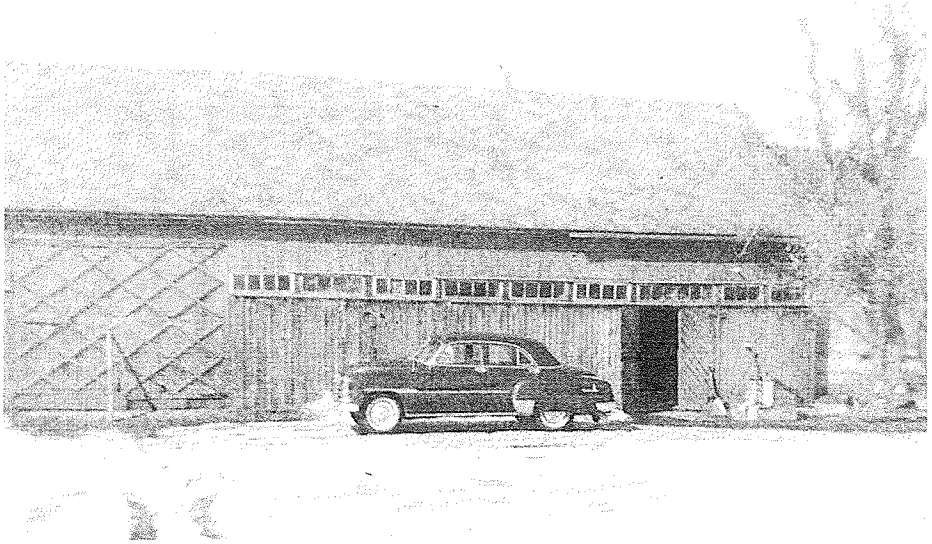
Floor plan of a typical Mennonite house and barn.



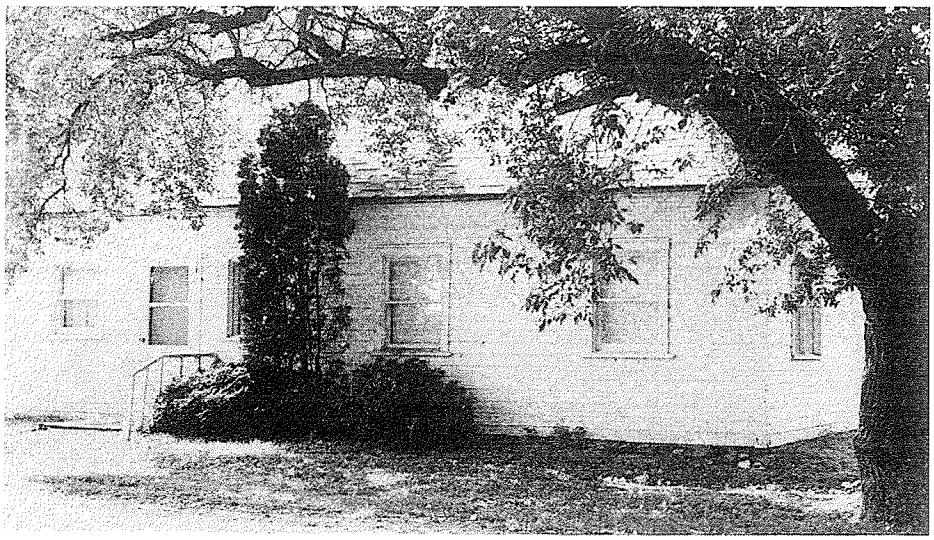
This home on Lot 4 has sheltered the Abram Neudorf, Abram Friesen and Isaac Wiebe families. Abram P. Janzen lived here after his return from Mexico in 1927. His son, Peter A. Janzen, presently occupies the home.



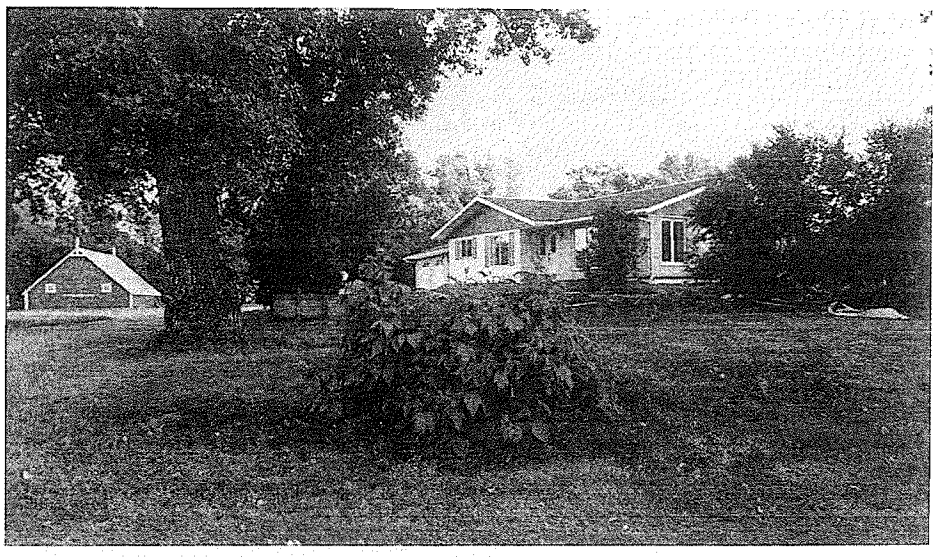
This home on Lot 8 has been occupied by David Fehr, Henry and Katherina Giesbrecht, Frank Rempel, Martin Wiebe, Corny Giesbrecht, Isaac C. Schmidt, John Neufeld and George Goertzen. It has also served as the base of operations for Stanley Transfer.



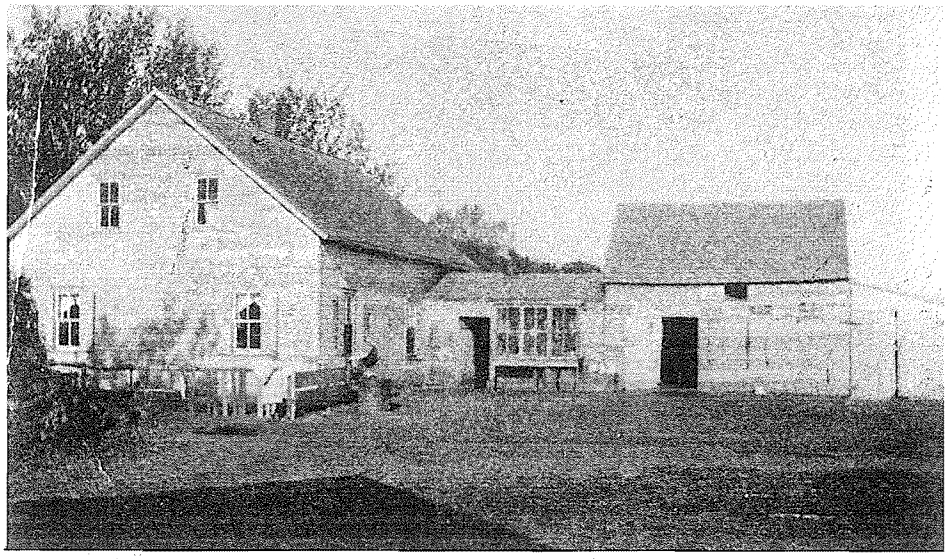
This farmyard developed by pioneer Peter P. Janzen, is presently owned by Peter and Eva Klassen.



The former home of Peter and Eva Klassen was demolished in 1981 to make room for a new house. Former occupants of Lot 16 are Peter P. Janzen, John F. Klassen, John Friesen and John Klassen.



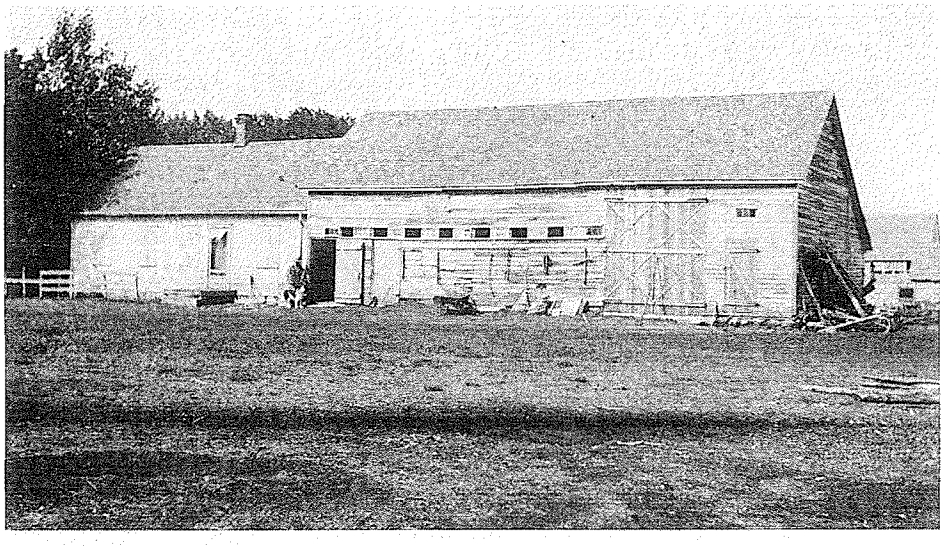
The new home of Peter and Eva Klassen.



The homestead of Peter P. Elias. His son, John P. Elias, and grandson, Henry A. Elias have also lived here. The design of the house is contrary to the pattern used in Blumenfeld. Peter P. Elias was a blacksmith and so the barn is constructed on a smaller scale than those of the farmers.

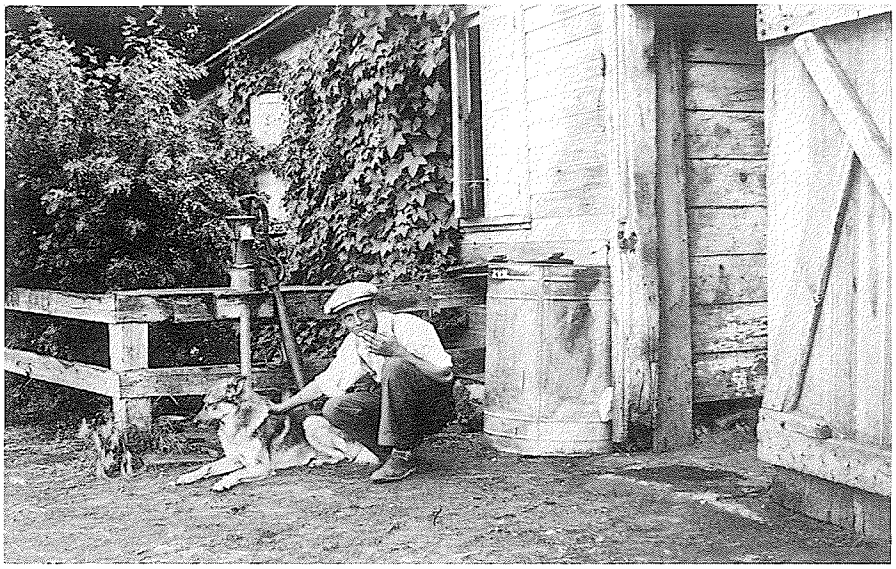


The Frank P. Klassen place also had the house built perpendicular to the barn.



Site of the first Neufeld store which operated out of the *Kjleeneschtov* of Jakob V. Neufeld's house. Diedrich Driedger, David Wieler, Henry M. Penner and Jacob E. Neufeld also lived on this yard which is part of Lot 7.

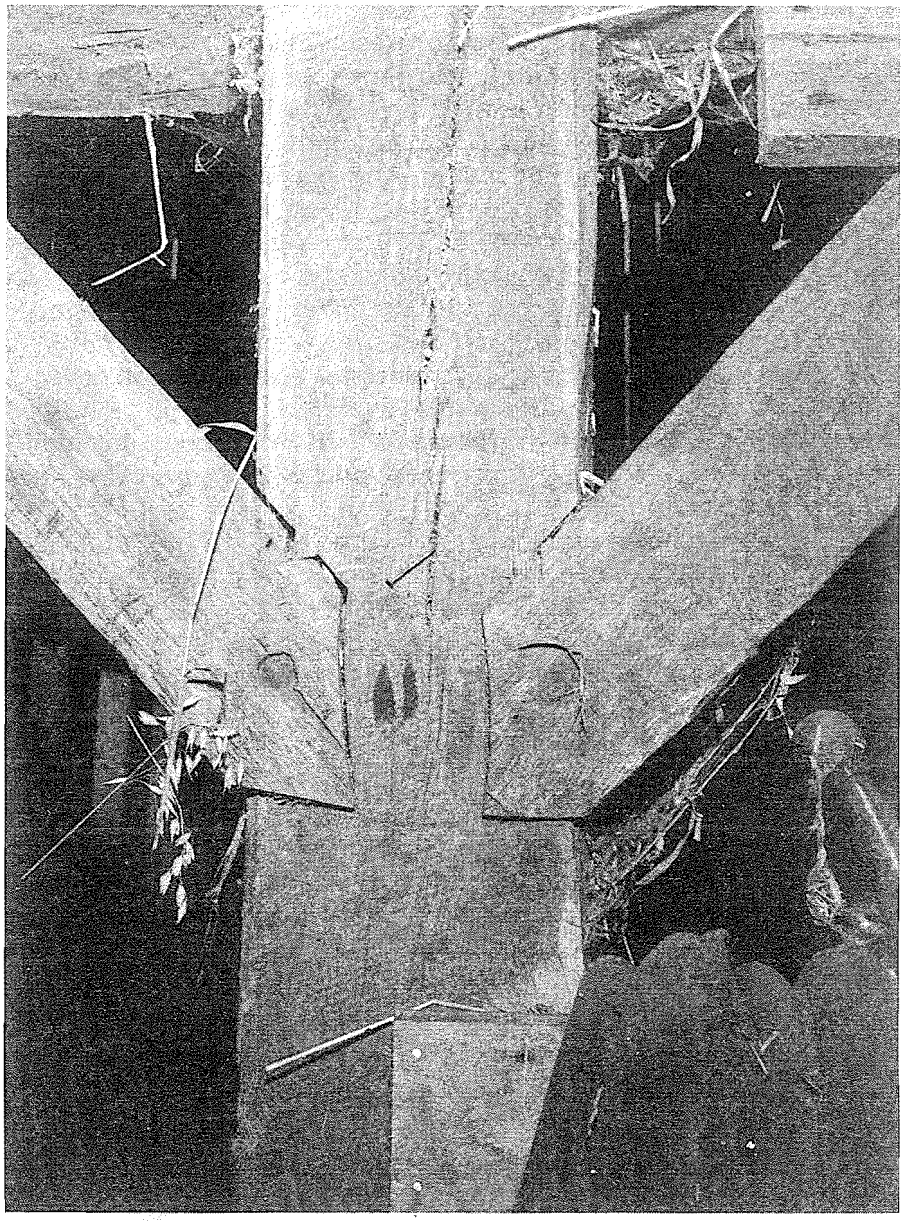
The entrance to the house most commonly used was through the barn. The front door was used on special occasions. This photo shows Peter Elias in front of the door to the Jakob V. Neufeld home.

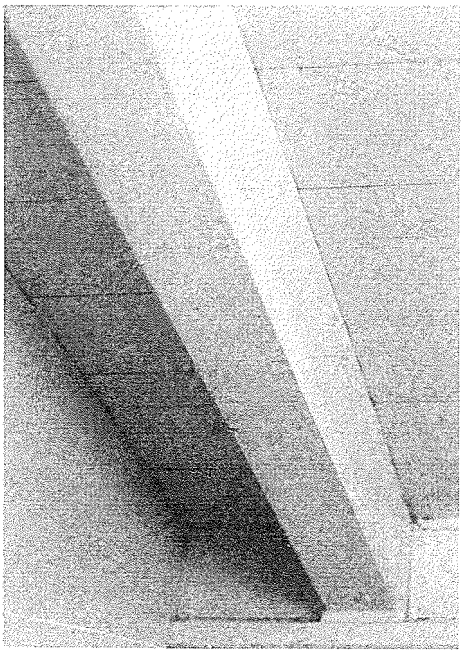


A typical interior of a traditional home. In the early homes, the open beams were unfinished logs. The furniture depicts the lifestyle of the Mennonite families. Photo: Manitoba Archives.

The interior of the home was finished in lathe and plaster, with wooden wainscotting to a height of four feet. Wooden ceilings bared great oak beams which supported the structure.







The open oak beam ceilings in the house were usually squared and planed.

Construction detail shows the exact notching necessary to provide a strong support for this building constructed in the 1880's. No steel nails were used; only fitted wooden pegs.

The barns were not as carefully built as the houses in that they used a balloon frame structure rather than the stacked wall. On the side of the barn away from the entrance, the roof was often extended below the plates until it was three to four feet from the ground. This section, the *Ovaseed,* was used for small animals such as pigs and chickens, for storing fodder, hay and fuel. A lean-to on the end of the barn was known as the *Scheua.* In winter it served as a place to store implements. All the early barns had very large doors so that the hay racks could be driven into the *Scheen* for unloading. The *Scheen* was a hay storage section separate from the livestock quarters. When hay hoists were introduced in later years, farmers were able to reduce the size of these doors. The harnessroom, *Saelenkoma,* was located in the *Scheen* or the *Ovaseed.*

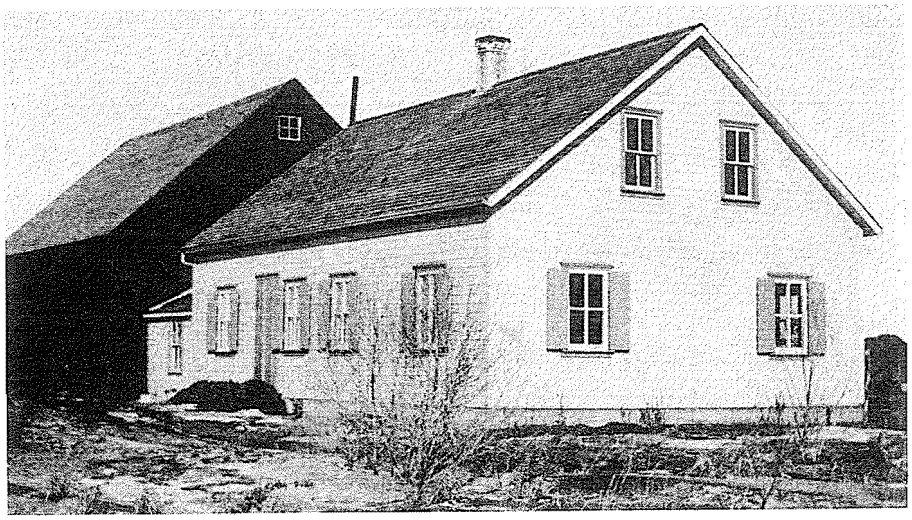
Shortly after their arrival at their new village site, the settlers planted cottonwood cuttings from the Pembina River. Other trees such as wild plums, gooseberries, poplars, ash and maple were planted. The trees grew quickly and soon the line of stark buildings was hidden behind rows of tall, deciduous trees. The trees have become a special feature of the Mennonite villages. In summer, their branches form a canopy over the village street and provide welcome

shade for the homes. In winter, the village in its grove of trees, is well protected from the force of the northwest winds.

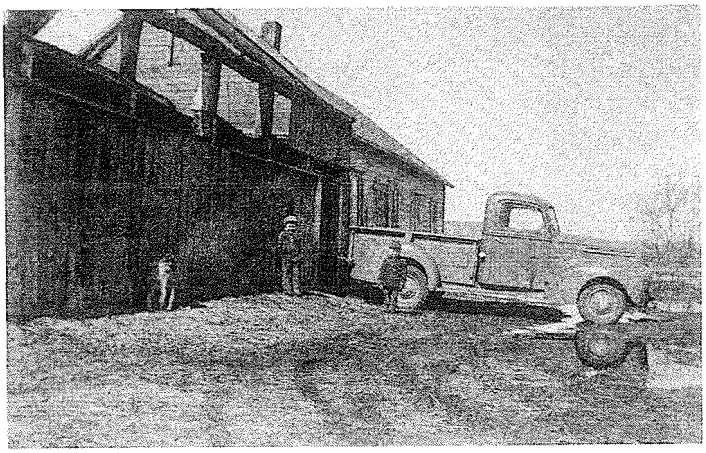
The *Sommakaijk* (summer kitchen) was a separate building, usually located close to the main entrance to the house, but across the driveway. Some times it was located behind the house in order to be conveniently located to the kitchen. The summer kitchen built behind the house was connected to the *Hinga t'Hues (kitchen and dining room) by a narrow hallway. It was also called the Sommaschtov.* Because it was often a favorite retreat for the boys, it was called the *Junges Schtov* or the *Rom Dreevs Schtov.* The summer kitchen served as the laundry room in spring, summer and fall. The heavy cast iron cauldron (*Meagroppen*) was located there in order to heat water for the laundry. Sometimes the bulky linen press (*Mangel*) was also kept there. When the room was used by the boys, one might find sunflower seeds, playing cards, and a kerosene lamp in a smoked filled room.

The mutual fire insurance agreement stipulated that a ladder and a long-handled hook be kept in an accessible place. The ladder (*Braunt-ladda*) was conspicuously hung on the outside of the barn. The long handled hook (*Bo'oshoijken*) was used for removing bags of grain from a burning loft or for pushing down a burning wall.

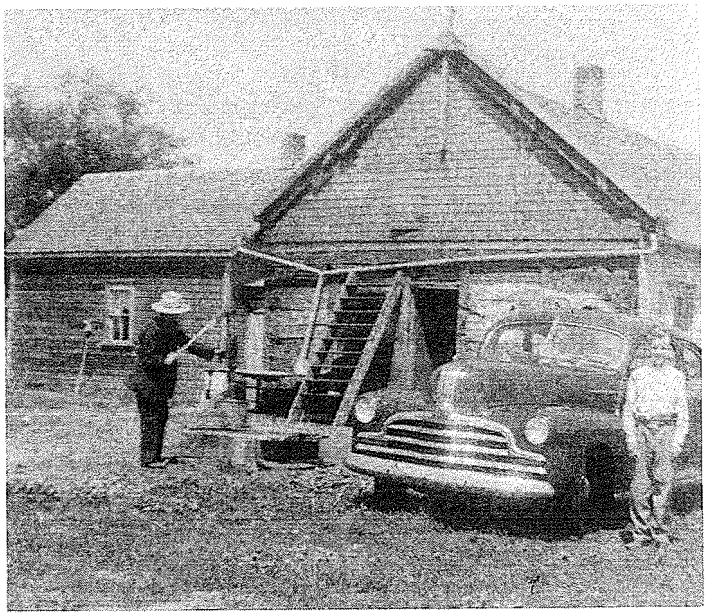
This home was built by David Fehr Sr. on Lot 21. It was home to Henry Fehr, A. A. Wall, David DeFehr, Jacob Dyck, Jacob Klassen, C. J. Klassen, Peter A. Elias and Abe N. Fehr.

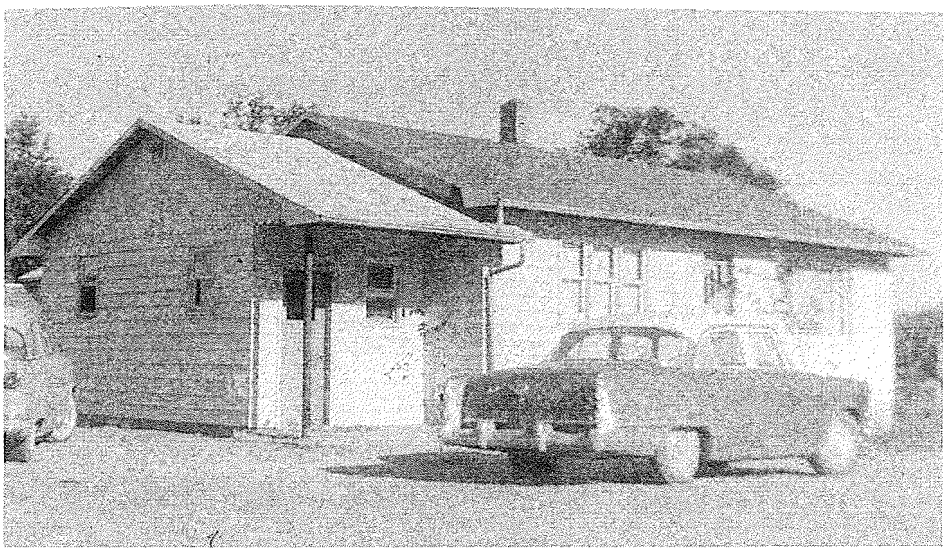


Below
Abe N. Fehr dismantling the barn built by David Fehr.

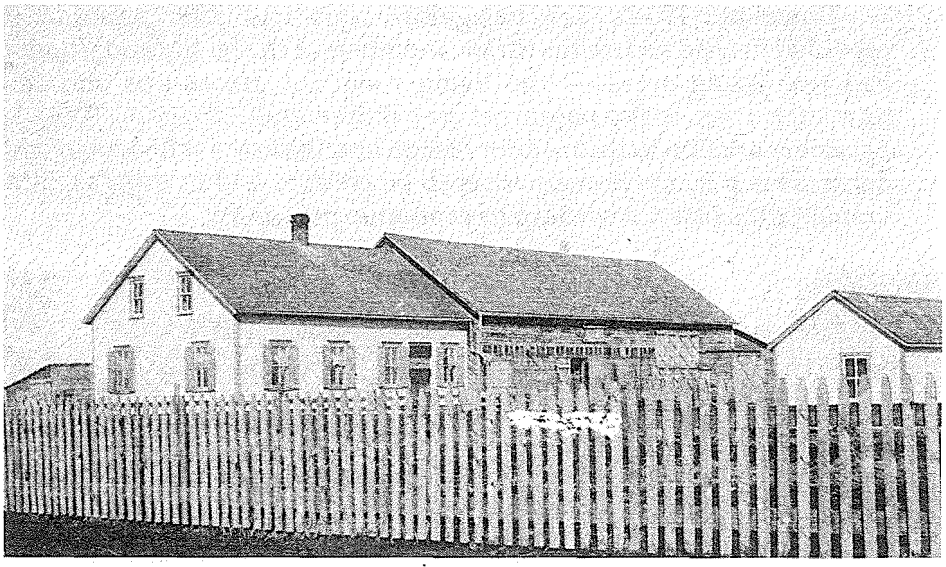


The barn has been demolished. The pump that was located in the barn is in the foreground. The man at the pump is Johann Fehr, son of David Fehr and father of Abe N. Fehr.

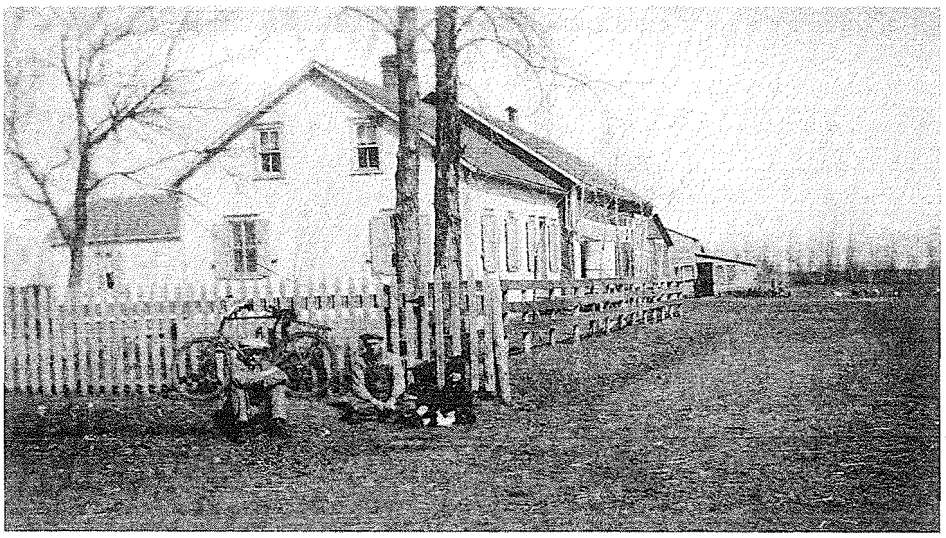




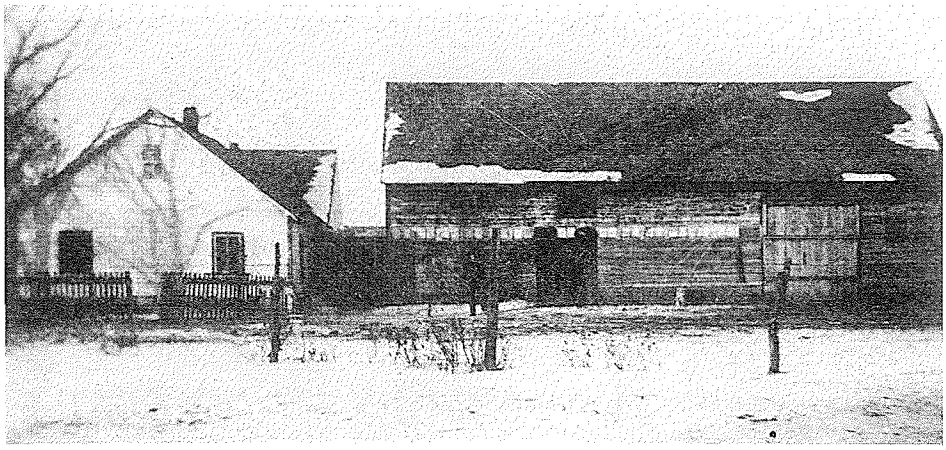
This house was built by Abram N. Fehr on Lot 21 to replace the one built by David Fehr. Other residents of this house include Jacob Klassen, Peter Klassen, Peter Schmidt, Jacob J. Elias, Jacob Wolfe, Bernie Thiessen and John P. Klassen. It was the temporary site of the village store after Jacob J. Elias bought it from Jake E. Neufeld.



Peter F. Klassen yard had a summer kitchen which was situated on the other side of the driveway. Klaas Wall, Henry Giesbrecht, C. P. Reimer, Peter Elias and Mrs. Isaac Elias have lived on this lot.



This view of the Peter F. Klassen yard shows the *Junges' Schtov* as a west side addition to the house.



This yard on Lot 9 has been occupied by Isaac Dyck Sr., A. A. Wall, John W. Dyck and Cornie J. Dyck.

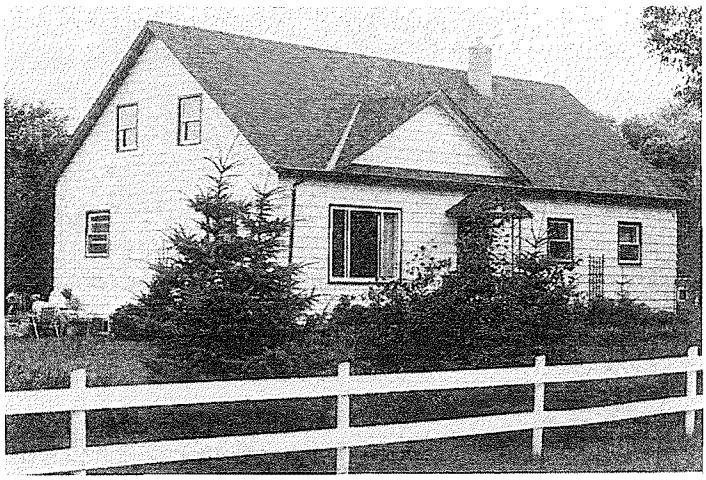
The Modern Era

New buildings erected after circa 1915 were modelled after neighbouring non-Mennonite farmhomes or the latest building style. Houses were built separate from the barn. Outbuildings were constructed for granaries, tool sheds and implement storage.

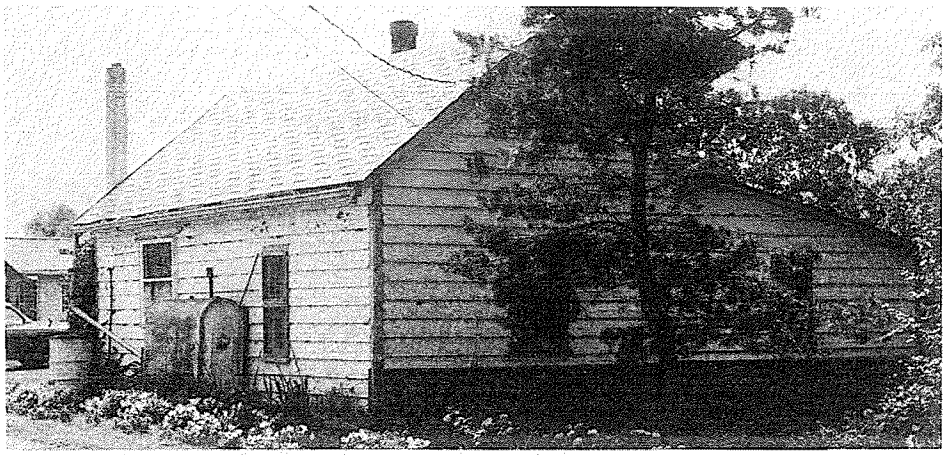
Since the 1950's, the bungalow style has been popular. It provided private bedrooms for the members of the family and usually had two living areas — the living room for grown-ups and the recreation room in the basement for children and teenagers. There is a greater variation in the exterior design and the interior floorplan and decor. This permits homeowners to be creative and to express individual tastes often according to economic prosperity.

Before being remodelled, Mrs. M. Enns, John W. Reimer, Abram Dyck, Peter L. Thiessen, Jacob Goertzen, David Reddekop and William Peters lived on this site. The house on Lot 14 was built by William Peters and remodelled by Isaac Elias in 1969.

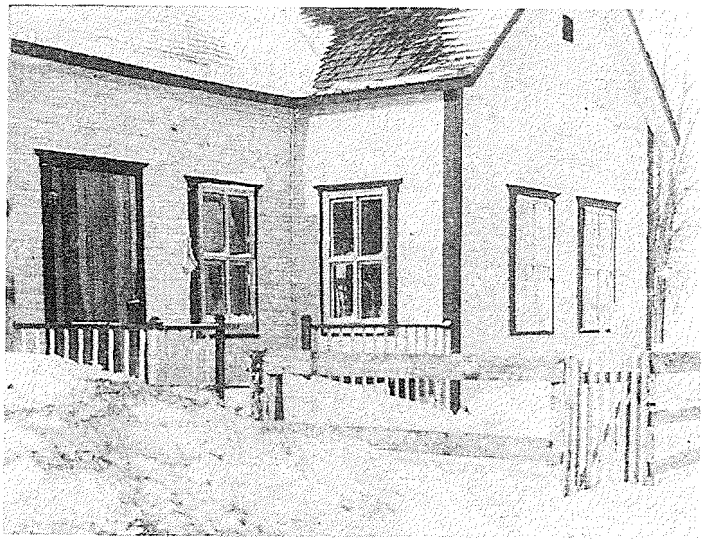




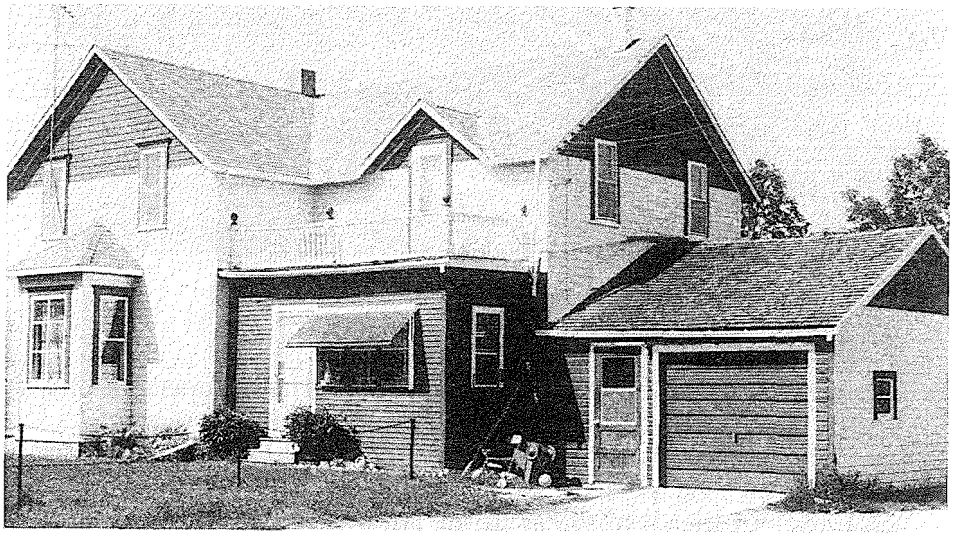
The Isaac Elias family now lives in this remodelled home.



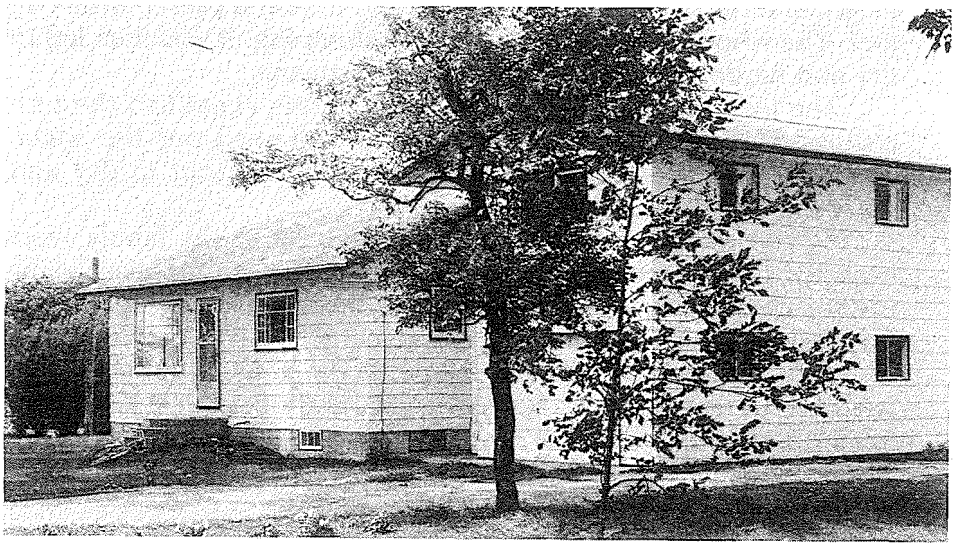
This home, also on Lot 14, is one of the poorer ones in the village. It is the home of Peter P. Elias, watchmaker. Previously, it was occupied by John Janzen, Henry Janzen, Jacob Peters, John Reimer, Mrs. A. Reimer, Peter Ginter, Peter W. Reimer, John E. Wolfe and Isaac Klassen.



Before this house was moved to the school lot to become the teacherage, it had been located at the west end of the village across the street from the George P. Klassen home. Residents of the west end lot include Julius Toews, Gerhard Blatz, Peter F. Klassen, Jacob Stobbe, Diedrich S. Klassen, Peter V. Neufeld, C. P. Reimer, W. W. Reimer was the last person to occupy the lot before the yard was amalgamated with the present W. W. Reimer yard.



The home of Mrs. Elizabeth (Jacob) Thiessen was moved to its site in Friedensfeld and demonstrates an architectural design borrowed from English neighbours.



The present home of George P. Klassen showing the more recent addition. The following families have lived here: A. A. Wall, Peter Neudorf, Mrs. Woelk, A. P. Janzen, P. B. Klassen, H. P. Friesen, John E. Wolfe, John P. Elias, Harry Rempel, Karl Pokrant, D. S. Klassen, John Warkentin, Jacob Warkentin, G. W. Elias and Frank Klassen.



The old home on Lot 7 was remodelled by Peter Friesen in the early 70's. Friesteel Manufacturing is located on the former Giesbrecht place.

The storage method for manure bricks permitted air circulation.



Heating The Home

Our day of energy conservation makes us more conscious of how the pioneers and early settlers heated their homes in winter.

The availability of oak firewood from the Pembina Hills was a boon to the pioneers. Most often they could have the wood for cleaning out the dead wood in the landowners future field. By the turn of the century the Mennonite farmers were forced to return to the source of fuel which they had used in Russia. Dried manure bricks (*Mestsodden*) were made from a mixture of horse and cow manure. The manure was distributed with wheel barrow up to a height of 1½ inches. Then it was raked for hours and packed firmly by foot. The whole family joined in on the stomping. It was then left to dry and harden. Later it was spaded into squares.

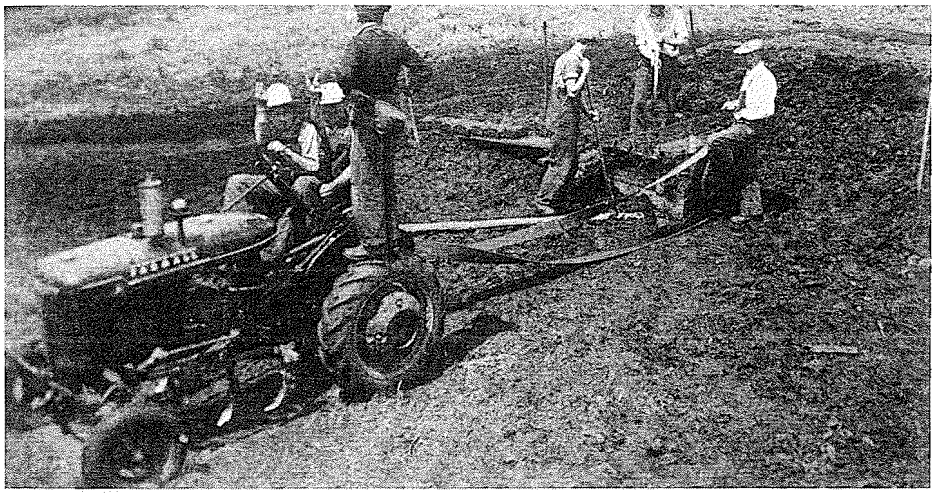
The invention of the manure press greatly simplified the procedure. The press took wet manure and pressed out the water, leaving a firm block of manure. These were laid out to dry and harden.

By the day of the school picnic the boys in the family were expected to have the manure bricks piled up into round piles for the further drying. This done, the boys could expect some pocket money for the picnic day. The bricks were stored in a dry place for winter use.

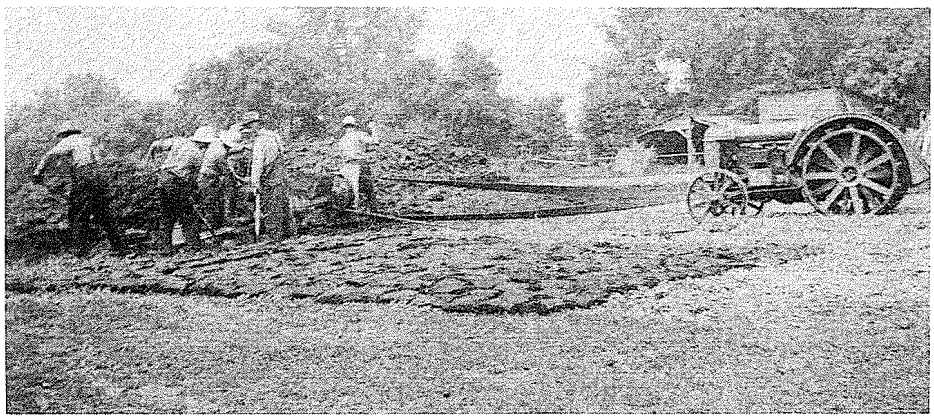
There were many advantages to this type of fuel. It was cheap. It used a resource which was readily available. The bricks created a very hot fire and were used efficiently in the big brick stove in the middle of the house. If the bricks were properly dried the odour was no more offensive than that of a coal or wood fire.

The brick ovens in the middle of the house used direct conduction heating. Only those rooms were heated which contained a portion of the stove. The rest of the house was cool. They were used until the end of World War I.

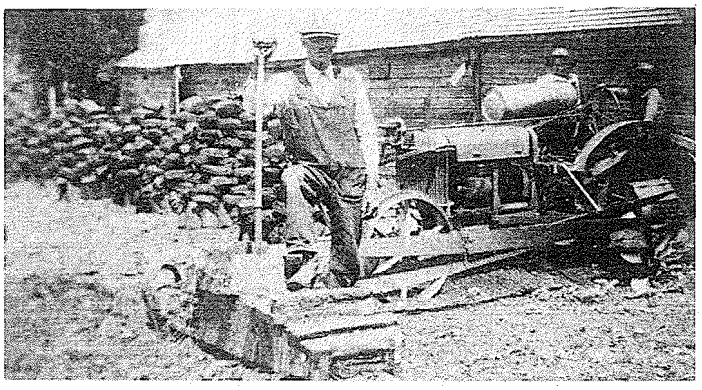
During the winter of 1942-43 the village people lacked sufficient wood and coal due to wartime shortages. The village was poor and could not afford to pay Winkler prices. A meeting was called in August 1943 to discuss how the village could secure adequate fuel supplies for the coming winter. Jim Hamm teacher, was appointed to go to Winnipeg. He went to the Wartime Prices and Trade Board and secured assurance that all wood and coal supplies would be supplied at cost if the Stanley Municipality agreed to administer the project. Reeve J. R. Walkoff agreed, and Blumenfeld ordered its wood and coal supplies at prices far below the retail prices charged in Winkler.



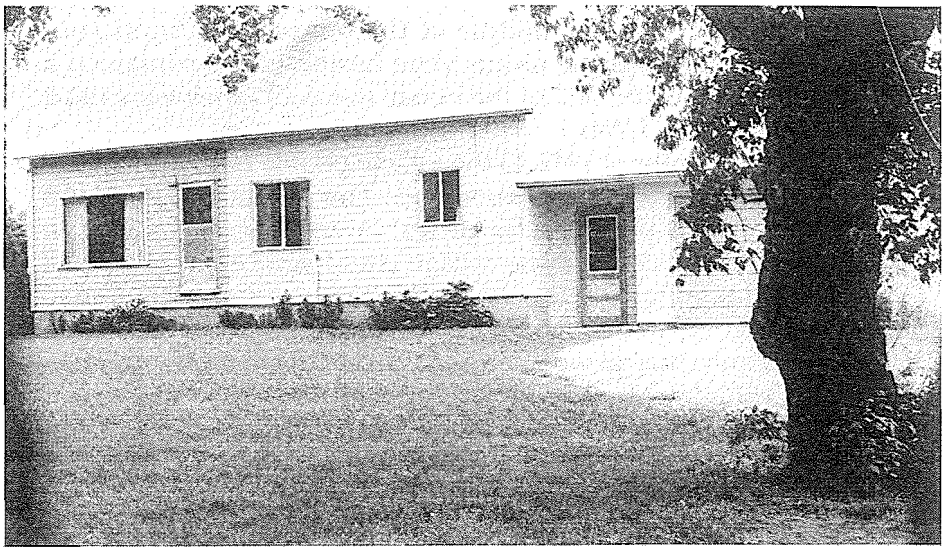
Boys would be paid 15¢ per day for working at the press and laying the manure bricks out to dry.



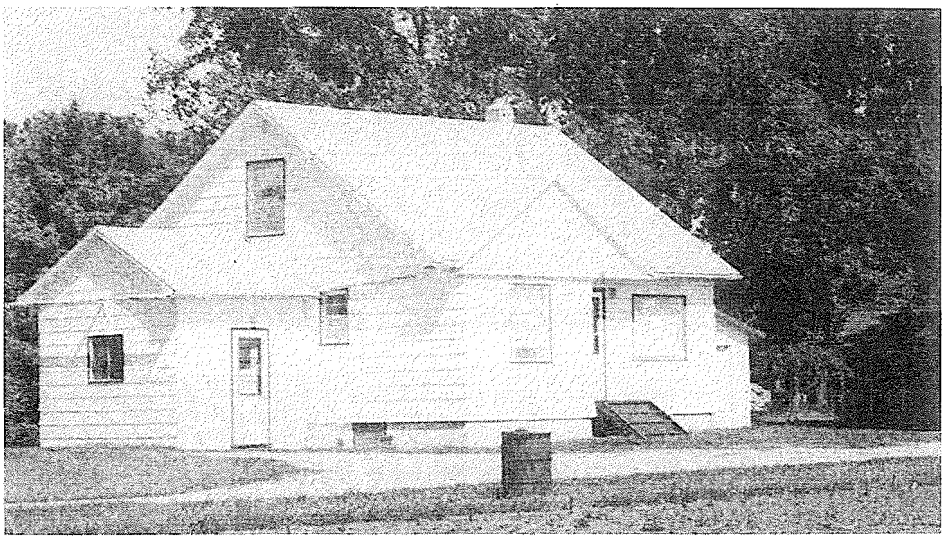
The old manure pile at the Peter F. Klassen place was an ideal place to set up operations for making manure bricks.



This 1934 photo shows the tractor driving the manure press.

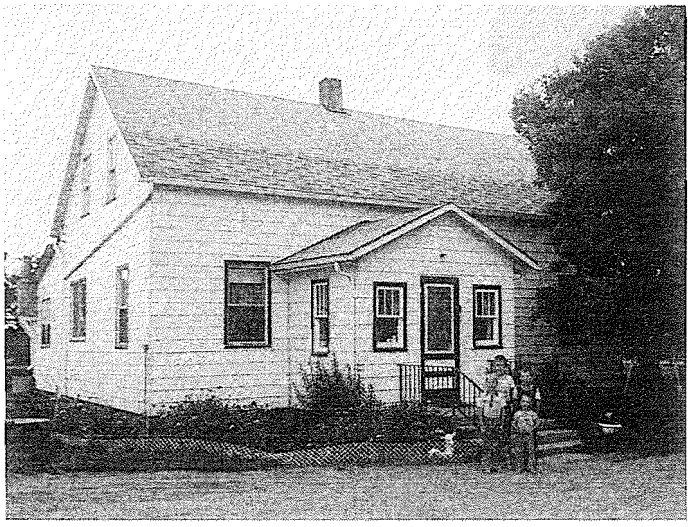


This remodelled house is the home of the John Buhler family, Friedensfeld. Although the outside dimensions of the original stacked-wall house have remained, the exterior has been recreated according to modern styles.

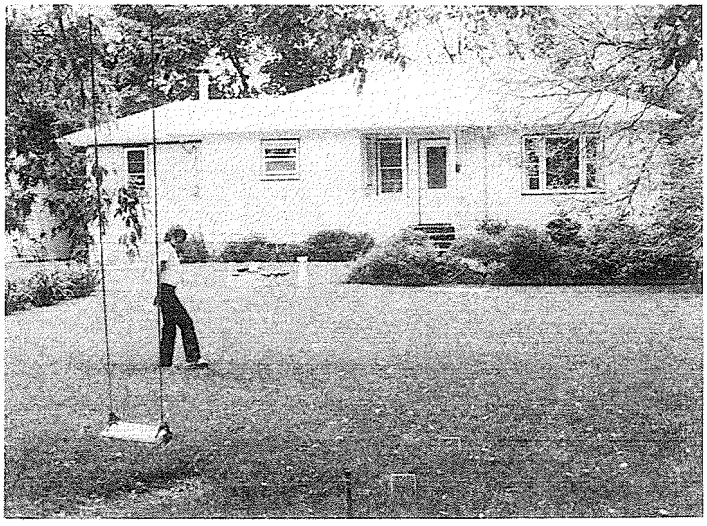


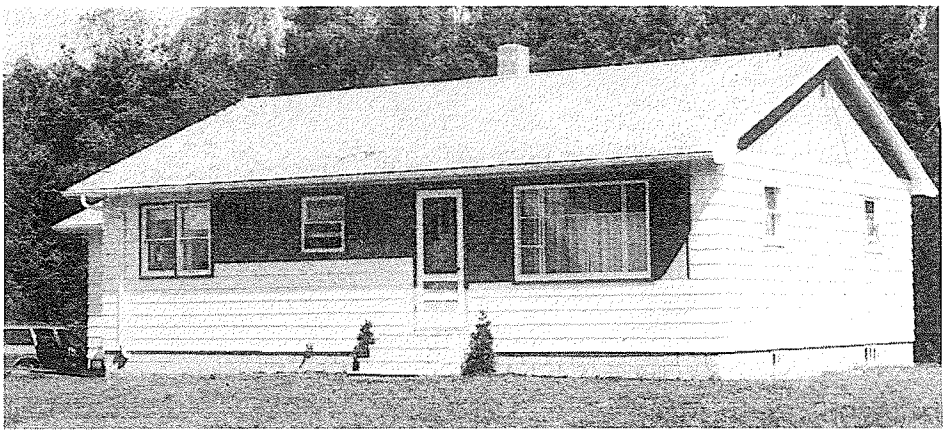
During the 1940's, this style of home became popular. The John Elias family owns this farm home.

The story-and-a-half style, common in the 1940's, is convenient for growing families who welcome additional living space.

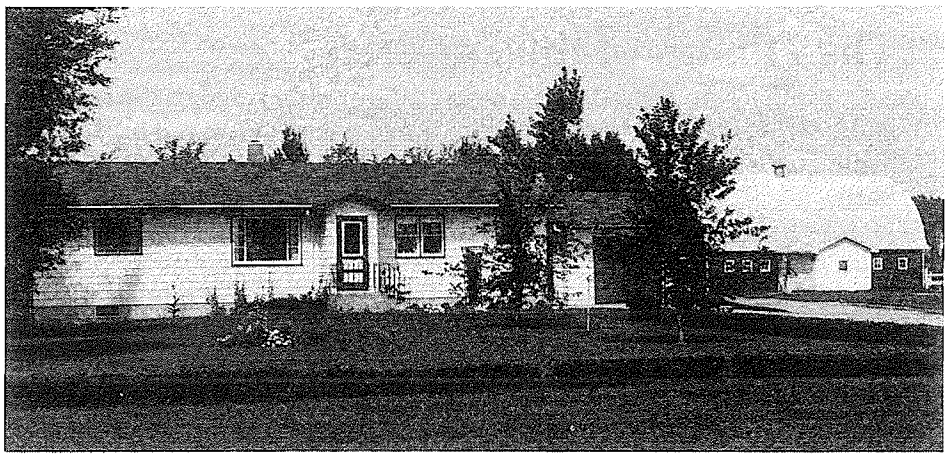


This house design was a forerunner of the modern bungalow. The roofline is a distinctive feature.

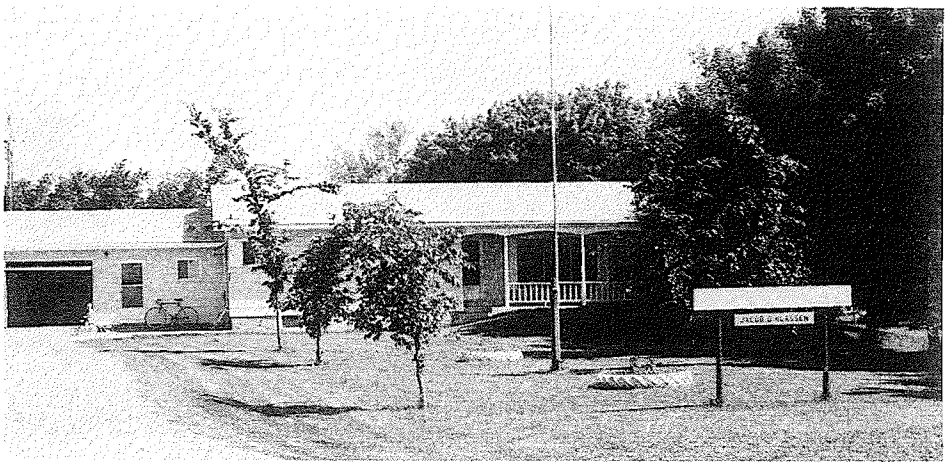




During the 1950's, the bungalow became the accepted house style. The features changed very little in the following thirty years. The simple lines represented the lifestyle of the community. The George Heide family resides in this farm house.



A number of additions have been made to this bungalow. The Jacob J. Elias family live on this neatly kept farmyard.



The Jacob D. Klassen family lives in this well landscaped farm home known as Landview Farms.



The farm home of the Willie Fehr family. As the farming community became more wealthy during the 1970's, the simple design of the bungalow was enhanced by adding the garage, larger windows and other decorative features.



The herdsman's cottage in the *Anwohner* end of Blumenfeld. Occupied by the Klemchuk and Yurchuk families.

The Homes of the Landless

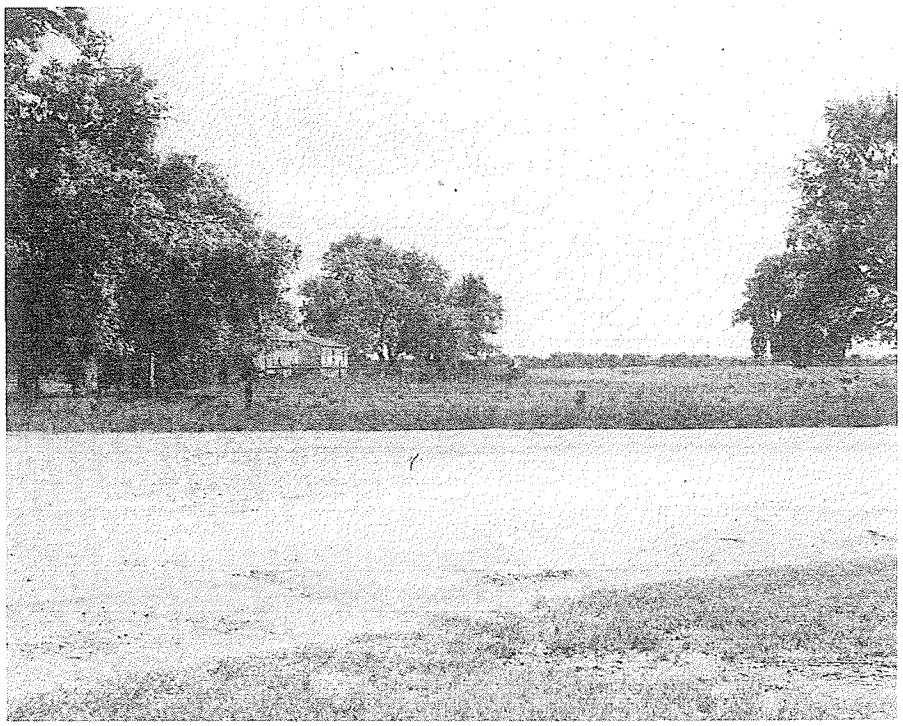
Tradesmen, retired farmers and labourers resided in the cottages at the *Anwohner* end of the village. The cottages were not built of the same quality as the homes of the farmers and seldom had an attached barn.

The *Anwohner* section of Blumenfeld was located where the Elias farm is located.

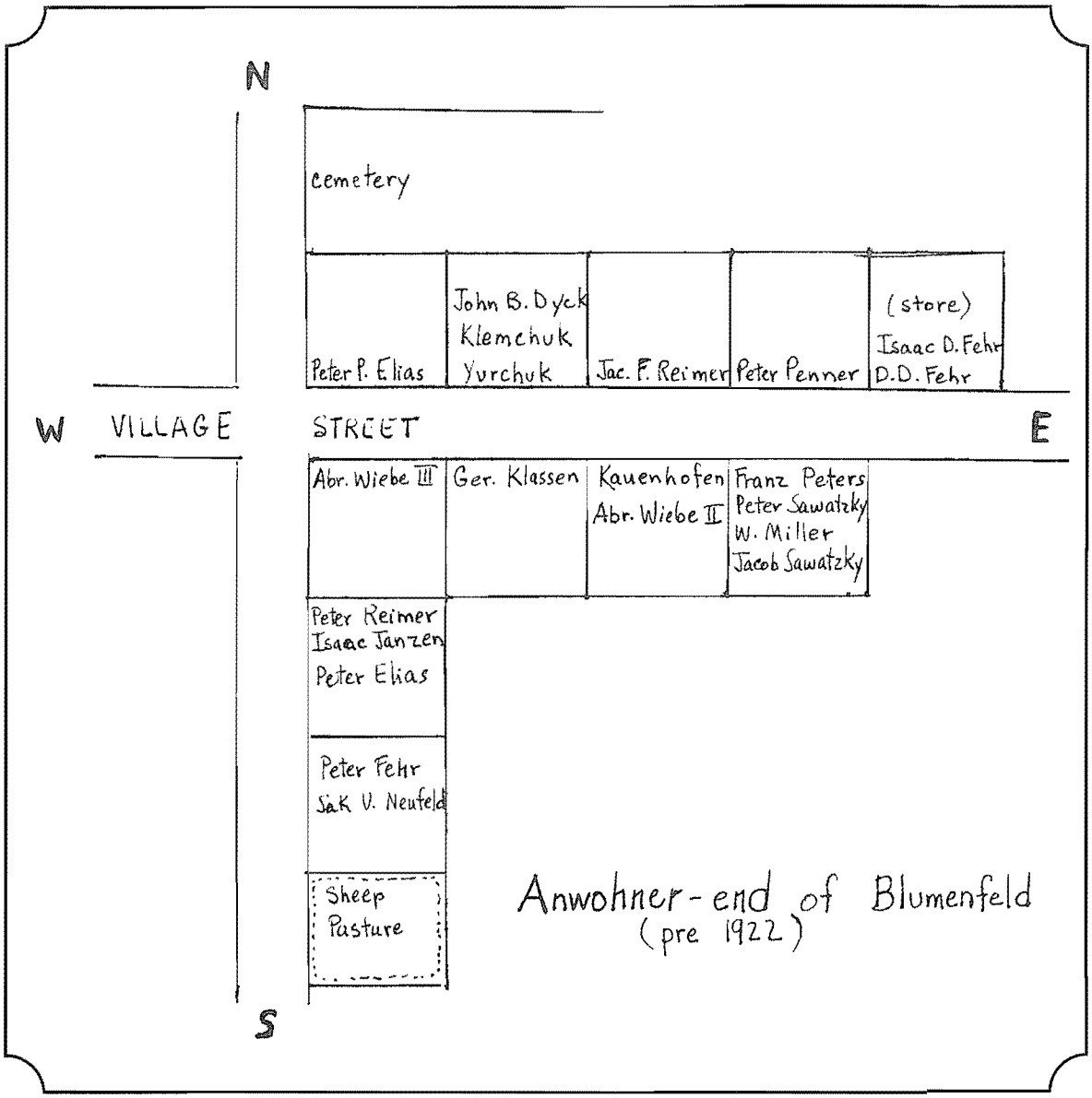
A few large maple trees in the field are the last reminders of the homes which lined the village street.

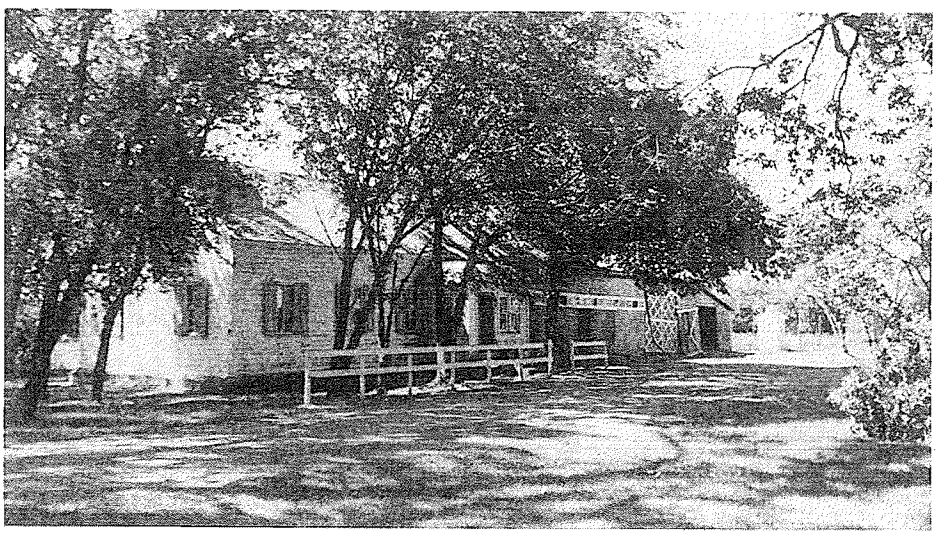
The store of D. D. Fehr and Isaac D. Fehr was located here until 1923.

A sheep pasture was located south of the last yard occupied by Peter Fehr and Jacob V. Neufeld.

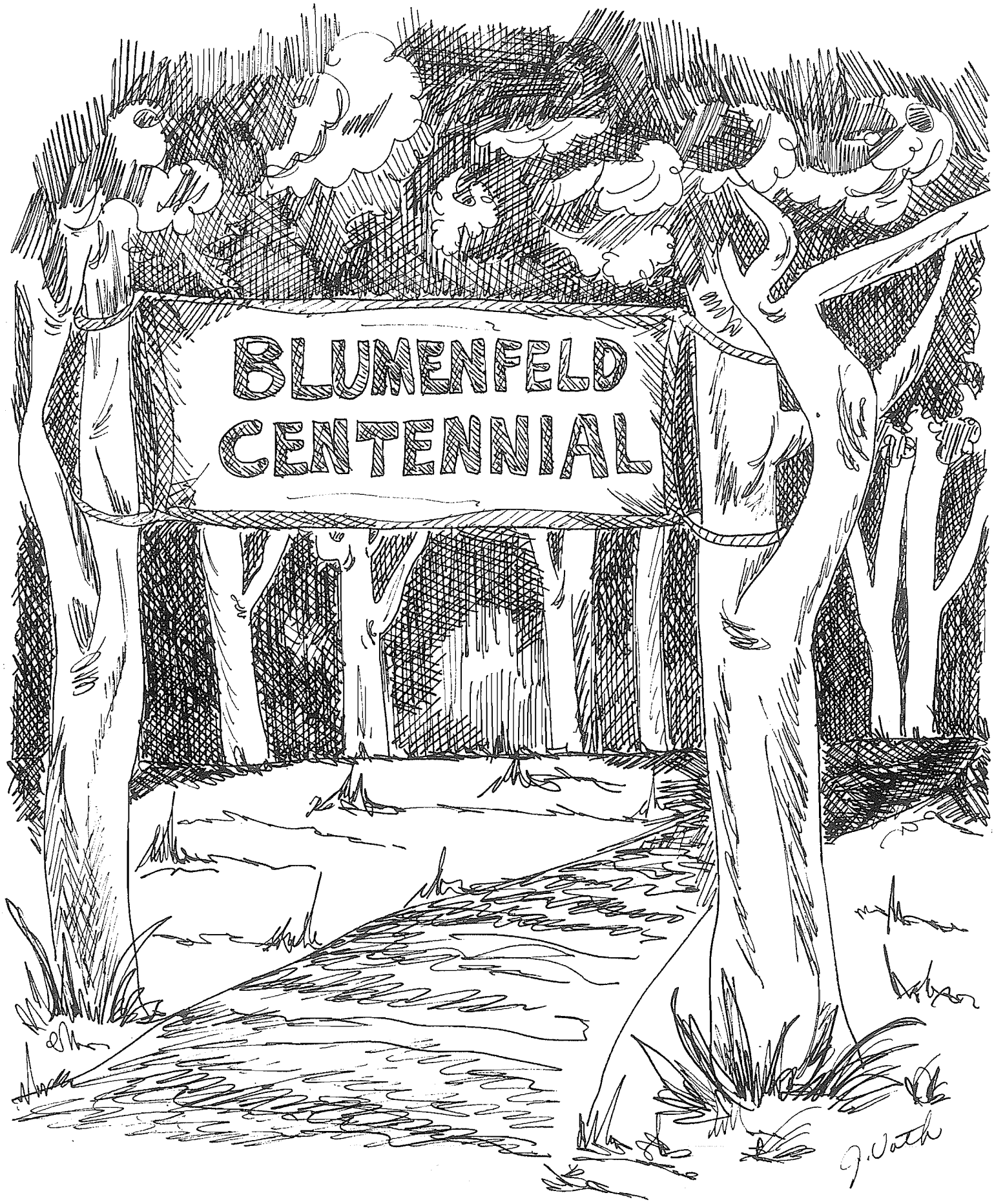


Looking east from the crossroads along the former street occupied by the *Anwohner*. Many of the trees are still standing.





This house and barn combination is one of the last still occupied in Blumenfeld. This unique architectural design is rapidly disappearing from the Mennonite scene in Manitoba.


BLUMENFELD
CENTENNIAL

Celebration

CHAPTER 9

In 1878, the pioneers of Blumenfeld celebrated the first anniversary of their life in new homes at the permanent site of the village. One hundred years later, thousands of people met again at Blumenfeld in order to celebrate a century of peaceful life in their Canadian home. The centennial celebration was characterized by the theme of homecoming. Many former residents and descendants of Blumenfeld's pioneers returned to the village to reminisce and to be reunited with old friends. It was an opportunity to learn more of the village's history.

The reunion required many months of planning. Credit must be given to the executive committee and the support committees which gave tireless energy to the organization of such a large event.

A beef barbecue at the Peter P. Schmidt farm (formerly the W. M. Elias farm) provided many with the opportunity to taste pit-roasted beef, prepared under the careful supervision of Peter P. Schmidt.

The events of the centennnial were reported by Elizabeth Bergen in this article in the Red River Valley Echo. The article is reprinted here with a few revisions:

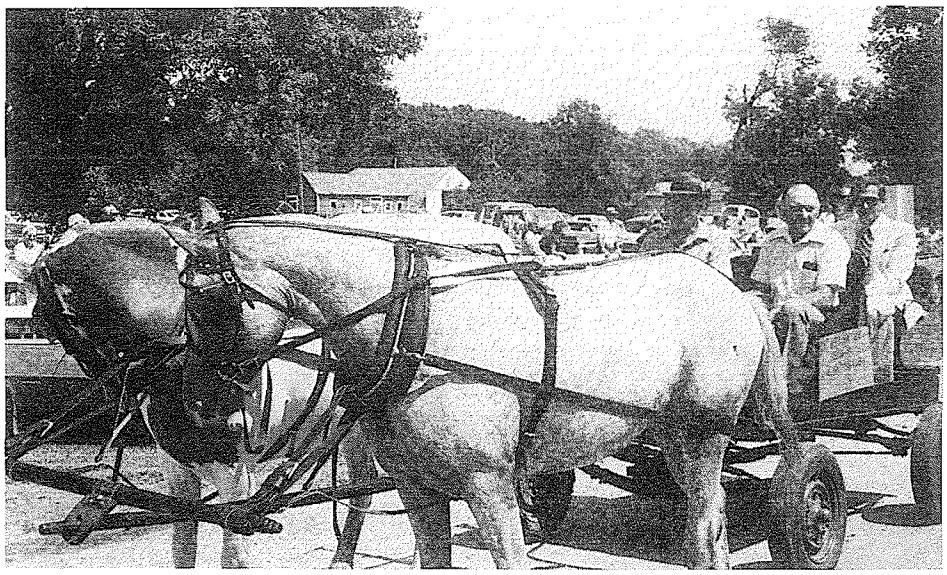
> After many months of planning and working, the Blumenfeld village centennial reunion became a reality on July 22 and 23.
>
> They were there in large numbers: farmers, businessmen, professional people, young and old, retired and employed to look once more on their childhood home with fond and nostalgic memories in this their century-old village. There were also those present who had never been to Blumenfeld before and those who had been a part of it for only a short time.
>
> A reunion means meeting friends and former neighbours, reminiscing of times gone by, and catching up on community news. For Blumenfeld it meant all this and much more. It was a weekend planned towards genuine joy, happiness and

Standing in front of the open barbecue pits are George and Neta Klassen, Peter P. and Mary Schmidt and Jake D. and Tina Klassen.





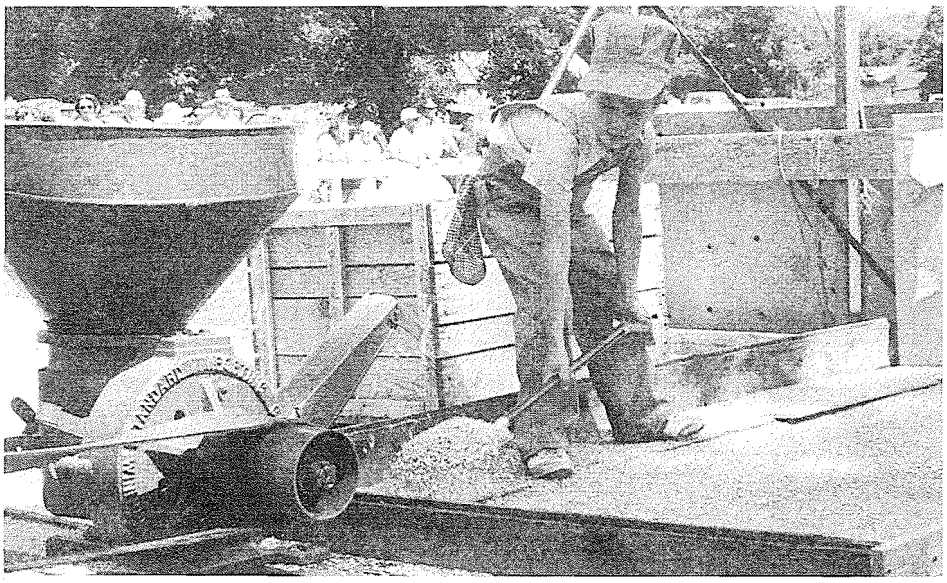
Harry Enns, M.L.A. for Pembina and Arnold Brown, M.L.A. for Rhineland drove this Model A Ford in the parade. Times Photo.



Reeve Art Warkentine (driver) escorted Jake Murta, M.P. for Lisgar, (back seat) through the parade. Times Photo.



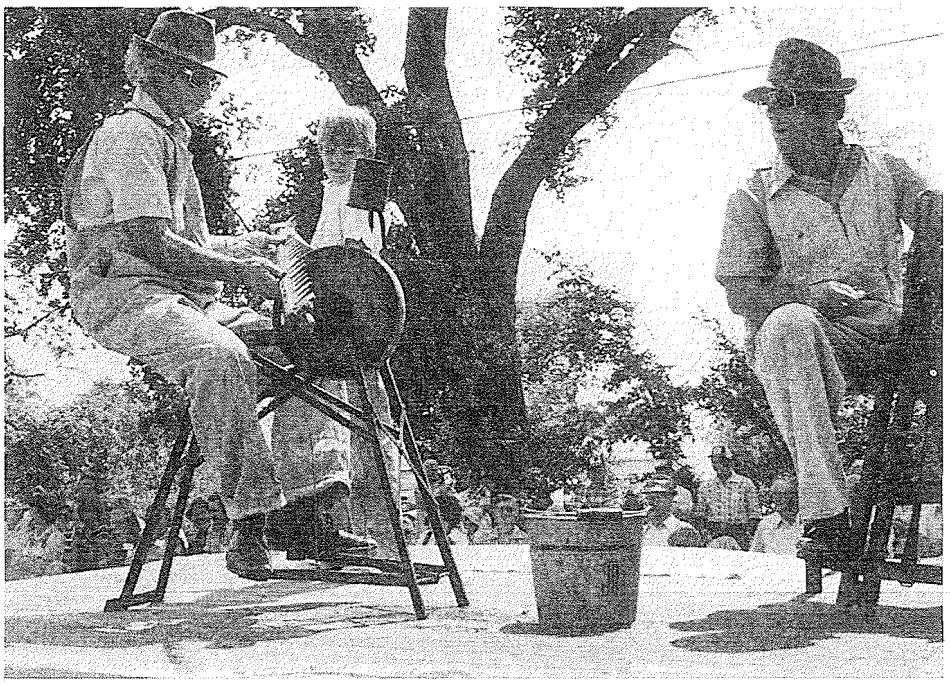
Blumenfeld young people rode on a wagon of hay and sang to the accordian accompaniment of Anne Elias.



This young lad showed how grain was crushed by the grandfathers. Times Photo.



This float in the Centennial Parade demonstrated the old-fashioned butter churn and the linen press. Times Photo.



Old timers were hard up for musical instruments. These fellows demonstrate how harmony can be created by using a little ingenuity. Times Photo.



The schoolgrounds were the hub of activity at the Blumenfeld Centennial.

celebration. It was an event planned to be remembered.

The village looked attractive with its well-kept, brightly painted homes, spacious green lawns and shade trees. Near the gate of each yard were signs indicating the names of present and past owners. Some gates also had the Canadian Maple Leaf flags attached to the posts, while at the school, a new Union Jack was flying from the flag pole.

The week-end event began with a long parade which was comparable to any in larger centres. It was also unique in that many entries were interesting for their originality. In the entries were many farm items of ingenuity, old buggies, democrats, a few early model cars, much old and modern farm machinery, small brand new model tractors. There were floats representing the old farm kitchen with women and girls busy at scrubbing boards doing the family wash or doing the laundry in an old hand-operated washing machine, while others were ironing and churning, mending and preparing meals. A grandmother rocked a child in an old-fashioned, homemade cradle while eating sunflower seeds. On another float a group of older school children were perched on bales of hay singing "This Land is my Land" accompanied by accordian music, while another float carried young village women singing Low German folk songs.

Last but not least was the old hissing steam engine, a must at any centennial event.

Riding in an old democrat was the parade marshall, Mayor D. A. Fehr of Morden, a former resident of Blumenfeld. Sitting beside him was his wife, Anne, nee Elias.

The official opening program was held in a large tent erected on the school yard for this occasion.

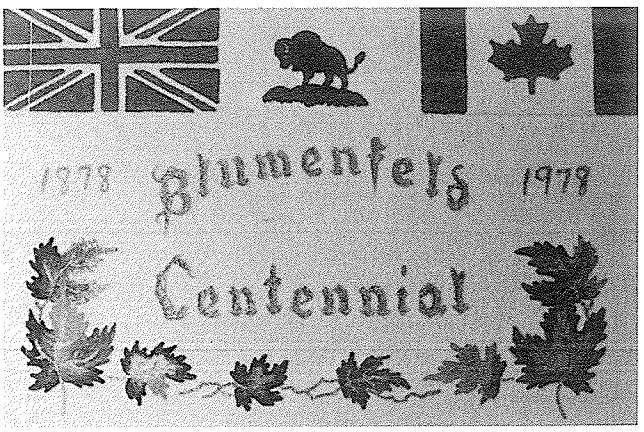
Words of welcome were extended by J. D. Klassen who served as chairman. The opening address was delivered by Ed J. Elias of Winkler, formerly of Blumenfeld. He offered recognition to the people of Blumenfeld for the excellent planning that had gone into the event. He paid tribute to the early Mennonite settlers by whose efforts the present generation is enjoying a lifestyle vastly different than that of a century ago. He also suggested that "we slow down", take time to shake the hand of a friend and give thanks to God.

Extending greetings was Jack Murta, M.P. for Lisgar. He congratulated the community of Blumenfeld for its pride in its yards and homes. "There has to be time for praise and reflecting, and to pay tribute to those who live here. But to go forward into the future, we must know where we have come from. Lisgar is a bit of a mosaic and in trying to maintain your culture and your Low German, which is a language with a history, you will make this community in Lisgar and Canada a better place to live," he said.

Harry Enns in bringing greetings from his Lakeside constituency and the Government of Manitoba, said, "The Mennonite heritage is a form of living in peace within themselves and for others. I ask that you pray that the governments of the future will see continued peace happening."

Other greetings were offered by Arnold Brown, M.L.A. of Rhineland; Abe H. Enns on behalf of the Rural Municipality of Stanley; Art

Blumenfeld Centennial flags, painted by local women, were sold as souvenirs of the festive event.



Warkentine, Reeve of the R.M. of Stanley; H. F. Wiebe, Mayor of Winkler, who also presented a plaque to the Village of Blumenfeld on behalf of the people in Winkler; Dr. C. W. Wiebe not only brought best wishes but also expressed thanks to the people of Blumenfeld for their assistance when the Bethel Hospital was built and for the donations and practical aid given to the Salem Home for the Aged in Winkler.

A Blumenfeld centennial flag was also offered to all teachers participating in Saturday's afternoon and evening program. The first to speak was Mrs. John I. Warkentin of Winnipeg who taught in Blumenfeld during the 1930's. She quoted Tennysons's Ulysses, saying "I am a part of all that I have met." These sentiments represented the comments of other teachers who extended best wishes.

Saturday evening's program, chaired by Edgar Enns of Altona, varied from reminiscing, singing, comments, music, an auction of a friendship quilt, a look into the past history of Blumenfeld by J. J. Elias. It concluded with a play, "The Little Red School House", reproduced by Peter



Bicycles decorated for the weekend celebration.

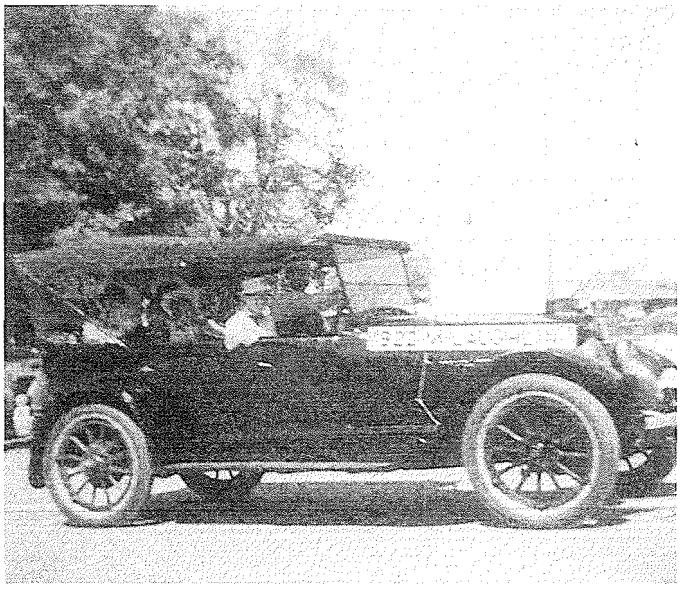


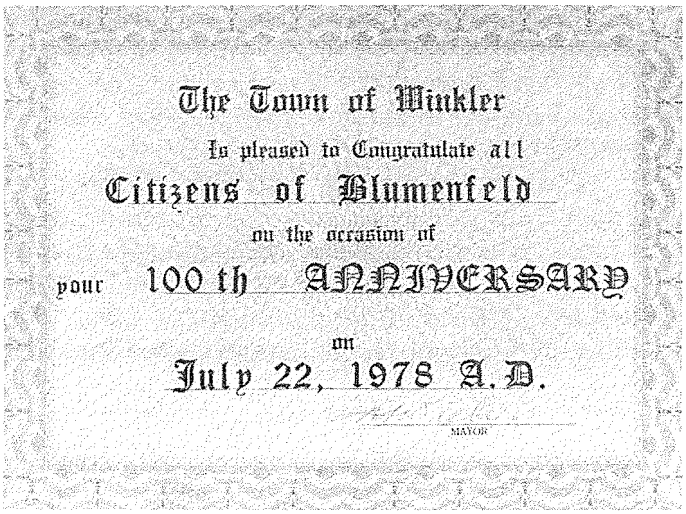
The Centennial parade proceeding west. Times Photo.

The Ed Elias family drove through the parade in his restored 1922 McLaughlin.

This birthday cake float was created by members of the community.







Mayor Wiebe of Winkler presented this plaque at the centennial celebrations.



Diedrich S. and Margaret Klassen relived old times as they drove through Blumenfeld in their democrat pulled by a white horse. Times Photo.

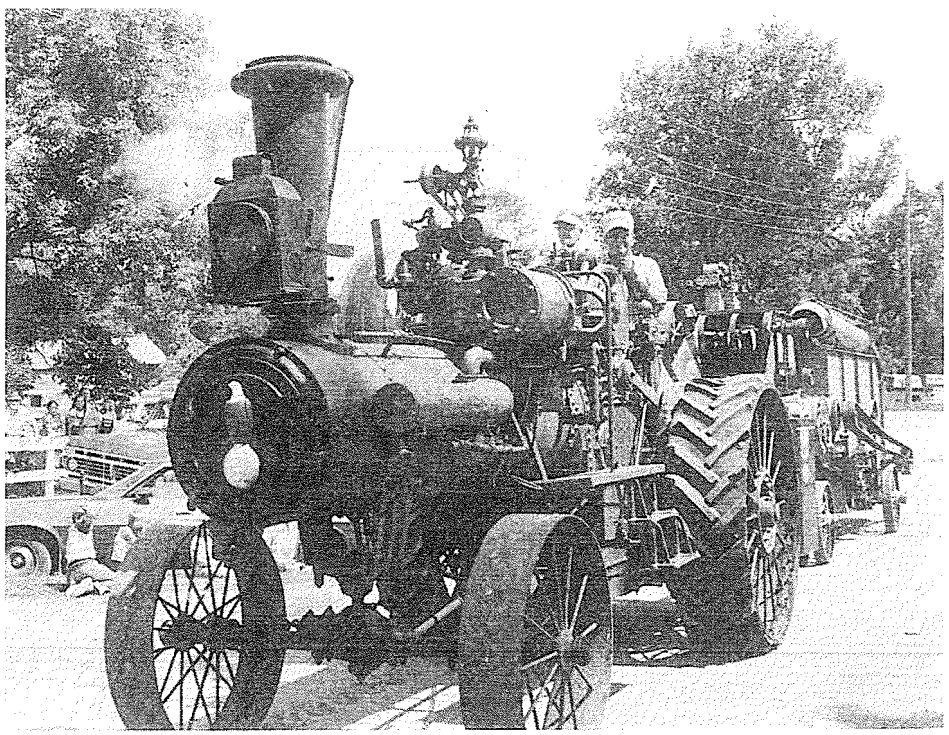
Klassen and Edgar Enns. Participants were Bill Klassen, as teacher, and Jake Penner, Bernie Elias and Peter Klassen as his pupils.

The large community choir, directed by former teacher, John Zacharias, sang several hymns. The J. J. Dyck family offered special music. Several musical numbers were presented by the John Zacharias family. The Peter G. Elias family sang "This Land is my Land" with Low German lyrics.

The meditations at the Sunday morning worship hour were based on the theme "O give thanks unto the Lord" (Psalm 107:1). The trilingual service included sermons in English, Low German and High German.

Rev. John J. Peters, Morden, brought his message in Low German. He chose his text from Deut. 6:1-2. He challenged the audience not to be only hearers of the word of God but to live by its principles. He also warned the listeners that the wealth God has bestowed on them is to be used for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ and not for selfish purposes. Rev. Peters also noted that

The chugging steam engine was an appropriate finale to the parade. Times Photo.



his listeners should remember the choice of their parents in coming to Canada. Many of the natives of Blumenfeld are scattered beyond the borders of Canada. "I ask myself, Are they living the faith instilled in them by their parents? Will they one day be able to say with Timothy: "I have kept the faith?" Rev. Peters closed with the thought, "We live in troubled times but they are happy ones."

Rev. Jake Friesen of Gladstone commended the community for the centennial celebration which took effort, work and community spirit to make it a reality. He based his address on Deut. 8:6. He said that the instructions contained therein have an important lesson for us as well as for the children of Israel. In Canada there are many cairns and monuments erected to perpetuate a memory. "I believe the best that we can offer to the memory of our parents and forebears is to live by the Christian principles and ethics they have instilled in us."

Rev. Frank F. Enns, former teacher minister of the Glenlea Mennonite Church, brought a message in High German. He used Psalm 106 for his theme. He noted that no general catastrophe had befallen the village of Blumenfeld in its 100 years. He urged all to look into the future with thanksgiving.

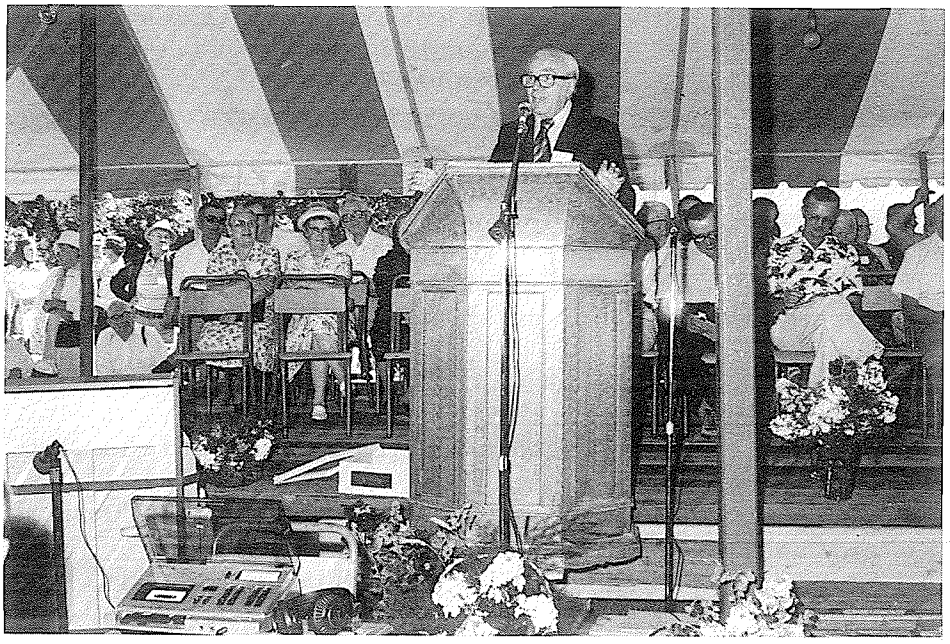
After the Sunday dinner, there was ample time for visiting, meeting with friends and listening to music provided by senior citizens.

A free *Faspa* was provided by the hosts by way of a thank you for attending and helping to make the event a happy one.

For those who attended from nearby centres and all who had come from Kansas, North Dakota, Saskatchewan, Ontario, northern Manitoba and other places, this weekend will be recalled as a happy memory when they helped Blumenfeld celebrate its centeniary and also its entry into a second century of history.



Guests of honor lined the platform under the shade of the tent. They are Harry Enns at the podium, and seated, L-R: Arnold Brown, M.L.A.; Jack Murta, M.P.; H. F. Wiebe, Mayor of Winkler; D. A. Fehr, Mayor of Morden; Ed Elias; Art Warkentine, Reeve; and Abe Enns. Times Photo.



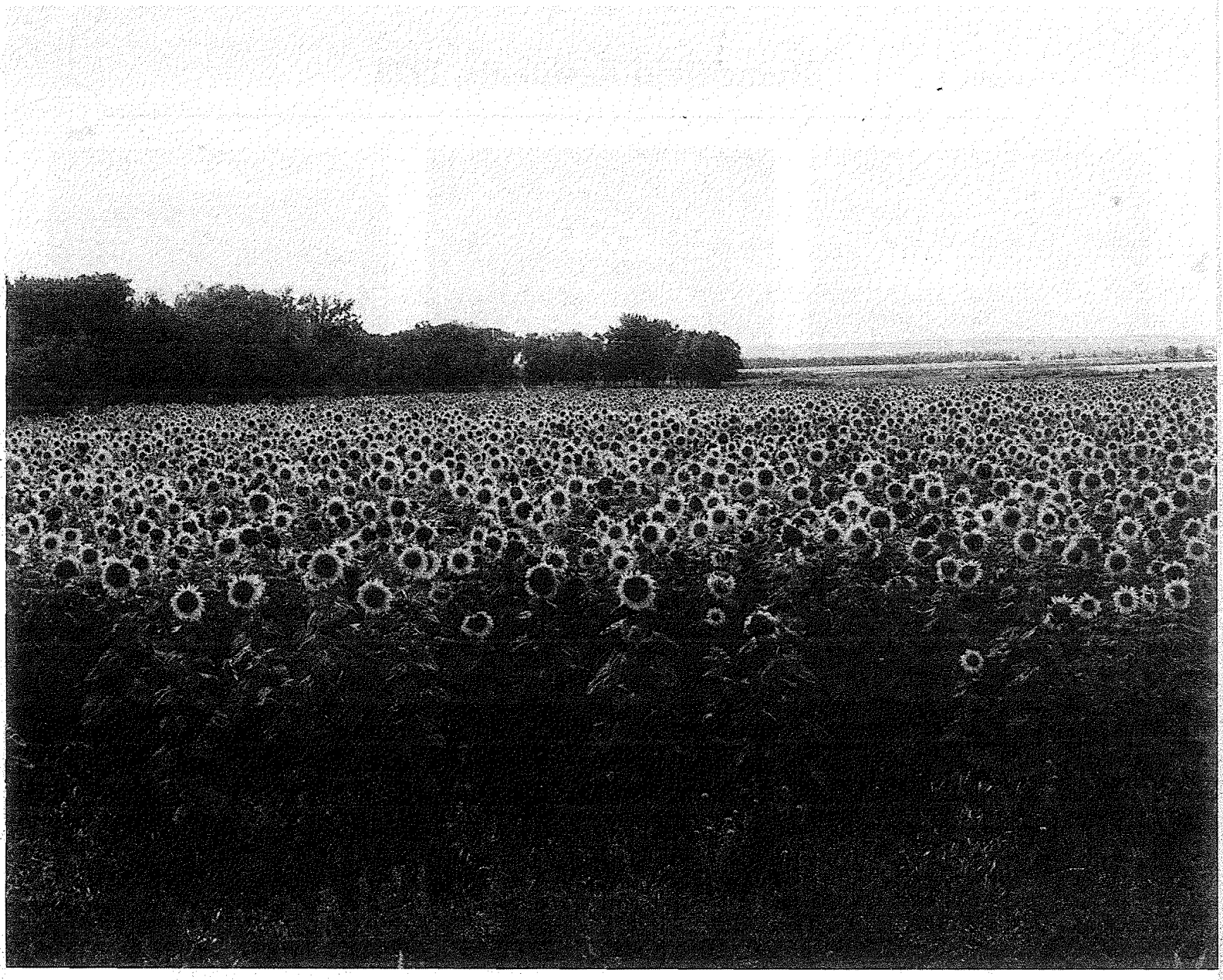
Dr. C. W. Wiebe, fondly remembered for assisting in the delivery of most of Blumenfeld's babies in the last half century, delivered a rousing speech in which he thanked the community for its contributions to Winkler area health services. Times Photo.



The women of the community treat the men to a barbecue every spring. After the harvest is completed, the men provide a catered fall supper for the women.

Do You Remember?

* When you could get a haircut for 30¢ at the village store?
* The Sunday in July 1947 when a group went to Winnipeg by bus to tour the park?
* When a nickel bought a double-decker ice-cream cone? On hot summer evenings, the store was open until midnight for all ice-cream lovers.
* When three bearded men returned from a winter's work in the logging camp?
* When 46 shovels opened the village street in the spring of 1949 and P. F. Klassen ordered a free drink for everyone?
* Going to the circus in Morden?
* *Trajch-Moaka* Unrah in Hochfeld?
* When the sugar shortage in 1950 raised the price of chocolate bars to 7¢?
* Jack McKinnitt driving into Blumenfeld to buy cattle or feed? *Vieh-Tjeipa McKinnitt* was an *Englanda* who spoke Low-German.
* The Farmers' Union Meetings in 1952?
* The treat of bought bread and bologna for Sundays?
* When hydro came into the village in 1950?
* Why Mennonites switched from voting Liberal to voting Conservative?
* The TB X-ray units? The polio and diphtheria vaccinations? Ouch!
* When the village pasture was divided in 1959?
* The first films shown in our school by teachers and implement-dealers?
* The signs of spring: a crocus and the song of the meadowlark?
* Getting dial telephone in 1964?
* Attending the Brown Shirt Meeting which propounded a Socialist-Nazi philosophy?
* Why the school doesn't have a Christmas tree at the Christmas program?
* Smoking in the vacant basement that later became the Old Colony Church?



Appendix A

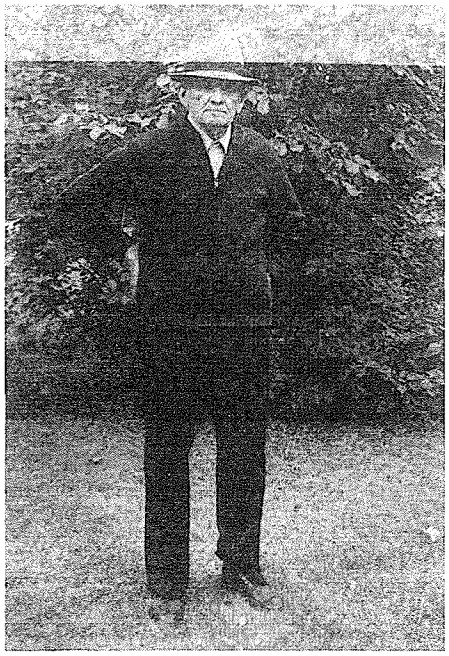
Blumenfeld Residents, 1978



John and Ann (Penner) Goertzen.



Isaac and Tina (Harms) Friesen and son.



Peter Elias.



Diedrich and Margaret (Neufeld) Klassen.



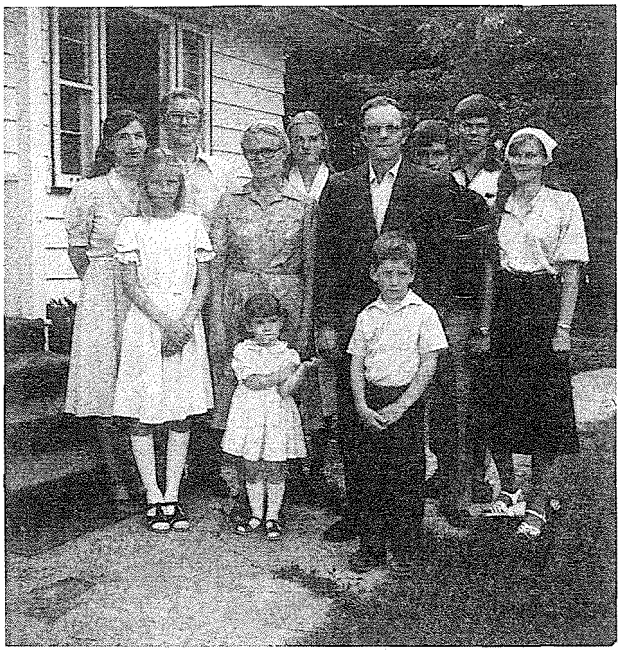
Henry and Mary (Derksen) Elias with daughters, Deb, Wendy, Tammy and Rachel.



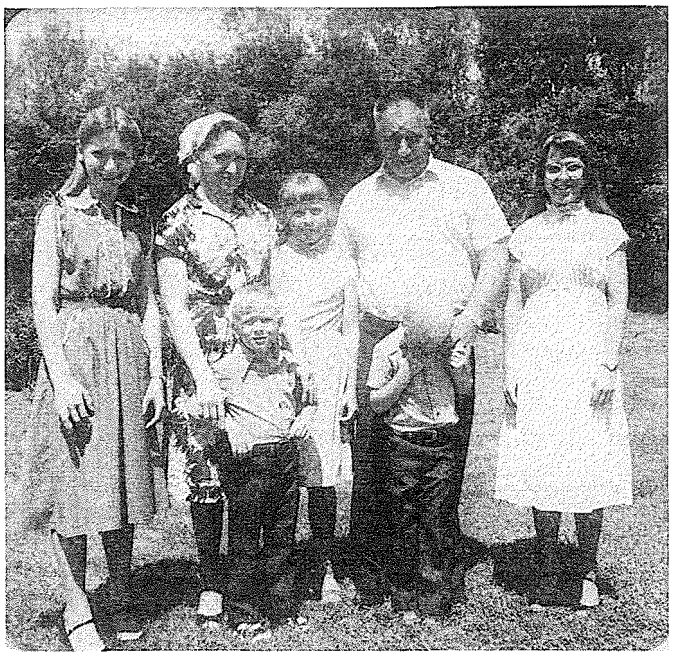
John and Anne (Wiebe) Klassen and family.



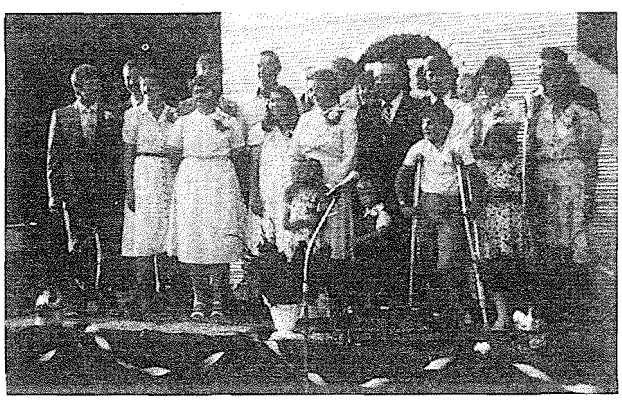
John and Mary (Reimer) Elias and family.



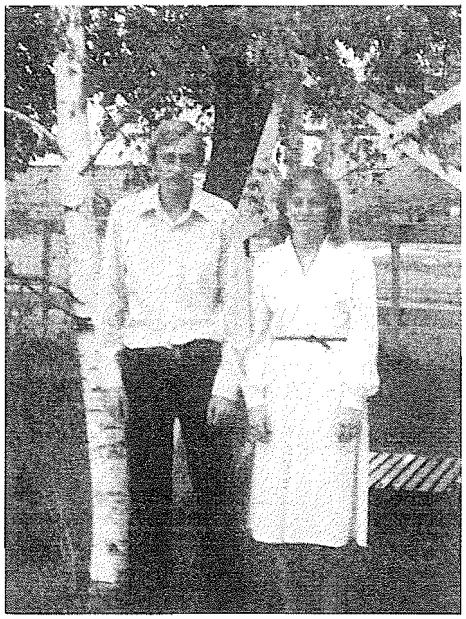
Peter and Mary (Wiebe) Elias and family.



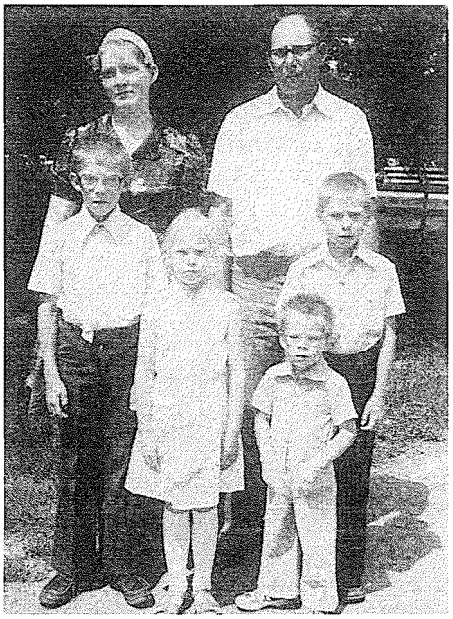
George and Nettie (Braun) Heide and family.



Jacob D. and Tina Klassen and family.



Isaac and Tina (Janzen) Klassen.



William and Tina (Elias) Reimer.



Elizabeth (Hiebert) Klassen.

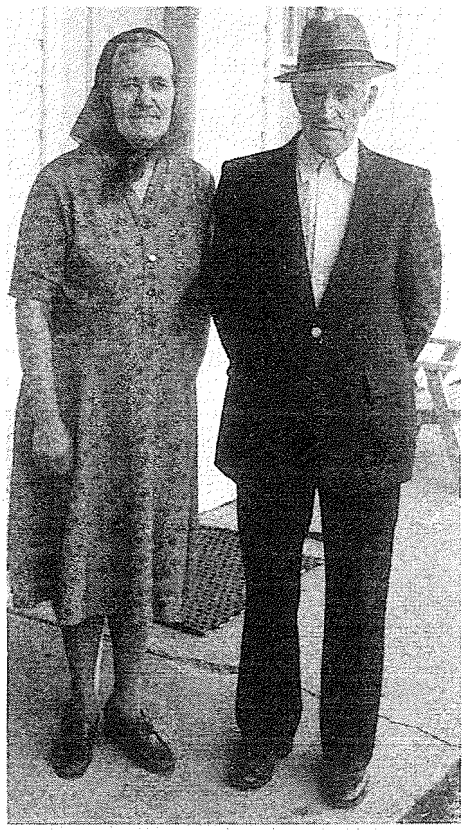


Anne Reimer and Mrs. Anne (Klassen) Reimer.



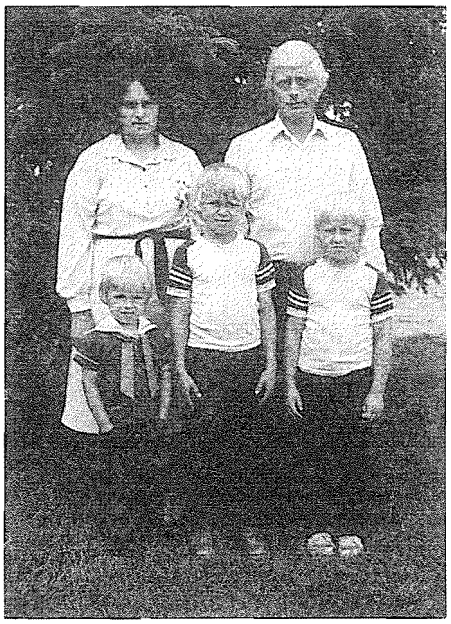
Anne Elias.

Mr. and Mrs. Peter A. Janzen.

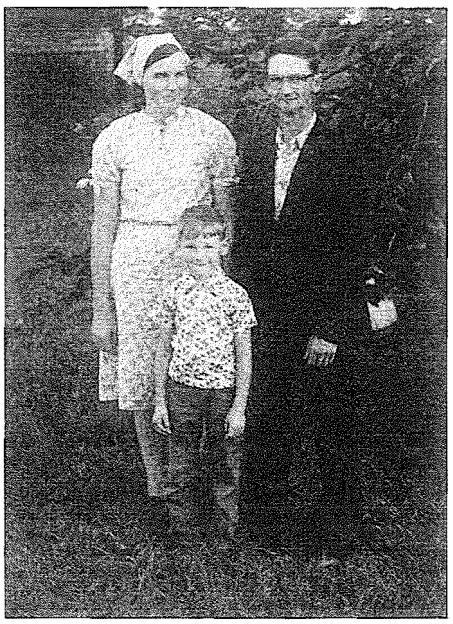




George and Margaret (Wieler) Zacharias.



Jake and Nettie (Reimer) Friesen and family.



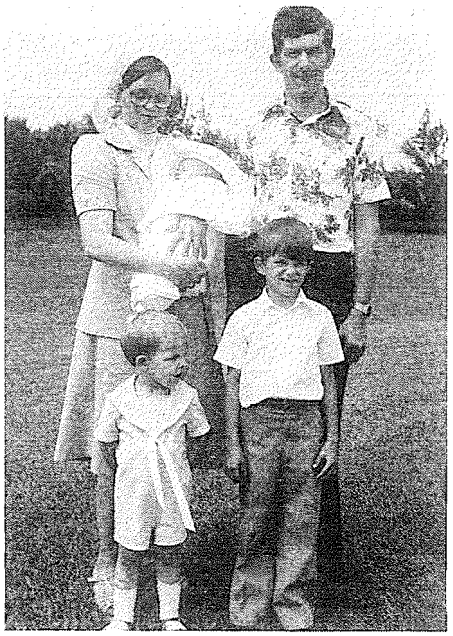
Henry and Tina (Wieler) Wiebe and son.

Peter and Mary Schmidt.

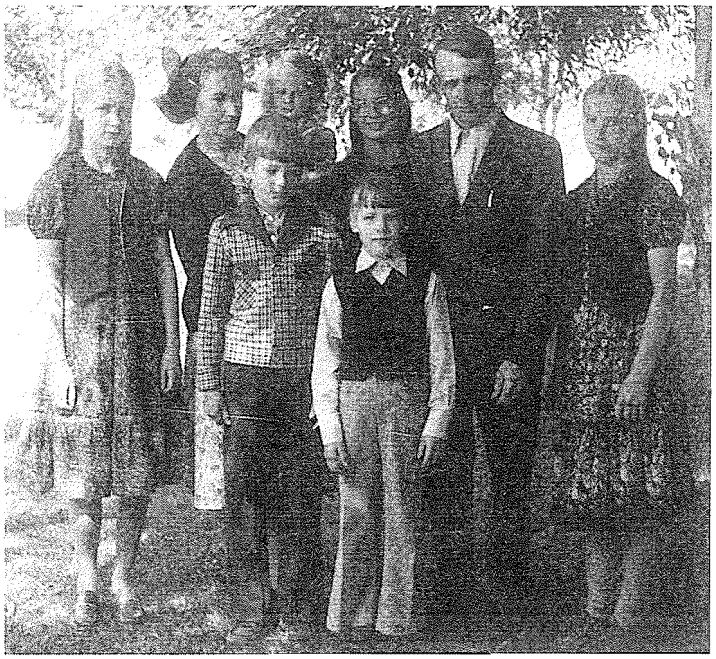




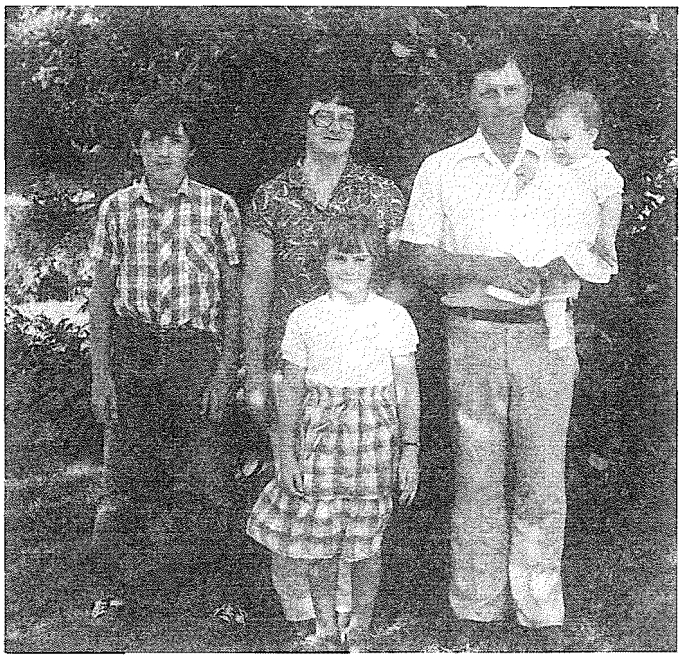
Anne (Thiessen) Wiebe.



Jake and Helen (Penner) Elias and family.



George and Sarah (Enns) Elias and family.



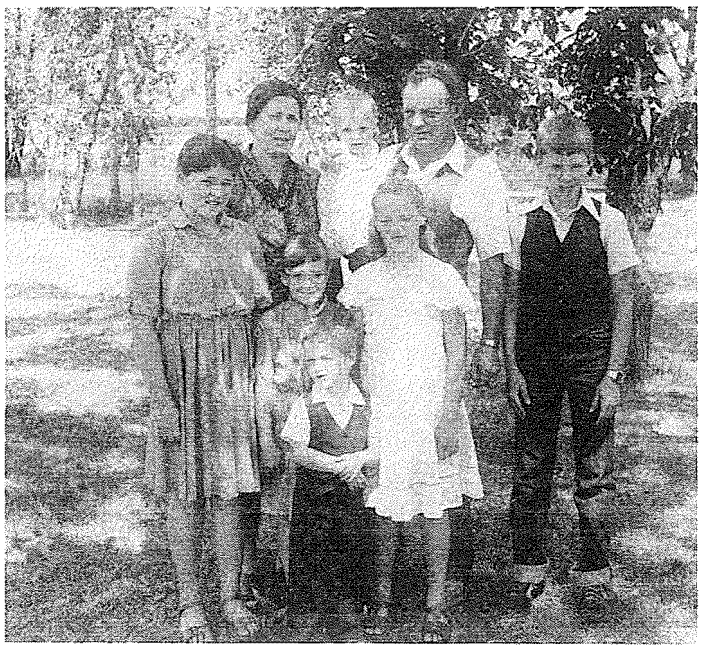
William and Hilda (Thiessen) Fehr and family.



Peter J. and Eva (Hildebrandt) Klassen and family.



Isaac and Helen (Letkeman) Wolfe and family.



Jake and Margaret (Suderman) Friesen and family.



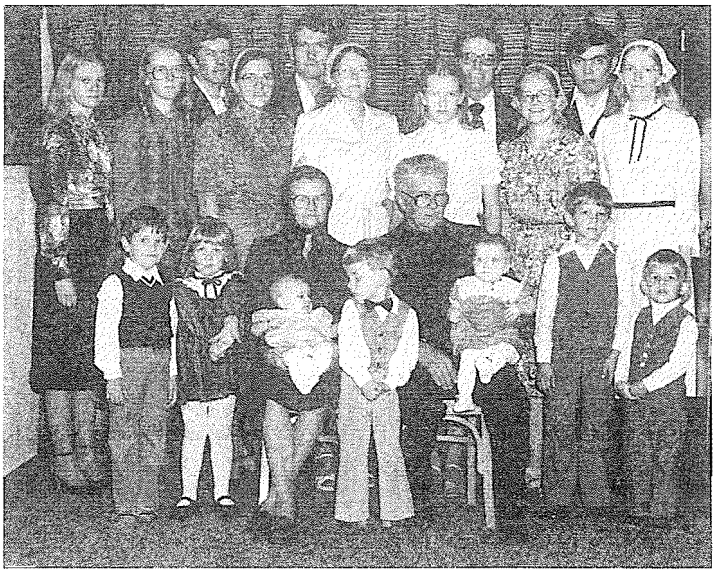
Jakob and Agnes (Sawatzky) Thiessen.



Cornie and Anne (Zacharias) Dyck and family.



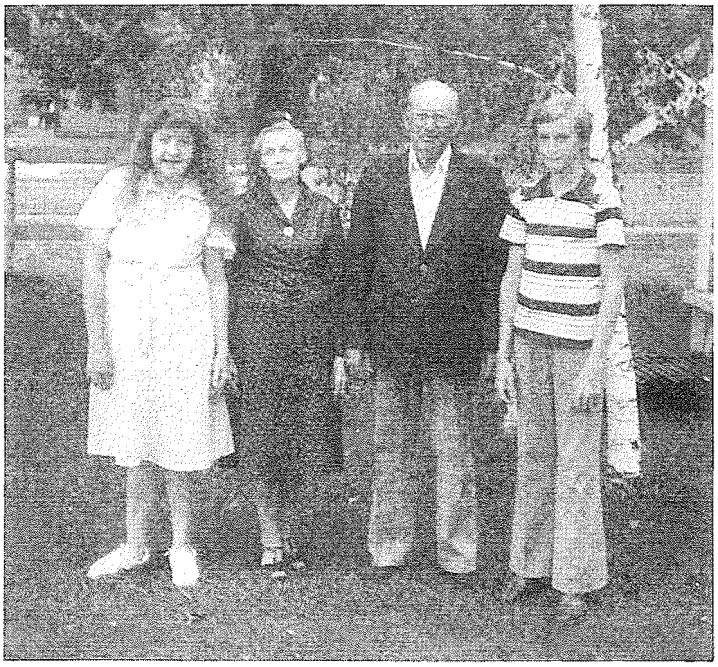
Martin and Helen (Elias) Wiebe and family.



Jacob J. and Susan (Wiebe) Elias and their family: (L-R) back row: Jake Elias, Howard Braun, John Friesen, David Driedger. Middle row: Kathy, Nettie, Helen Elias, Susan Braun, Mary, Anne Friesen, Eva Driedger. Front row: grandchildren with Susan and Jacob J. Elias.



Children of Johann Wolfe: Cornie Wolfe, Mrs. Peter Reimer, Mrs. Isaac Dyck, Mrs. Letkeman, Isaac Wolfe.



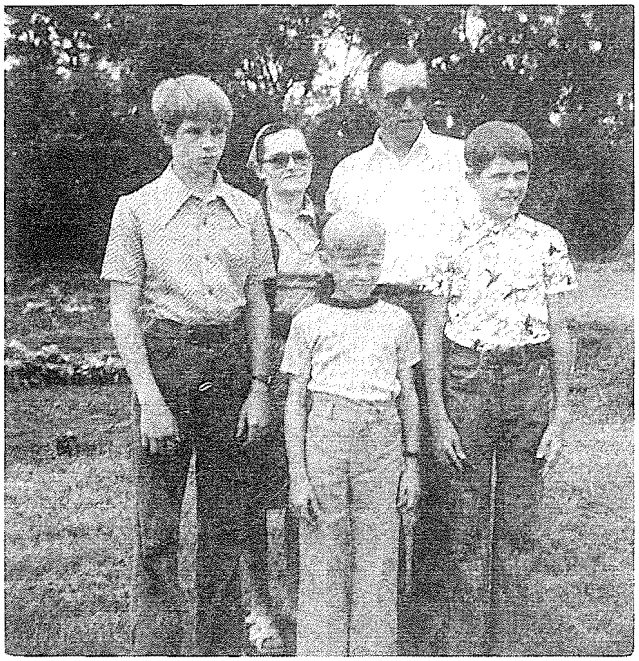
George and Neta (Fehr) Klassen with Barbara and George.



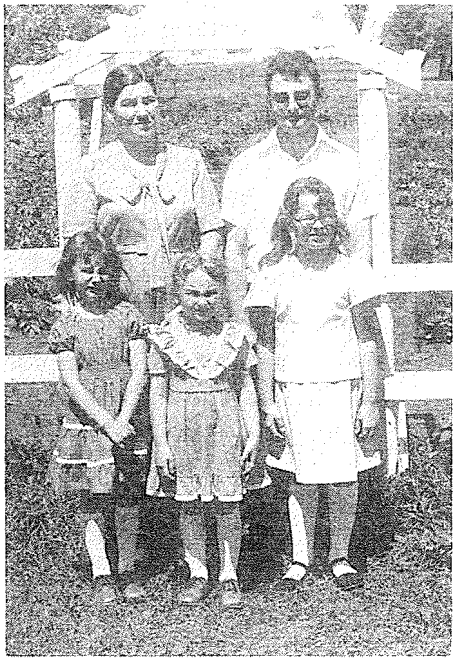
Connie (Sawatsky) and David Goertzen with son, David.



Isaac and Helen (Wiebe) Elias and family.



Jake and Helen (Thiessen) Rempel and family.



Peter and Helen (Schmidt) Fehr and family.

Missing from photos: Henry and Margaret Penner, Pete and Susan Friesen, Mr. and Mrs. Johann Wiebe.



Sarah Elias.

Appendix B

The Depression

by Jake Elias

The decade, 1929 to 1939, is vivid in the mind of each person who lived through them, including the people of Blumenfeld.

My father, Jacob P. Elias spent most of these years in the village and his experiences at that time affected his outlook on life ever afterwards.

Variously known as "the dirty thirties" and "the great depression", these years spelled hardship for everyone. Only the few fortunates who entered the time with a great deal of cash and no debts outstanding were able to come through unscathed.

During the 1920's, all parts of North America had been prosperous. This included the Pembina Triangle, and the village of Blumenfeld. Crops had been good. Markets were steady. For anyone willing to work for a living, there were opportunities everywhere. Government handouts were virtually unknown, because there was no need for them.

Then came the great stock market crash in New York in 1929. It was only the first of many disasters that would eventually reduce the standards of living to a fraction of their former levels all across the world, but especially in areas such as Blumenfeld, where the standards had so much father to fall before reaching rock bottom. Perhaps of even greater consequence than the market crash were the reduction of trade around the world, which resulted in ever shrinking markets for the foods produced in the village, and the severe drought, which threatened even the production of the crops.

In my father's opinion, the outward changes that occurred in his life in the 1930's were probably not as severe as those affecting his inner life; his attitude towards his country; towards big business; governments at all levels; and himself. He not only lost confidence in the many institutions that affected his life, but also in life itself, to a degree. Many people have told me they had the same experiences.

Yet not everything was doom and gloom for these years. Life went on in Blumenfeld as everywhere else, and the people forced to put up with the adversities had no choice but to make the best of things.

Since hard work was no longer any guarantee of success, people had to rely more and more on their wits to cope with the daily problems of life. This resulted in many novel ways of "beating the system".

Worst off at that time was anybody with outstanding debt, since there was so little opportunity to earn any hard cash. But staying out of debt was also very difficult to manage. Therefore a visit from the sherriff at Morden was always a cause for alarm in the village.

A Blumenfeld farmer, whose name I was unable to determine, for example, had bought a car — a Chevrolet — on credit. When the payment became due, he did not have the necessary cash. The seller did not want to extend the time necessary. What to do? He saved his car by using a law that most people had never even heard of. The law stated that its officers, such as police and sherriffs, could not disturb a

hen roosting on eggs. The farmer simply parked the car in his barn, and surrounded it with hens on nests. When the sherriff came, he was forced to leave empty handed, although he vowed to come back when the eggs hatched. However, he was spared the second trip, because the farmer had already paid the debt.

Another Blumenfeld farmer, faced with eminent foreclosure of a land mortgage, faked mental illness when law officers came onto his property. Again, the stall worked, and he was able to save his means of making a living.

Since the usual sources of cash had mostly dried up with the weather, people turned to various small enterprises to make ends meet. Eggs were a common way of getting a few extra dollars in Blumenfeld.

The route for marketing them started at the Blumenfeld store, run at that time by my uncle, Jacob Neufeld. From there they were delivered either to Haskett or Winkler. Eggs at the local store also became a medium of exchange, and were often traded for tobacco, and other small purchases.

Mr. Neufeld's store operation became a focal point of the community's operations. His transportation — an old truck in summer, and a horse-drawn sleigh in winter — were the main links with the outside world. Cars were not uncommon in the village by this time, but the cost of gasoline made even warm weather driving too expensive for many. It was often easier to pay for taxi service occasionally than to keep a car operational.

Transportation during the winter months often turned out to be a nightmare. The roads were "maintained" only by the people who used them. Since no car would have been able to drive on them from the middle of winter to after breakup in spring, the job was left to horses. The driver often had to get out of the sleigh and walk alongside it to avoid freezing. Mr. Neufeld made the trip to Winkler each Tuesday, and at least one weekly trip to Haskett to pick up the village mail. His earnings for a winter's work — a few hundred dollars!

Still, he did have regular work and a steady income. Many others were not as fortunate.

The threshing rigs also employed a few people each fall. Although most workers came from the farms being threshed (i.e. the "Company"), many hired an extra hand or two. Work was hard from sunup to sundown, if it did not rain, and the pay — $15.00 a month. But, the food was free and plentiful, and income tax was not a worry.

Another source of temporary employment was the local municipality. The local government was almost as badly off as its citizens, since its only source of funds was taxes — unpaid taxes in many cases. How to allow farmers to pay off their debts without involving cash? The solution was to rebuild the road from Winkler to Plum Coulee using "volunteer" labourers. The farmer was credited $1.75 a day against his outstanding debt. As soon as his debt with the municipality was cleared, he was "fired" and replaced with another debtor.

Especially in dire straits were farm hands, employees of the landowners. During the winter months there was barely enough work for the farmer, and few people could afford to feed an extra mouth until spring. The provincial government finally agreed to allow $5.00 a month for room and boarding these workers. This not only solved the problem but was used as a source of income by many poor families.

Welfare, or relief as it was then called, was something largely invented in the 1930's. It was an absolute necessity, and the governments involved treated it as such, making certain that no one would get more than the barest essentials. Food relief was the responsibility of the municipality, and to be eligible for it any person in the village had to convince his elected councillor that he needed it. If he passed this hurdle, he would be given a bag of flour — the only food that was dispensed.

A farmer from neighbouring Hochfeld, several miles away, walked to Blumenfeld, picked up his 100-pound bag, and carried it home on his back. He had no choice; he had no other transportation.

Governments were slightly less stingy when it came to helping the farmer maintain his operation. Seed grain was available to anyone with the ground to put it in, although it had to be repaid in fall. And grasshopper poison was free.

Grasshoppers! People who lived through this time in Blumenfeld talk about the subject with passion.

The hopper plague lasted for only three years, but during that short time they brought farming operations to a near standstill. They came to southern Manitoba from Saskatchewan in such numbers that they blackened the sky. Once on the ground, they destroyed anything that could possibly be eaten.

The individual farmer stood by helplessly, and the government nearly so. Poison was available free, but the farmer had to take delivery and do the spreading himself. It was usually done by hand, from the back of a large wagon. It only slowed the insects down a little; it was impossible to stop them.

The depression also slowed down the rate of mechanization of farming in Blumenfeld. The steam threshing rigs of the 1920's had been mostly replaced with gasoline and distillate tractors and smaller harvesting machines by this time. Tractors were also becoming more popular for plowing and other land uses.

But the old work horse, still not replaced entirely at this time, again proved his worth. Horses needed only the hay and feed off the land, which in many cases could not be marketed in any case. The horse became so valuable that he always got first class treatment. The farmer would feed and water his livestock before going to eat himself, and the horse's fodder was sometime better than that which was on the dining table.

Livestock in the barn also provided another necessity as time wore on. Most houses were heated with coal or wood as the decade began, but coal became too expensive and the village's supply of wood from the Pembina Hills began to run out. Fortunately, the answer was right there in the barn: manure, when bricked and dried during the summer months, was enough in many cases to heat the home all winter.

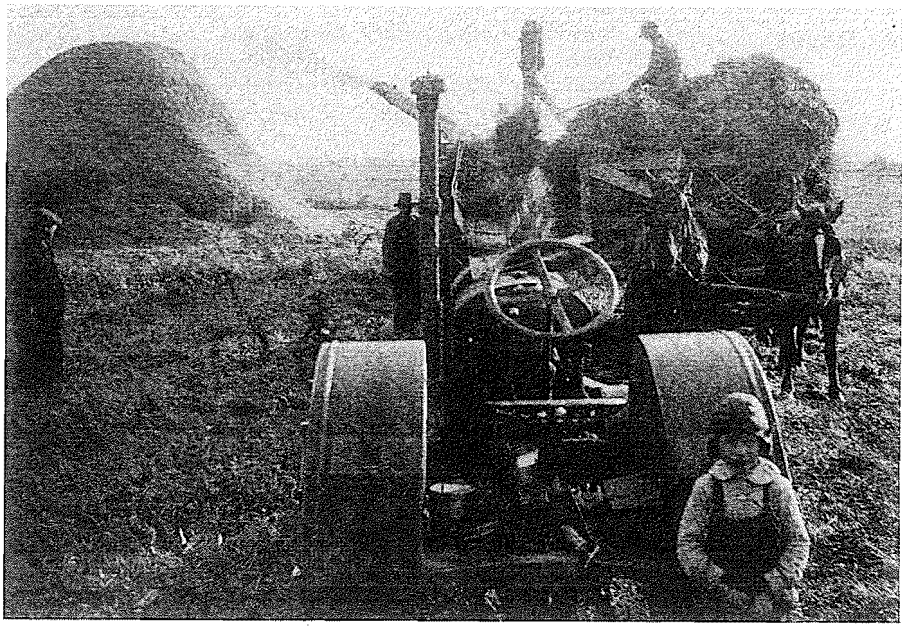
The new (or rather revived) manure industry also held some benefits for the young boys in the community. The bricks were usually made in the hottest and driest part of the year — threshing time. Since the farmer and his family could not afford the time, local boys were hired for this job. The rate of pay was 15 cents a day.

Better paying jobs were hard to find anywhere, by anyone. But there were always people willing to try, and many a young man from Blumenfeld left to do better elsewhere. Most did not, and eventually came back home with little to show for their efforts.

Two men who had gone this route and were coming back home when they reached the village of La Riviere, west of Morden, hungry and tired. They had to get some food, but they had absolutely no money. In desperation, one caught a large fly with his hands, and they entered the local cafe and ordered a meal. Having finished it, they put the fly into the soup bowl, and refused to pay, claiming the place was unsanitary. They were thrown out, but their stomachs had been filled.

Even at the worst of times, however, the village of Blumenfeld probably fared better than many other places in North America. The Mennonite pioneer tradition was alive and well during the 1930's, just as it had been when the village was first settled a mere 55 years earlier. Even though food was sometimes scarce, and not always the finest, no one starved to death. No one in the village had to resort to stealing to feed himself or his family. The church, as was its tradition, helped any person who had no other means.

Social life in the community was perhaps better than it is in prosperous times. Radio was still a luxury, and television a distant dream. Trips were too luxurious, so people had to socialize with each other, and that they did.



By the late thirties, the gasoline tractor began replacing the steam engine as the work-horse of the threshing season. The outfit belonged to Peter F. Klassen, far left.

Footnotes

In Search of a Homeland **Chapter 1**

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43. authors' survey conducted by the students of Blumenfeld School, 1981.

Building a Community **Chapter 3**

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48. Interview with John P. Klassen.

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Working the Land **Chapter 5**

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13. Interview with Peter P. Elias, Blumenfeld.
14. Warkentin, *op.cit.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 315.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
19. *Reinland Gemeindebuch.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Warkentin, *op.cit.*, p. 303.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
23. Interview with Peter P. Elias, Blumenfeld.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Warkentin, *op.cit.*, p. 131.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 324.
29. Data from authors' survey of Blumenfeld district, 1980.
30. Warkentin, *op.cit.*, p. 338.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 326.
32. Interview with Jim Hamm, Winnipeg.
33. Warkentin, *op.cit.*, p. 337.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
35. Ibid., p. 348.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Serving The People **Chapter 6**

1. Zacharias, *op.cit.*, p. 139.

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1. Francis, *op.cit.*, p. 271.
2. interview with Susan Fehr.
3. Francis, *op.cit.*, p. 277.

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