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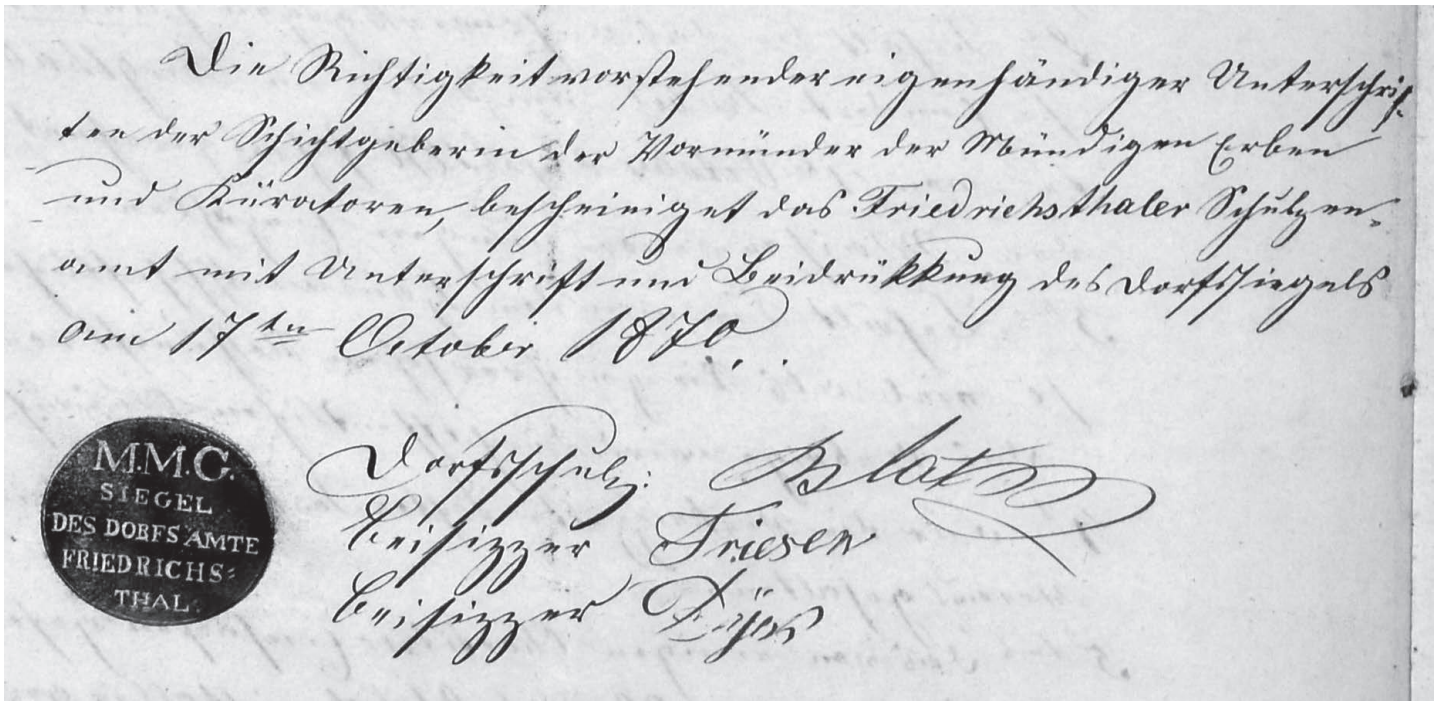
Mennonite Historian

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA



The Friedrichsthal village seal (bottom left) has survived primarily in *Teilungs Kontrakt* ledgers (estate settlement agreements) like this one. In the presence of the estate heirs, the surviving spouse, the guardians, the trustees, and the representatives of the village administration or sometimes the *Waisenamt Vorsteher* (director/administrator), the stipulations of the estate settlement agreement were read, witnessed, signed, and stamped with the village seal. MMG stands for *Mariupoler Mennoniten Gemeinde*, the regional name for the five villages in the Bergthal Colony in Ukraine. *Siegel des Dorfs Amte Friedrichsthal* means "Seal of the village office of Friedrichsthal." The above text is the certification paragraph at the end of an estate agreement dated 17 October 1870 and signed by *Dorfs-Schulz* (mayor) Daniel Blatz, *Beisitzer* (assistant) Peter Friesen, and *Beisitzer* Heinrich Dyck. The story of Friedrichsthal, the last Bergthal Colony village, starts on page 2. Photo credit: Ernest N. Braun.

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Friedrichsthal: Last Village of the Bergthal Colony: Part 1 of 2

by Ernest N. Braun[1]

In 1973, on the centenary of the arrival of the Mennonite delegates from the Bergthal Colony in the newly created province of Manitoba, the late William Schroeder published a book called *The Bergthal Colony*.[2] It is a measure of how dim the memory of that settlement in Ukraine was in 1973 to know that its very geographic location had been lost. This Colony is one of very few instances where an entire Mennonite colony (five villages) emptied of all Mennonite presence within a few years in the 1870s and, unlike Chortitza or the Molotschna where Mennonites lived at least until WWII, very little was published about it in Mennonite circles until 100 years later.

That same year, 1973, the last remaining Mennonite born in the Bergthal Colony, Heinrich D. Penner (my second cousin several times removed), died at age 101. The entire Bergthal Colony emigrated from Ukraine (then known as southern Russia) *en mass* in the years 1874–1876 and settled in America, principally Manitoba, but also in parts of the USA. Of the more than 500 Bergthal families that sold their properties, only 21 did not emigrate, each for different reasons.[3] Since then, many large groups of refugees have left their home countries, usually under duress, but the Bergthal Colony is still a singularly important example of a voluntary emigration of a complete people group in modern history.

After years of research and futile inquiries, in a final effort to locate the village of his ancestors, William Schroeder contacted the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Fortunately, the Library did have maps of that Colony, which gave the names of the five villages in Russian. Schroeder dates the maps to 1867, just nine years before the last Mennonites left the area. These maps had been seized by German agents after German forces had occupied parts of the Soviet Union and were taken back to Germany. Then after the end of WWII, the American forces in turn captured a wide range of documents in Germany. Many of these, including the Bergthal maps, were taken back to the United States and microfilmed for deposition in libraries and archives, among them the Library of Congress. Four of the maps were at some point stitched together to form a composite picture of the Bergthal Colony in 1867. These are the maps on which most Bergthal Colony maps are based.

Geography and location

As Schroeder points out in his book, the land for this new colony in the Mariupol area west of the Sea of Azov had originally been reserved in 1817 by the Russian government for a Jewish agricultural colony, but not all the land was taken up. Consequently, in 1833, the remaining land was offered to the Chortitza Colony for its landless population. The tract was about 25,800 acres (about 9,540 desiatin, various spellings) or about 40 sections, somewhat larger than a township in western Canada, which is about 23,040 acres (36 sections).[4]

The assignment of land for a new colony was a welcome and timely opportunity for the large, landless population of Chortitza, but a severe drought, cattle pests, and disease that year (1833 was called the "black year"[5]) postponed any new settlement until 1836, when the first village, Bergthal (2,080 des.), was founded. Three more villages followed, one per year: Schönfeld in 1837 (1,625 des.), Schönthal in 1838 (2,015 des.), and Heuboden in 1839 (1,820 des.) taking up about 7,540 desiatin and leaving over 1,950 desiatin undeveloped.[6] The district was formally known as the Mariupol[er] Mennonite Colony, but, in Mennonite circles and later in hindsight, it was referred to as the Bergthal Colony after its principal village, and its 1870s emigrants were known as Bergthalers. Only later in Manitoba would the name Bergthaler begin to mean something else, notably on the West Reserve and then in Saskatchewan where it referred to a particular Mennonite denomination.

In 1848, a series of historical reports was compiled by the village *Schulzen* of all the Mennonite and German villages of southern Russia. Many years later, the *Odessaer Zeitung* published the reports, including the ones for the Bergthal Colony, and, in 1941, Margarete Woltner republished them in a book, *Die Gemeinde Berichte von 1848 der Deutsche Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer*.[7] While the reports cover the origins and circumstances of these first four villages, they do not address an obvious question: what happened to the remaining 1,952.5 desiatin (5,271 acres) still vacant?[8] Hence, the subject of this article.

In fact, in 1852, a fifth village was finally established and oddly enough named Friedrichsthal. An explanation for the 13-year hiatus in settlement has not been provided to my knowledge, but it may be attributable to several factors. First, in 1847, the government body overseeing the foreign settlers in southern Russia, the *Fürsorgekomitee* (hereinafter Guardianship Committee[9]), opened settlement opportunities in the neighbouring Jewish colonies for enterprising Chortitzer Mennonites to serve as "model" farmers for the Jewish settlers.[10] For a time, this attracted a smattering of the landless, but the initiative did not really ameliorate the landless problem. Second, several of the intervening years in the 1840s were difficult, with all the Mennonite colonies experiencing drought, storms, livestock disease, crop failures, and even a gopher plague. An element not as directly affecting Mennonites but preoccupying the authorities in 1848 was the threat of revolution spilling over into Russia from Europe where there was considerable unrest. Third, by this time, Johann Cornies's restrictive policies, already in place in the Molotschna regarding who qualified as a suitable candidate to take up a farm, began to extend to the Chortitza and Bergthal Colonies. For example, with respect to

(cont'd on p. 4)

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Unehelich: Mennonite Genealogy and Illegitimate Births: Part 1 of 3

by Glenn H. Penner <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>

Illegitimate (*Unehelich*) births usually involve a host of social issues that are complex and can be a challenge for the genealogist. If the event happened within living memory, or involved a fairly close relative, such as the parent or grandparent of a living person, the situation could be delicate. Also, over the last few generations, illegitimate births frequently also involved adoptions and/or name changes. For these reasons, I will consider only the situation as it existed about 150 to 350 years ago in the Mennonite communities within Prussia and Russia. Looking back more than 350 years puts us well into the time frame where we have almost no records and when surnames were not necessarily permanent in the Low-German Mennonite population.

All names given in the discussion below are for individuals who died more than 100 years ago. Except for information from DNA analysis, all information provided below is taken from publicly accessible records. Indeed, that is one of the points of this article—to provide information from original documented sources, not unreliable family stories and old-wives tales. Note also that not every Mennonite illegitimate birth scenario can be mentioned in this article.

Before going further, one must mention the different scenarios that could commonly occur: 1) both the man and woman were single and *did* marry each other after the birth of the child, 2) both the man and woman were single and *did not* marry each other, 3) the man was married but the woman was not, 4) the woman was married but the man was not, and 5) both were married to different people. The first case was most common. The couple always intended on marrying and often saw this as justification for pre-marital sex. The second case often happened when one of unmarried people was a non-Mennonite. Cases 4 and 5 were often unreported since the woman was already married and having children within that marriage (see the Jacob Hiebert case below). A variation of 4, and rarer situation, is when a widow gives birth more than nine months after the death of her husband.

Illegitimate births have come to the forefront of genealogical research due to the popularity of DNA testing. Autosomal DNA testing, which is provided by several companies,[1] has shown genetic siblings, half siblings, cousins, etc., that do not fit in the family tree. This test does not provide any kind of definitive information beyond 1st cousins. Extrapolating these DNA results to show that a great-grandparent, or more distant relative, was illegitimate is very difficult and is also not covered here for these reasons. On the other hand, the Y-DNA test, which looks at DNA passed down from father to son, will show clearly if there is a break in the male line of ancestry or relatedness.

There are three common reasons for not having a Y-DNA match between two men with the same surname. The first is adoption. This is often the "fall back" excuse for two such men not having a Y-DNA match. This, however, is an unlikely scenario during the time frame I am considering for two reasons. 1) Mennonites adopted only orphaned Mennonite children. Exceptions to this were exceedingly rare. Only one confirmed example exists.[2] Those stories your relatives told you about some distant ancestor who was a Jewish, Gypsy, Russian, etc., baby adopted by a Mennonite family are nothing more than entertaining stories and should not be taken seriously. 2) When an orphan child was adopted, it kept its original family name.[3] I have yet to find an original document to show otherwise.

The second reason for a non-match is that people with the same surname could be descended from two or more genetically unrelated men who took on the same family name. For example, hundreds of years ago, the families of two unrelated men named Jan could have taken the surname Janzen (or one of its many variations). In such a case, two men from within the same Janzen family will match but two men from different Janzen families (i.e., descended from the two unrelated Jans) will not. This is also true for occupation-derived names such as Schroeder, where there are two distinct unrelated Mennonite Schroeder families, one of Flemish/Dutch origin and one of Frisian/German origin. Unfortunately, these are not always cut-and-dry situations.

The third reason for a non-match in Y-DNA testing is that the male ancestor was simply illegitimate. There are two ways that one can investigate this situation. 1) There may be documentation to back this up. 2) Y-DNA testing of several supposedly related men might confirm this.

Several years ago, a Penner man did a Y-DNA test. His results did not match the other Penner men. His earliest known Penner ancestor was an Abraham Penner, who died in 1907 at the age of 83 years. A considerable amount of research eventually led to an Abraham Penner, born on May 22, 1824, illegitimate son of the unmarried Anna Penner of Klein Mausdorferweide, West Prussia.[4] He is now #1072395 in the GRANDMA database.[5]

In some cases, strategic testing can be used to further investigate when two supposedly related men with the same surname do not match. The Y-DNA results of a male Hiebert descendant of Jacob (1833–1906; GM#185479) did not match the results for the other Hiebert men, including those for a descendant of his own brother, Abraham Hiebert (1823–1902; GM#184697). The latter did, however, match the other Hiebert men. All it took was a test of another descendent of Jacob, through a different son, to show that Jacob Hiebert was not the biological son of Abraham Hiebert (1799–1877; GM #186873). Interestingly, the two descendants of Jacob were Y-DNA matches to the Penner men. This means that Jacob was the biological son of a Penner.

Part 2 will provide more examples of the use of DNA testing and existing records in investigating illegitimate births in Mennonite genealogy. See the September 2021 issue.

Endnotes

1. For more on the Mennonite DNA project, see www.mennonitedna.com and my articles in the following issues of the *Mennonite Historian*: September 2018, December 2018, and June 2019, viewable at https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/.
2. This is Johann Peters (1863–1946), who was known to be an abandoned child taken in by a Bergthal colony Mennonite. See William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony* (Winnipeg: CMBC, 1974), 33–34. His Y-DNA does not match any men of Mennonite background.
3. See my article on Mennonite genealogy and adoptions in the March 2020 *Mennonite Historian*, https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/46.1.MHMar20.pdf
4. Church records of the Evangelical Lutheran congregation of Jungfer, Prussia. LDS microfilms 208168 & 208171.
5. This information comes from the GRANDMA "GM" database, https://www.grandmaonline.org/.

Friedrichsthal

(cont'd from p. 2)

eligibility for settlement in any new area, all "disorderly, indolent, and extremely poor" Mennonites from Chortitza were ineligible; the only ones permitted to settle were those with "sufficient funds and ability to give dependable guarantees that, within a two-year period after their settlement," they would have "completed their dwelling, barn, threshing floor, and fences according to regulations."[11] This rendered most of the landless ineligible.

However, after hardliner Cornies died in 1848, new blood entered the Guardianship Committee. After more than a dozen years, it seems that settling the remaining land in the Colony again became an option, for a new village was opened for settlement.[12] The earliest reference to the fifth village was the notice given in very early 1851, inviting Mennonites to register an interest in the new settlement in the already established Mariupol Bergthal Colony.[13] The Odessa State Archive has preserved a drawing of the colony with the new unnamed settlement clearly marked (see Figure 1: Bergthal Colony Map).

The land block that constituted Friedrichsthal was a long, narrow parcel on the extreme west side of the Bergthal Colony lands. Geographical boundaries enclosed Friedrichsthal lands on two sides—the Karatysh River adjoining Crown land on the west and the Vodina River (literally Водяная or Vodyanaya, various English spellings) on part of the south adjoining Cossack territory. Schönthal lands shown as L-shaped on Colony maps lay to the east and the Bjelowjesher colonists to the north.[14] An advantage for this piece of land was that the *Tschumakerstrasse* from Mariupol ran north right through it about halfway between Friedrichsthal and Schönthal. Now referred to as the Chumak Way, this was the trade route for travelling Ukrainian traders (*Chumaks*) hauling salt, fish, grain, and other goods on heavy, four-wheeled wagons drawn by oxen in long trains to guard against robbers and marauders, a freight system remarkably similar to the Métis freighters on the Crow Wing Trail in Manitoba, one that ran just 8 kilometers west of the Friedrichsthal village in Manitoba.

The land on either side of the Salt Road, as the trail is also known, was very wide to prevent the spread of cattle disease

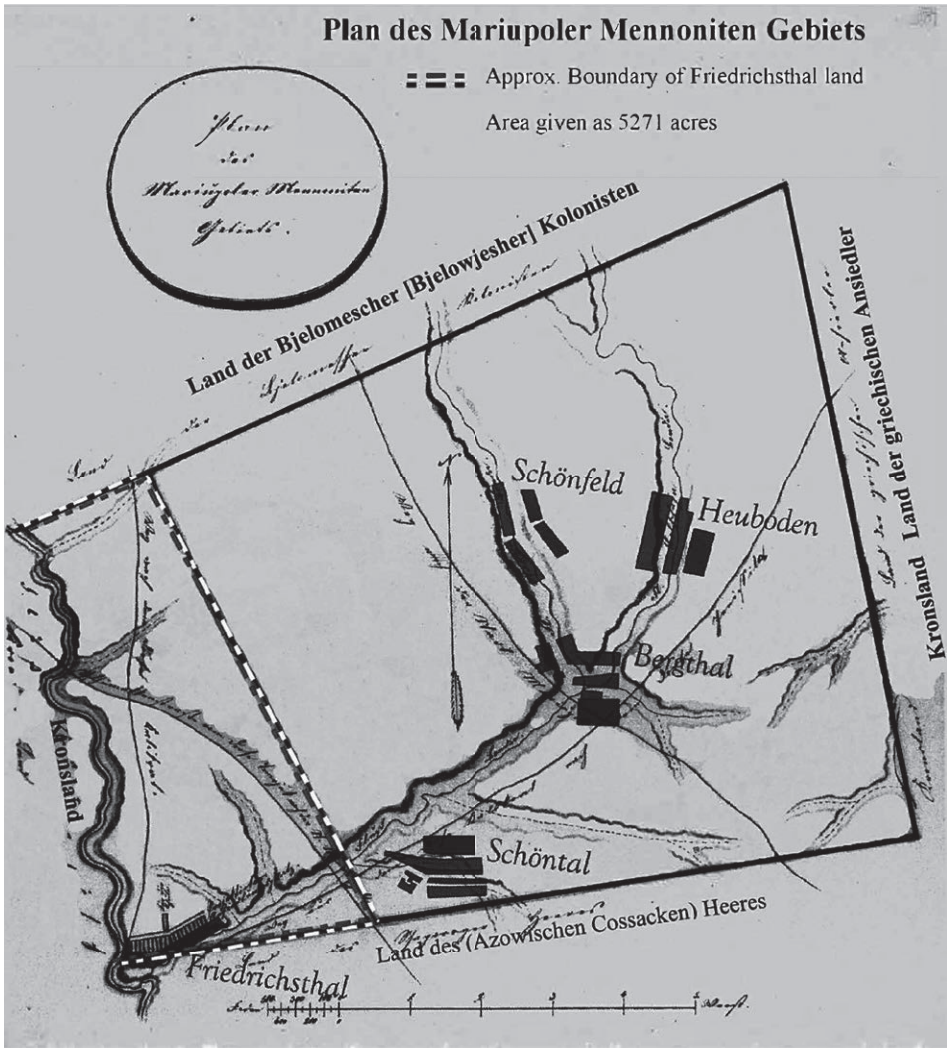


Figure 1: Bergthal Colony Map. ***Projektierter Ansiedlungsplatz*** **"Proposed settlement site" (no names given on original).** Photo credit: The source for this and all five figures used in this article is the Odessa State Archive: Fonds 6, Inventory 3, File 14914. In this map, the village outlines of Schönfeld, Heuboden, Bergthal, and Schöntal, and the names of all five villages were added by Brent Wiebe (Stettler, Alberta). All the figures used in this article are courtesy of Ernest N. Braun, who also digitally enhanced each one.

from the oxen to the local village herds. This land could not be owned by settlers until the land reforms of 1866, when the trail was narrowed to liberate more lands in the various colonies. This land may well have been part of the *unbrauchbares* (unusable) land mentioned in several sources when determining the size of each village's land. Eventually, the *Chumaks* lost out to the railways and became local traders. An entire culture of folk songs, dances, folklore, and traditions arose from the lifestyle of the *Chumaks*[15] (see Figure 2: Friedrichsthal Land Parcel).

The name of the new settlement

Likely at the request of the Guardianship Committee, Peter Friesen of Bergthal drew up a sketch of the area that the new settlement would occupy within the larger Colony. The undated plan shows the boundaries of the settlement, including an unnamed village that follows the template that had evolved during the last decades of Johann Cornies's leadership. A lot plan endorsed by *Oberschulz* Jacob Peters in June 1852 leaves a blank space where the village name would have been inserted.[16] When the village does receive a name a few months later, it is unusual in the annals of Mennonite village names. Only one other Mennonite village has ever had the name Friedrichsthal and that is a later, short-lived village on the Mennonite East Reserve near modern day Kleefeld, Manitoba, founded in 1875 by members of the original Friedrichsthal community.[17]

Most Mennonite village names have obvious origins, usually following the pattern of naming a new place after the village that the settlers came from. In some

cases, the name described the topography, and later names sometimes commemorated previous owners, Russian officials or rulers. Friedrichsthal belongs to the latter type.

A quick look at the contemporary situation might be helpful to explain the Friedrichsthal name. The Molotschna Mennonite community had for years experienced the autocratic policies of Johann Cornies, and, by the mid-1840s, his influence extended into the Chortitza and Bergthal Colonies as well, although not without stout resistance. Even upon his death in 1848, the Mennonite colonies continued to be further frustrated by Eugen von Hahn (1807–1874), a keen supporter of Cornies, his modernization plans, and strict enforcement of policies. Von Hahn served as deputy to the President of the Guardianship Committee from 1841 and as President from 1845 to 1849. At the end of that year, he was promoted to higher office and a new President installed.[18]

The new President, Baron Fedor von Rosen, would become the face of the Guardianship Committee. Officially, his title was Baron Fedor (Fyodor) F. von Rosen and his name in Russian is Федор Фридрихович Розен (Fyodor Fridrikhovich Rosen), but, to all the German and Mennonite colonists, he was known as Friedrich v. Rosen as he was named in his obituary published in February 1854 in *Unterhaltungsblatt*. It appears that it was his role as President that prompted the new name of the settlement that took shape under his leadership, leadership which his obituary lavishly describes in most generous terms.[19] Von Rosen fell sick some time in 1853 and died in February 1854 at the age of 45.[20] When the village was sold to some wealthier neighbouring Ukrainians, the name reverted to the v. Rosen's first name, Fedorivka, which is still used today (Фёдоровка or Fedorovka in Russian).

Origin of settlers

The intent as mentioned in a document from the *Gebietsamt* of Chortitz and Bergthal dated August 14, 1852, was to place 30 families in the new settlement, which at that point was still unnamed.[21] Accordingly, Peter Friesen's drawing, probably created after that memo, shows a village plan with 30 farm lots. This plan was likely a formal one incorporating Cornies's vision for new settlements, since it also provides for *Anwohner* (cottagers without an allotment of land) and woodlots.[22] Another provisional village plan for 18 village lots was extrapolated from the larger Colony plan (*ca*. 1852) and a name assigned, likely the first document to do so. However, it is not dated. This *ad hoc* 18 lot plan may have been promotional or simply designed for the purpose of drawing lots for the first 17 settlers that expressed an interest in moving.

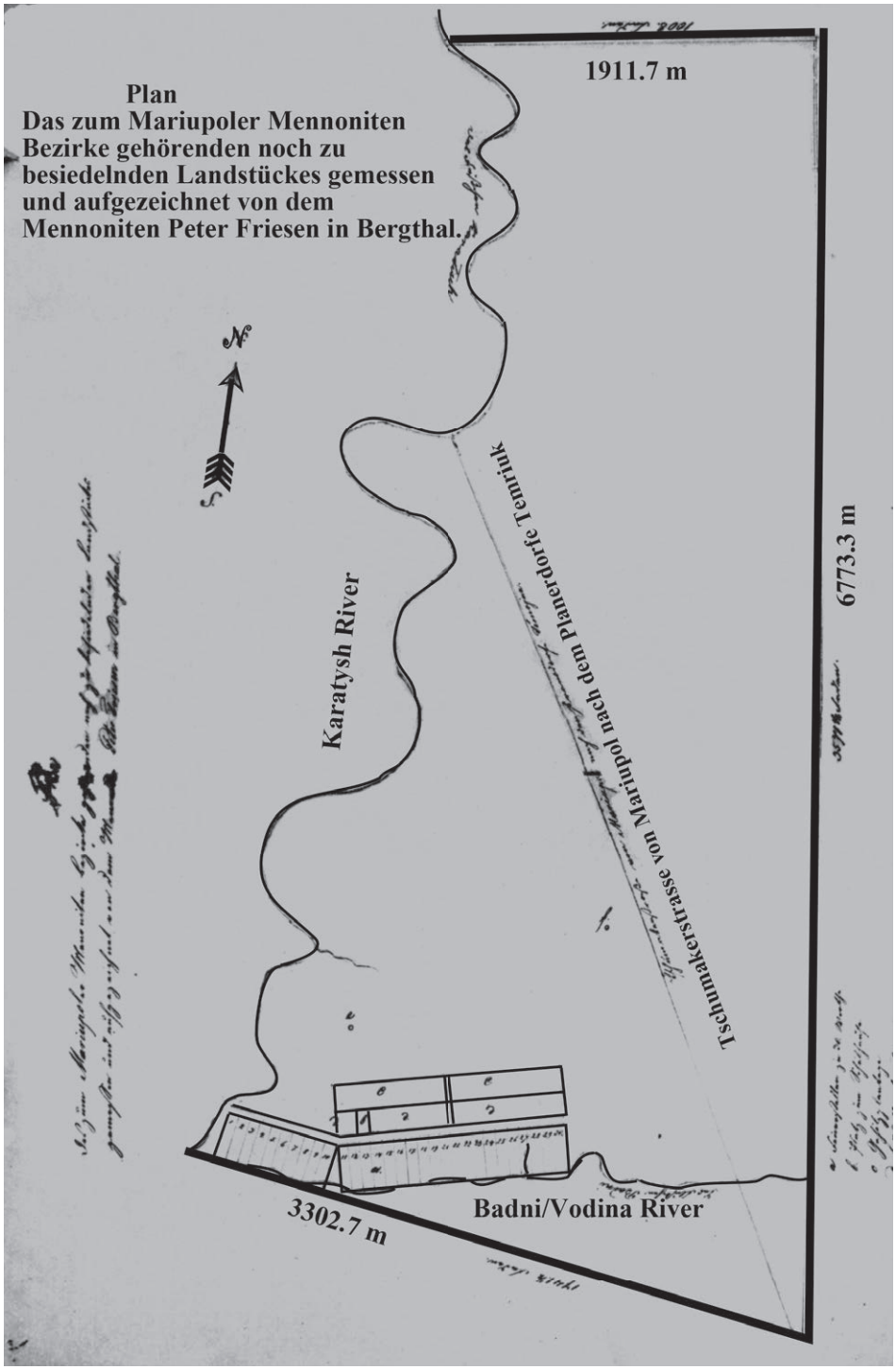


Figure 2: Friedrichsthal Land Parcel.

The earliest list of settlers desiring to settle in the new colony appears to be dated June 1852 and lists 16 family heads (names transliterated into Russian), ten from the Chortitza Colony and six from the other Bergthal villages, with subsequent lists adding one more to make 17 heads of families as the founding settlers.[23] William Schroeder notes that there were 19 original settlers, but there is no contemporary list

(cont'd on p. 8)

Mennonite Heritage Archives

MHA Update

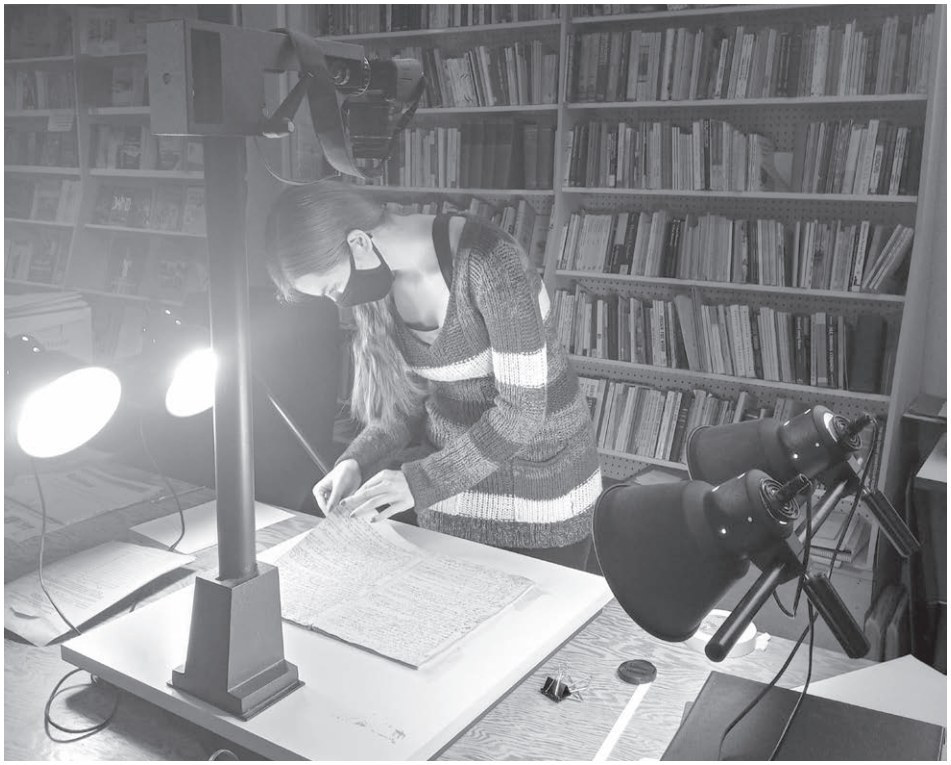
by Conrad Stoesz

The staff at the Mennonite Heritage Archives carry on with their work even as COVID-19 continues to exert significant pressure on our communities. Depending on local health orders, the MHA has been open for researchers by appointment and, at other times, closed except for pick up and drop offs. We have started two digitization projects during the pandemic. Selenna Wolfe began digitizing our collection of 5,000+ audio cassette tapes. Some are getting close to 50 years old and at times need repairs. Digitizing them happens in "real time," meaning that if a tape is 60-minutes long, it takes 60 minutes to digitize. This process preserves the information on the tapes and makes the data easier to access.

The second project is the digitization of the *Steinbach Post*, the oldest Mennonite weekly newspaper founded in Canada (1913). Sara Dyck, a student at Canadian Mennonite University, has been hired to begin this project, which is made possible with funding from the D.F. Plett Research Foundation. With a digital camera mounted on a stand, Sara takes pictures of each page of the newspaper. On the computer, she adjusts the contrast, crops, rotates, and combines the images into a complete issue of the paper. Sara will also be putting her German skills to use by testing a program that can be trained to recognize the German Gothic script print so the *Steinbach Post* will also be word searchable.

Due to COVID restrictions, classes could not visit the archives, but we did host classes virtually. I spoke via video conference to students at four schools: University of Winnipeg about archival research, University of Manitoba regarding the origins of the Mennonite Archival Information Database, Canadian Mennonite University about our medieval Catholic manuscript from Spain, and Westgate Mennonite Collegiate about Canadian conscientious objectors in the Second World War.

People continue to bring us historical materials for preservation, and others contact us for information needed for their various family or community research projects. Staff continue to process materials and create new finding aids for organizations and individual collections, including Westgate Mennonite Colligate, Marta Goertzen-Armin (1923–2009), and Heinrich Heinrichs (1899–1941).



CMU student Sara Dyck takes pictures with an overhead camera. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

Voices from EMC & EMMC

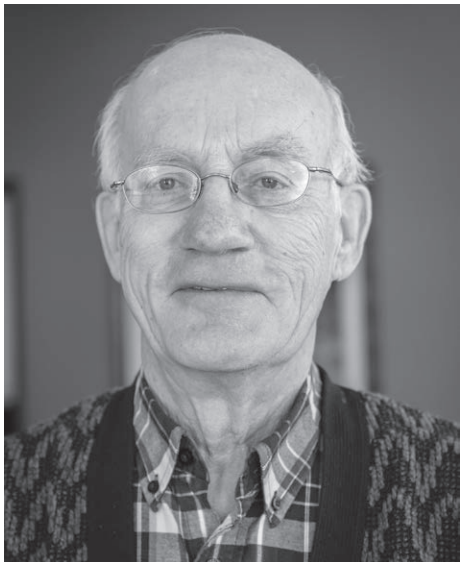
In the early formative steps of the *Rudnerweide Gemeinde*, which later became the EMMC, one of the resolutions of this organization was to support the preaching of the gospel in countries beyond Canada by means of prayer and financial support. Young John Schellenberg (pictured above, *ca.* 1940) felt called to become a missionary to the "regions beyond," as it was termed. He completed his Bible school training, and in time, arrangements were made for him to work under Africa Inland Mission. On June 30, 1940, he was ordained as a missionary at Missionfest in Bergfeld, Manitoba, and left for Kenya in 1942. Schellenberg was the first of many missionaries to be sent out with the prayers and financial support of the EMMC. Text by Lil Goertzen and photo courtesy of Mary Falk Neufeld.

Leona Reimer (pictured here pushing out a vehicle, *ca.* 1946) and her husband John K. were the first missionaries sent out by Steinbach EMC, and the first missionaries serving under Western Gospel Mission, EMC's first formal mission endeavour. John K. and Leona began their ministry in Arabella, Saskatchewan, north of Yorkton, in 1946. Western Gospel Mission would only operate for fifteen years, but in that time would reach into the Saskatchewan communities of Arabella, Danbury, Canora, Kamsack, Weekes, and Wynyard. The work begun by John K. Reimer and Leona would culminate in a church — Arabella Fellowship Chapel officially joined the EMC in 1967, and was folded into Pelly Fellowship Chapel in 1987. Text by Ruth Block and photo credit: MAID EMC D1940-P-01804.

Historical Commission Publishes College History

by Jon Isaak

The Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission's most recent publication is Abe J. Dueck's book, *Mennonite Brethren Bible College: A History of Competing Visions*. The book—released by Kindred Productions in April 2021—documents and assesses the Canadian Mennonite Brethren church's education agenda from 1944 to 1992, a story of competing visions. To purchase your copy, see https://www.kindredproductions.com.



Abe Dueck is academic dean emeritus of Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He was born in Coaldale, Alberta, and studied at various institutions, including MBBC, the University of British Columbia, and Goshen Seminary. In 1971, he received his PhD in religion from Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

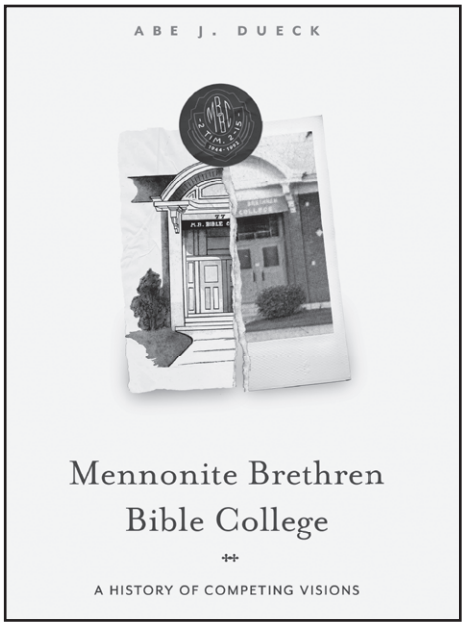
In 2016, Dueck was awarded one of the Historical Commission's MB Studies Project Grants for his research project on the history of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. The focus of his research was the guiding vision of MBBC as it was conceived in the early 1940s and as it evolved and became an issue of intense disagreement and conflict through the years. MBBC was the main program supported by the Canadian Mennonite Brethren conference during the college's existence (1944–1992), and, as such, its story is also in large measure the story of the conference as a whole. The theology, worship, and polity of the conference are reflected in the discussions and the often heated debates that transpired from year to year concerning the nature of the college. Now, five years later, Dueck's research has been published.

The main sources for Dueck's project were the detailed reports and minutes of the college boards or committees (later Board of Higher Education), the proceedings of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, and the administrative and faculty minutes and related documents. In addition to these, he consulted other documentary sources, such as reports in denominational newspapers and magazines, letters, college catalogues, yearbooks of convention proceedings, biographies, and autobiographies.

MBBC was not the end of the story of Mennonite Brethren higher education in Canada. The institutions that followed (Concord College and Canadian Mennonite University) developed in ways that took into account and built on many of the experiences, characteristics, and strengths of the founding colleges, including MBBC.

Dueck taught at MBBC for 23 years and served as academic dean for 15 years. In 1992, he became the director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and later served as the executive secretary of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission for several years. He has published a number of articles in books and academic journals and has edited several books relating to Mennonite and Anabaptist history and theology.

Abe Dueck, one time faculty and academic dean, deserves wide recognition for his courage and candor. His study of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College will be of interest to anyone familiar with the once flag-ship denominational center. As the title implies, throughout its history, the school struggled to find an identity acceptable to its supporting constituency, itself subject to a constantly shifting cultural milieu. Baffling for administrators and faculty alike was finding a healthy balance between theology and liberal arts or conceptualizing an acceptable divide between undergraduate and graduate offerings. Often surfacing in this study is the tension confronting the college in fine-tuning a music culture that would attract constituency approval. Dueck's meticulous study offers not only a compelling narrative of MBBC but also a skillful analysis of the issues that throughout most of its existence threatened the health of the college and ultimately caused its demise (David Giesbrecht, former librarian at Columbia Bible College, Abbottsford, BC).



In this thorough study of MBBC's 48-year history, Abe Dueck reveals the enthusiasm Mennonite Brethren had for education, alongside their almost constant disagreement about what kind of education it should be. This is a story populated by dynamic and influential personalities, robust debate, debilitating tension, but also reminders of God's gracious blessing on the school and of its enormous contribution to the life of the Canadian MB Church (Dora Dueck, author and former *MB Herald* editorial staff, Delta, BC).

Friedrichsthal

(cont'd from p. 5)

that confirms this. A summary list for 1859 by A.A. Klaus does use 19 as number of *Feuerstelle* (village lots), and perhaps that is the origin of the number.[24] In 2009, an article by Tim Janzen mentions that two more names, Anton Fischer and Adam Scheffel, were recently supplied by researcher Andrey Ivanov, but they do not appear in any Friedrichsthal list, Russian or German, or in any census data.[25] It is likely that neither of these non-Mennonite families actually settled in Friedrichsthal, although they appear to have settled nearby. Evidence of that appears in the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference Waisenamt records where Anton Fischer is listed among Friedrichsthal buyers at various auctions in the Bergthal villages in the early 1870s as are other German colonists from the surrounding villages.[26]

By November 20, 1852, a document gives the name of the new settlement as Friedrichsthal and lists 15 family heads from Chortitza and six from other Bergthal villages.[27] A year later, on December 2, 1853, there were 25 family heads registered to vote, including eight from various Bergthal villages (none from Heuboden).[28] By that time, the name Franz Zacharias of Neu-Osterwick had been replaced by Jacob Braun from Kronsthal.[29] A summary statement dated January 8, 1854, notes that voters in Friedrichsthal elected Franz Harder, one of the settlers from Bergthal, as *Beisitzer* (assistant) in the elections.[30] One can identify 25 of those voters from the various lists available in the Odessa files.

The exact date of the physical move to Friedrichsthal for each family has not yet been discovered and may be lost entirely. Suffice it to say that by some time in 1853, there were at least 25 families resident in the village. They moved from both Chortitza (67%) and other Bergthal Colony villages (33%), with some individual families originally coming from the Molotschna Colony. Most were married couples in their 20s and 30s, the exceptions being Abraham Hamm, at 49 (b. 1803), and Friedrich Wall, the second oldest at 44 (b. 1809).

As had been the case for the earlier Bergthal villages, the new settlers were largely *Kleinhäusler-familien*, a fancy word for families that did not own a *Wirtschaft* (established farm) in the home village in Chortitza or other Bergthal villages. They lived in separate allotments on the periphery of the older villages or maybe still with their parents. As the rigorous restrictions regarding eligibility were mitigated by the changes in the Guardianship Committee, poorer and younger families could now express interest in moving and the village began to fill up.

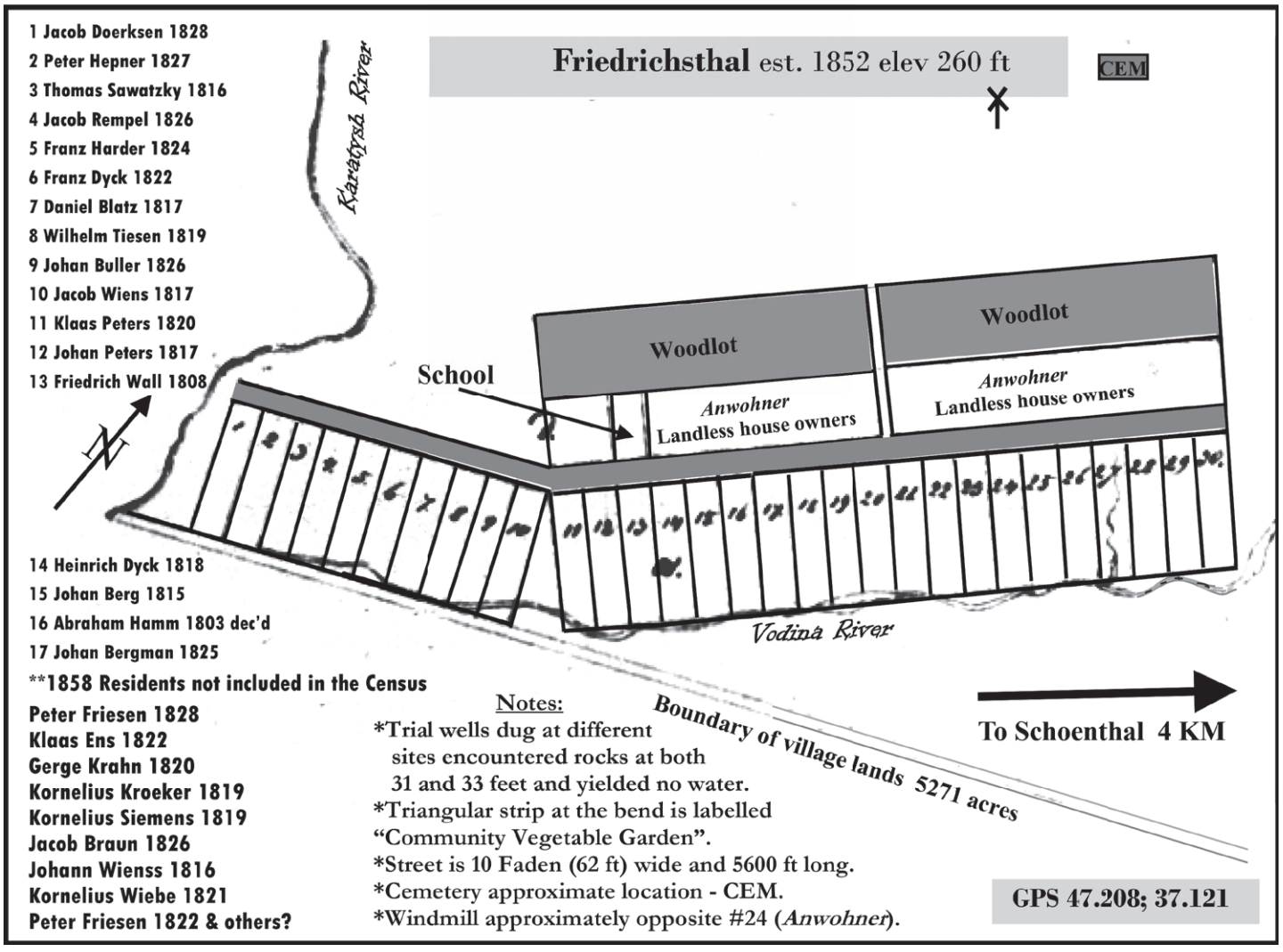


Figure 3: Friedrichsthal Village Plan. This plan was surveyed and drawn by Peter Friesen, Bergthal. Names and village lot numbers as given in 1858 Bergthal Colony Census for Friedrichsthal.

A typical family settling in Friedrichsthal might not have met Cornies's rigorous standards, but reports show that they brought 3–4 horses, 4–5 cattle, some sheep, a wagon, a plow, and a harrow. On average, the Bergthaler families owned three times as many sheep as the Chortitzer. The latter, however, held over 200 rubles compared to only 150 for the former.[31] Whatever money the settlers were able to bring with them had likely been obtained from day-labour wages or inheritance since they had no land to sell. With limited money, manpower, and equipment, erecting a complete village on the open steppe within two years was a challenge but likely a welcome one, and one that characterizes the Mennonite migrations over the centuries.

Description of the village plan and lots

As noted, the village of Friedrichsthal was laid out north of and parallel to the Vodina, bending slightly as it followed the course of the river. The street ran about 230 meters north of the river, eventually crossing it to continue east to Schönthal (4 km) and then northwards to Bergthal (another 3.5 km) where the meetinghouse and the offices of the Colony administration were located. Each plot backed onto the river, giving everybody access to water for their cattle and gardens.

A village plan on Peter Friesen's undated sketch of the Friedrichsthal settlement area shows 30 lots including provision for almost double that population by reserving land for about 30 *Kleinhäusler* (cottagers) immediately north of the street. It also includes a lot for the school on the north side as well as two large parcels dedicated to woodlots. As noted, the village plan also shows the influence of Johann Cornies's village template and his vision for a two-tiered community: farmers and tradespeople.[32] This is a radical departure from the earlier villages where only a population boom created a cottager section or two at the periphery of the village as an afterthought (see Figure 3: Friedrichsthal Village Plan).

A second, more basic village plan clearly extrapolated from the larger Bergthal Colony map shows only 18 lots and a school lot north of the street. This is likely a plan used in the drawing of lots for the first 17 families.[33] As successive voters' lists show, the population grew rapidly, mostly from within as children of established farmers married and took up residence in the village. In fact, by 1869, the Waisenamt records show about 55 households belonging to Friedrichsthal: 33 landowners and 22 cottagers.[34] There continued to be only 30 full farms in the village; therefore, having 33 owners signifies that several owners had subdivided their farms and sold either a half farm or quarter farm to others in the village as they were entitled to do after the reforms of 1866. A compilation of all the names entered in various lists in the Waisenamt just prior to emigration totals at least 70 households, not including Erdman Buhr who lived on an estate nearby and is also associated with Schönthal. The size of the village and woodlots together was about 70 desiatin or about 190 acres.

Although historians have usually divided the households in Mennonite villages into two or three categories, A.A. Klaus gives three categories with several subgroupings of ownership for each in his 1869 book, *Unsere Kolonien*.[35]

1) Villagers, i.e., owners with an allotment of land, divide into three subgroups: a) *Vollwirt* or full-holder: owner of a village lot and a full quota of land (65 des. or 175.5 acres); b) *Halbwirt* or half-holder: owner of a village lot and half an allotment of land (32.5 des. or 88 acres); and c) *Viertelwirt* or quarter-holder: owner of village lot and a quarter allotment of land (16.25 des. or 44 acres).

2) Cottagers divide into three subgroups: a) *Kleinwirt* or owner of cottager lot but no allotment of land or, after the reforms of 1866, owning between 0.5 and 12 des. land (1.3 to 32.5 acres); b) *Anwohner* or cottage owner making a living as tradesperson; and c) *Freiwirt* or special category of cottage owner, likely one exempt from certain levies.

3) Landless (*Landlose*) do not have any property or land within the settlement and also divide into three subgroups: a) landowners living on their own land (not in the village) or leaseholders on leased land; b) *Handarbeiter* (tradesperson), *Gewerbetreibende* (business owner), and *Kaufleute* (merchant) who live in rented quarters, sometimes referred to as *Einwohner* (renters); and c) *Arbeiter* or labourers who live with their employer and work for wages, often married sons employed by their parents and still living with them.

A family with a house lot in the village and 175 acres was obligated to build a

Levies mandated by the state:
1. *Grundsteuer* - state property tax: 1862 - 5 kopek per desiatin - 3.25R per full-holding

Levies mandated by the Colony:
2. *Seelengeld* - church head tithe: 1867 - 90 kopek per working person ages 14–60, both genders
3. *Auflage für Gov and Kreislasten* - colony levy for government and district charges
4. *Auflage für Zuchtvieh* - colony levies to buy and maintain breeding stock
5. *Auflage für Gebäude usw.* - colony levies to build and maintain church buildings and institutions*
6. *Auflage für Brücke usw.* - colony levies to build and maintain bridges, fences, roads
7. *Beschaffung des Gemeinde Vorrathsgetreides* - procurement of community supply/stock of grain
8. *Unterhaltung der Verwaltung* - colony levy to support the colony head office per worker (m/f)
9. *Unterhaltung für Arzt/Felscher/Hebamme/Pockenimpfer* - colony levy for medical care

Levies mandated by the village:**
10. *Gehalt des Dorfsältester* - village levy 8–20 kopeks per person to support village office
11. *Unterhaltungs des Dorflehrers* - village levy for teacher salary per number of children enrolled
12. *Produkte en Natura und Beleuchtung/Beheizung der Schule* - non-salary support of teacher and school building (often carried by villagers only)
13. Herdman/Pasture fees: a villager could field up to 25 head of cattle (in which 5 sheep or calves equal 1 head); cottagers could field between 2–4 but at a cost of up to 50 kopek per head
14. *Baustelle Auflage* - village levy for each cottager property of 30 kopek - 3 Ruble per site
15. *Sämmtliche Naturalleistungen* - all payments in kind - days on road maintenance, etc.

*Other items were the annual levy of grain for the village storehouse in event of future crop failure, and a fund for the future purchase of land for the next generation. In 1874, this fund was used to help the poor emigrate.
***Vollwirte* (full), *Halbwirte* (half), *Viertel* (quarter) *Wirte* - fees in proportion of a full holding

Figure 4: Levies based on A.A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien* [1869 in Russian], trans. J. Toews (Odessa: Odessaer Zeitung, 1887), 233, 247.

house and a barn according to regulations, service a portion of the woodlot (*Plantage*), and plant regulated shelter belts bordering their village lot, as well as plant fruit trees along the street. In addition, the head of the family would have to carry out responsibilities involved in running the school, the church, the communal fire insurance, and the village administration. These also included a long list of some 15 levies owed to the state, the colony, and the village (see Figure 4: Levies). The head of the family had the right to vote in the elections of village administrators, a right not accorded to landless families until 1866.[36] This resulted in the widening of the gap between the landowners and the landless as all power was vested with the owners, leaving the landless with little recourse.

The design of Friedrichsthal differed significantly from that of the earlier villages founded in the Bergthal Colony. Although the full-holder lots remained the same, the village itself from the outset was a two-tiered community. Each full-holder owned the following: a lot measuring 30 *Faden* (30 x 6.222 = 187 feet) by 120 *Faden* (747 feet) totaling about 3.2 acres, having been lengthened by Johann Cornies from the original design of 80 Faden (498 feet) for the earliest Bergthal villages. All the lots on the south side of the village street followed the same pattern (see Figure 5: Village Lot Plan). Each house also followed a pattern (see Figure 6: House Plan). This floor plan is similar to that of the housebarn at the Steinbach Mennonite Heritage Village. Beyond that, the landowner had agricultural land consisting of some 160 acres left after the village was carved out and all woodlots were subtracted. However, there was inevitably land unsuitable for cultivation or pasture (*unbrauchbares Land* or unusable land in the Colony totaled 167 desiatin or 451 acres spread over the five villages), so the actual acres that could be farmed were less than that. Village hay land and pastureland were held in common with a village herdsman taking care of the dairy cows during the day. The wide village street (10 *Faden* wide = 62 feet) was lined with wild pear trees on both sides, and mulberry hedges were planted between each lot. The street was in the river valley, hence the name, valley (*Thal*) of Friedrich, with the land rising quickly over 100 feet in elevation both to the north and south, although the latter lay outside the boundaries of the Colony.

As noted above, to qualify for new land, settlers had to be deemed as appropriately "diligent, energetic, peaceful and thrifty," to live "irreproachable lives," and to possess "sufficient means … cash, livestock, and agricultural implements." Then, the first task was to meet with the other selected family heads and elect village representatives.[37] That done, they could cast lots in the presence of at least one District official to determine which site they would receive. After that, some time in later 1852 and early 1853, the full-holders moved to the site to find their lot clearly delineated with a furrow on all four sides plowed at the behest of the District office and *Landwirtschaftlicher Verein* (Agricultural Union), which also engaged a surveyor (in this case a Peter Friesen from Bergthal) to separate the land itself into streets, field roads, arable land, pasture, hay land, and woodlots, all demarcated with a plowed furrow.

The integration of cottager village lots right from the start, as opposed to earlier villages where such lots were only added at the outskirts later, was an attempt to accommodate the *Handwerker* (literally hand worker but meaning tradespeople in this instance) who were expected to be a part of the village from the start. These lots were only 20 *Faden* (124.5 feet) wide and 60 *Faden* (373 feet) long, just over an acre in size.[38] The house floor plan of the cottager was similar to that of the landowners, but smaller and built more crudely, usually by the cottager himself, using adobe and thatch instead of fired bricks and tile roofs.

Cornies had pushed to have Mennonites rely less on agriculture and develop more cottage industries. The intent was that instead of having Mennonites buy supplies and services from beyond the colony, those were to be available locally, providing employment for landless and supporting a more diversified local economy. However, by the later 1860s, as manufacturers outside the colony produced ever cheaper goods, local Mennonites could not compete. Only their wagons, bricks, roof tiles, and basic farm implements remained in demand locally and among wealthier Ukrainian landowners.

Livelihood

The livelihood of the Friedrichsthal villagers (landowners) resembled that of the other Black Sea-Mariupol Mennonite villages of Bergthal and the Molotschna. The commercial sheep era had largely ended by the late 1840s, when competition from other countries and mechanization of the industry forced Mennonites out of the market, although sheep still constituted a substantial part of the farm economy for domestic use. There is no evidence that sheep were a significant part of the export picture in Friedrichsthal, although wool in the Molotschna colony was still the second most important export in 1851.

By the time Friedrichsthal was established, Mennonites in general had turned to grain growing, especially wheat, largely for export via the Black Sea and newly established Sea of Azov ports. Grain farming was rapidly becoming mechanized even here in the somewhat isolated Bergthal Colony with various horse-drawn machinery increasingly used by all farmers. It is noteworthy that every new Friedrichsthal settler had between three and four horses. The innovations of Johann Cornies had by this time reached the Chortitza and Bergthal colonies, so that the practice of agriculture was fairly uniform. The prescribed pattern was the four-year field rotation: plowed summer fallow, barley, wheat, and finally rye/oats. Climate was similar to that of Molotschna: namely, a much longer frost-free season and milder winters than Manitoba.

Machinery was also fairly consistent: the most important being the single-bottom plow with mouldboard that required four horses to pull since the hard soil of the steppes, packed over millennia, was hard to break, or a similar two-wheeled machine (*Haken*) with a single share for deep tillage easily converted to multi-share cultivator (*Bugger/Bukker*), the four-row harrow, and finally the roller/packer to break up the clods and form a level seedbed. Every Friedrichsthal settler owned a plow and a harrow or two. Some more prosperous Mennonites also used a wider cultivator with up to 13 shoes called a *Rahmen*.[39]

To grow the grain, each landowner would have half a dozen small fields laid out in long strips with narrow field roads between them. The grain fields were scattered so that everybody would have equal portions of good and poor land, and equal travel time. The crop was usually cut

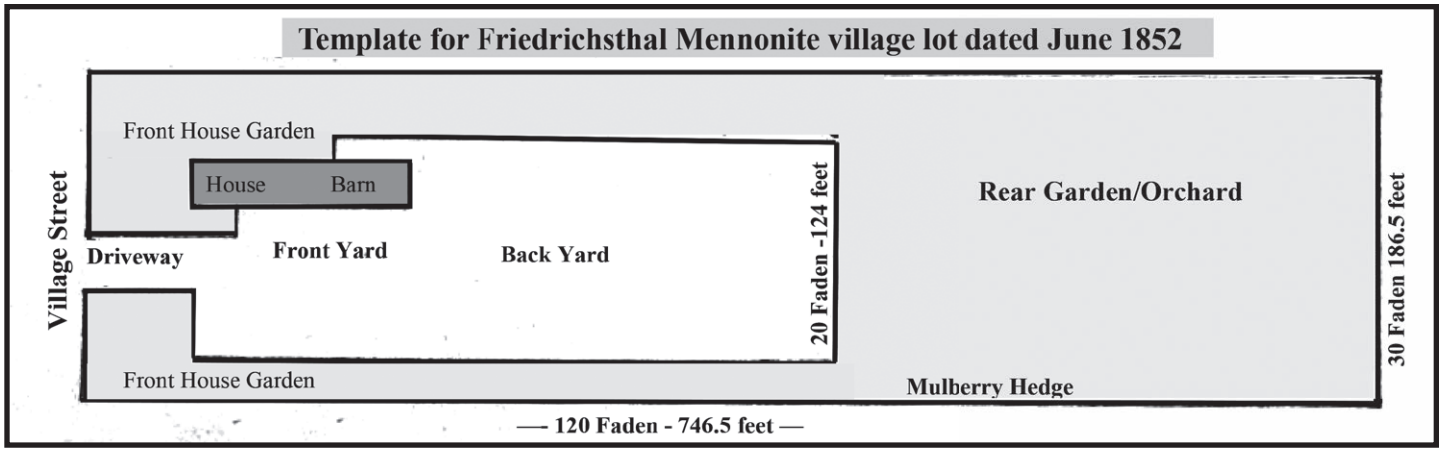


Figure 5: Friedrichsthal Village Lot Plan. This plan of a village lot in Friedrichsthal is dated June 22, 1852, and signed by *Oberschulz* Jacob Peters. It also shows the hand of Johann Cornies in its rigid template for new village lots in the settlement. Peters has left the name of the village blank, which indicates that in June 1852 the village had not yet been named.

with a hand scythe equipped with a cradle, tied into sheaves with strands of grain stalks, and set up in stooks to be gathered later with Mennonite ladder wagons and winnowed on the threshing floor with a flail, although established colonies were already using the threshing stone.[40] Still, since by 1867 only 30% of agricultural land was devoted to grain in the entire Bergthal Colony, it is reasonable to assume that Friedrichsthal as a new village likely had even less than that.

Next to field crops, the second most important income source for Friedrichsthal was livestock, with horses, cattle and sheep being the main saleable products. The fact that in 1867 over half of all the agricultural land in the Colony was pasture speaks to the primacy livestock and dairy still enjoyed here. An additional 16% of the land was communal pastureland where the village herdsman would graze all the animals together for the entire village. To prepare feed for livestock, most Mennonite farmers owned a one-horse chaffcutter (*Häckselmaschien*). The cattle manure was also useful; compressed and dried it served as fuel for the brick stove in the absence of wood, which in Friedrichsthal had not matured enough to serve that purpose. In the older colonies, wood from the planted woodlots was already available.

Another of the most important elements of village life was the garden, as can be seen from an examination of the typical village lot. Villagers had both a front and a rear garden. A large part of the diet of the settlers was produced at home where a relatively new crop, potatoes, occupied an especially important place. Part of the rear garden was devoted to the development of orchards, eventually with grafted stock, which produced fruit for domestic use but also provided income from sales outside the village. The climate was well suited to fruit trees, barring the incidence of hard frosts that some years diminished the crop. My great-great-grandmother lamented the loss of her cherry trees, which were in season when they left Friedrichsthal in June 1875. Although already seated on the wagon, she asked her youngest daughter to pick some quickly to eat on the way to the train station.[41]

One preoccupation of the colonies, largely at the prodding of the Guardianship Committee and Johann Cornies, was the planting of trees on the barren steppes. Over a span of 50 years, this initiative would turn the entire area into a verdant, sheltered breadbasket of Europe, protected from the strong desiccating east winds by carefully prescribed shelter belts and from the perennial threat of drought by crop rotation and summer fallow. Each village had a planned woodlot, usually amounting to over an acre per owner, and that was over and above the mandatory trees planted along all streets (usually wild pears) and between village lots (usually mulberry). Unfortunately, Friedrichsthal was sold before the woodlots could become a source of income.

Although figures are not available for Friedrichsthal, the Agriculture Union reported that, by 1851, the Molotschna Colony had about five million planted trees, not counting wild olive trees, caraganas, and hawthorn hedges. The formal village plan of Friedrichsthal follows the template, showing the area devoted to the *Gehölzplantage* (woodlot). Planting trees was no simple matter, since the barren steppe packed down for millennia had to be loosened over 20 inches deep, which required a special plow and many teams of oxen. It is intriguing to note that online today the Friedrichsthal Mennonites are given credit for the nearby Fedorivka Forest.[42]

However, a few other enterprises were on the cusp: namely, the silkworm industry and even tobacco, which was already produced in Molotschna villages by this time, although no specifics are available for Friedrichsthal.

As the younger generation came of age and no full farms were available, they were forced to move onto the cottager lots and build houses, hoping to make a living by working as day labourers and/or by developing trades like blacksmithing, carpentry, repair work, and maybe even wagon manufacturing, or by leasing/renting surrounding land. As a case in point, north of the village on higher ground near the cemetery, Friedrichsthal had a windmill, run by Peter Friesen (b. 1822), who owned only the mill and his house lot. In a survey of Russian Mennonite occupations, Alexander Petzholdt lists 23 trades employing 541 Mennonites in 1854, as well as 350 Mennonite enterprises, including over 70 mills, 99 silk reel establishments (much of this done by women), machinery production valued at 55,000 silver rubles in one year, and the production of almost 8 million bricks in 1854.[43]

After the first difficult years, an established farm of 175 acres was more than enough to prosper. The original stipulation that a farm could not be subdivided caused

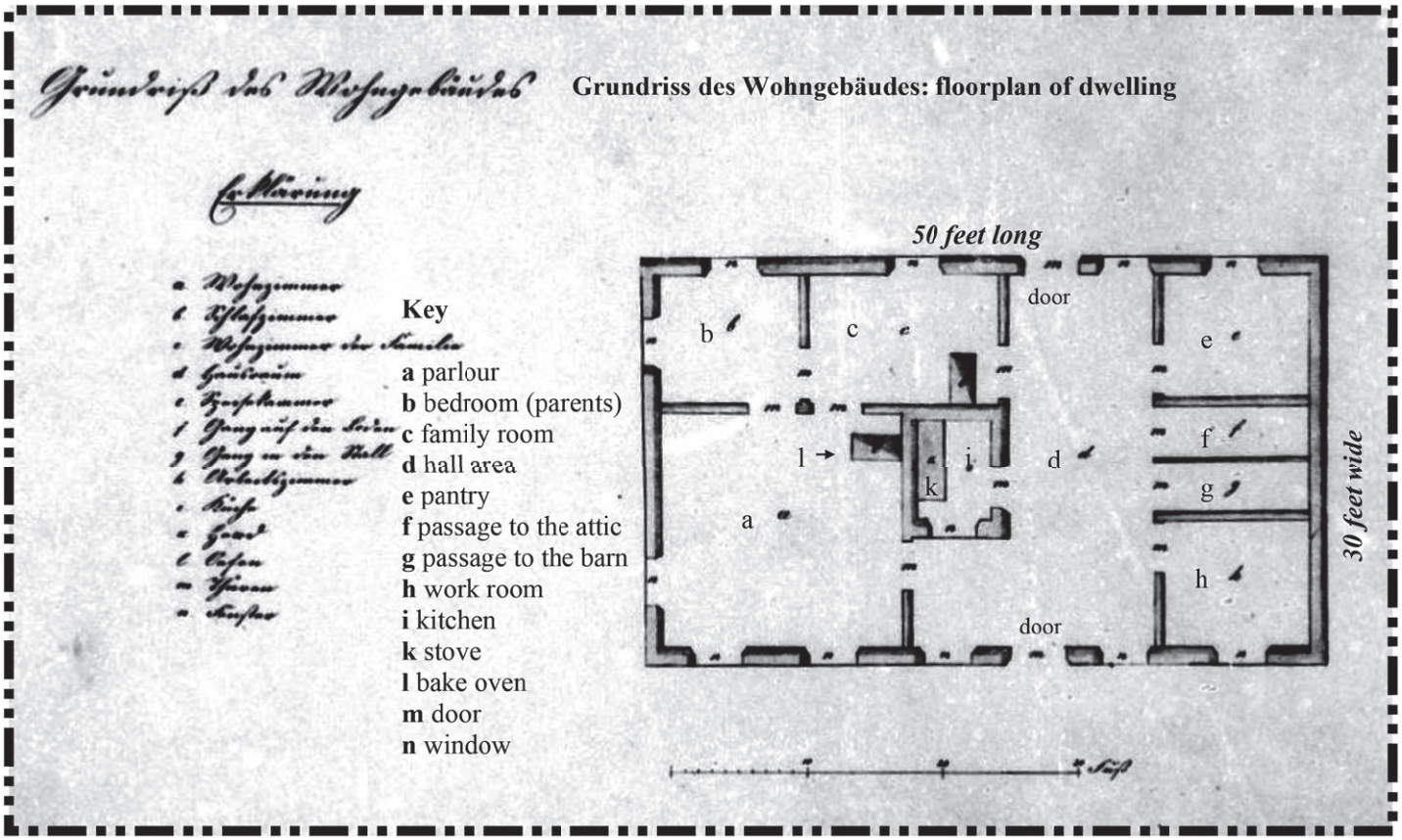


Figure 5: House Plan. This floor plan is similar to the one drawn up by Philip Wiebe in 1852, although some of the names are different. For example, what is normally called the *Somma-stow* (h - relatively unheated summer room occupied by older sons or even young marrieds) is given here as Workroom. Room c given as Family room was usually the girls' bedroom as well. Room e given as Pantry was usually smaller, and Passage to the attic f also had access to the cellar. See Roland Sawatzky, "The Control of Social Space in Mennonite Housebarns of Manitoba, 1874–1940" (PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2005), 82. Notably, neither plan uses the letter j in the key. This would have been the current template for full-holders in Friedrichsthal.

a two-tiered society within one generation, because by Russian law only one child (in the case of Mennonites usually the oldest son: primogenitor) inherited the entire farm. The high birth rate of the Mennonites made it impossible to provide a full farm for each male offspring even had land been available, and with land thus restricted, most of the second generation were landless.

The Mennonites in Chortitza and Molotschna had anticipated this and held reserve land for that purpose, land rented out in the meantime to entrepreneurs who unfortunately then with some collusion on the part of the colony administration did not relinquish it. In the Bergthal Colony, landlessness was inevitable, and, since a house lot in the village sold for 1,000–1,250R and an entire farm with house lot sold for between 3,000 to 3,500R, yearly wages (100R for day labourers or 500R for skilled tradespeople) made land purchase almost impossible.[44]

In 1863, the landless in the Molotschna gave up waiting for distribution of reserve land and exerted pressure on the Guardianship Committee, pressure which resulted in significant changes. By 1866, the landless could finally vote, "full farms" (65 desiatin) could legally be subdivided, and, in 1872, individuals received title to their land.[45] Friedrichsthal debt records show farmers purchasing half of the land of an established farm and even one quarter parcels of land by the early 1870s.[46] This was progress, but since even half a farm (88 acres) was very expensive (1,000–1,250R in 1871), this resulted in significant debt loads for younger families. These debts would become problematic in 1875, when Friedrichsthal emigrated en mass to Manitoba and some families were forced to carry the debt over to Manitoba where it was combined later with the travel debt and the *Brotschuld* debt of 1875–1876.[47]

Leadership

Spiritual leadership was provided by Rev. Franz Dyck, ordained November 1854. The Bergthal Colony only had one meetinghouse, situated in Bergthal, but distances were not great, and all five villages attended there as per custom, i.e., not necessarily every Sunday. In 1869, David Stoesz was ordained and shared the leadership with Rev. Dyck. Communion and baptisms were performed by *Ältester* Jacob Braun of Bergthal until 1866, when *Ältester* Gerhard Wiebe of Heuboden took over.

Not all schoolteachers are known, but it appears Peter Friesen (1828), later of Fürstenland, was one of the early schoolteachers. David Stoesz taught there for many years. Another teacher was Abraham Warkentin (m. Susanna Jacob Braun), probably only for a few years in the late 1860s into the early 1870s. He may have been the last teacher.[48] He did not emigrate, ending up in Ignatyevo later.

The village administration (*Schulzenamt*) consisted of the usual mayor and two assistants. These roles rotated among several prosperous men of the colony: Daniel Blatz, Johann Abrams, Jacob Braun, Jacob Wiens, Heinrich Dyck

(who seems to be the last *Schulz* before emigration), and others.

By the time the village dissolved in 1875–1876, it consisted of at least 70 families, of which only nine were original settlers, despite the fact that most of them were young married couples in 1852–1853. Of these 70, only Abram Warkentin and, of course, Erdmann Buhr did not move to America after the villages were sold.

The motivation for the original establishment of the Bergthal Colony had been to alleviate the landless problem in the Chortitza Colony. However, even in this new Bergthal Colony, the cycle repeated itself within a generation, and, by 1876, the year the last Bergthal village was abandoned, what was to be home to 145 families held more than triple that number. This issue, as well as the new policy of Russification initiated by the Russian government after the humiliating loss of the Crimean War in 1856, and specific reforms arising from that policy, prompted the unprecedented emigration. These reforms would, among other things, cost the Mennonites their exemption from military service offered by Catherine the Great, one of the primary elements of the *Privilegium* negotiated with Potemkin and approved by Tsar Paul I in 1800. Added to this "push" was the "pull" of cheap land and a new start in America, at that time still synonymous with promise. In the mass migration of 1874–1876, Friedrichsthal too was abandoned and later sold to wealthier neighbouring Ukrainians. As a Mennonite community, it only endured for about 24 years, a factor which may explain why its existence has largely been forgotten.

The conclusion to this two-part article on Friedrichsthal will appear in the September 2021 issue. Ernest explains what became of the Friedrichsthalers that immigrated to Canada and what remains of the village footprint today in Ukraine.

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Endnotes

1. Special thanks to Conrad Stoesz (Mennonite Historical Archives) and Brent Wiebe (Stettler, Alberta) for generous access to the Odessa State Archives materials, to Tim Janzen for use of his transcribed voters' lists, to James Urry for his expertise, and to Rudi Engbrecht for editing.

2. The limited edition is out of print, but there is a revised edition: William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony*, rev. ed. (Winnipeg: CMBC, 1986).

3. John Dyck, "Origins and Destinations," *Settlers of the East Reserve* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2009), 12. A total of 26 families stayed in Russia, but all the Buhrs listed lived on a private estate outside the village itself.

4. A desiatin is equal to 2.7 acres. A.A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien: Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte und Statistik der ausländischen Kolonisation in Russland* (Odessa: Odessaer Zeitung Verlag, 1887), 228, and N.J. Kroeker, *Erste Mennonitendoerfer Russlands 1789–1943* (Vancouver: N.J. Kroeker, 1981), 128, both give the area as 9,492 desiatin. Elsewhere, Klaus gives a total of 9,617 desiatin, including 167 desiatin described as unusable land (p. 232). Conrad Keller, *The German Colonies in South Russia 1804–1904* (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1968), 33, gives a total of 9,656 desiatin.

5. Josef Malinowsky, *Die Planerkolonien am Azowischen Meere* (Stuttgart: Ausland u. Heimat Verlag, 1928), 42.

6. Odessa State Archive, Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 14914, p. 26; the memo of August 14, 1852, gives exact size of the new settlement as 1,952 des. and 1,598 sazhen, which is just over 5,271 acres. Hereinafter Odessa State Archive: OSA.

7. Margarete Woltner, *Die Gemeinde Berichte von 1848 der Deutsche Siedlungen am Schwarzen Meer* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1941). These original *Berichte* were mandated by E. v. Hahn in January 1848. See Dale Lee Wahl's 1996 introduction to the village history project at http://www.odessa3.org/collections/history/link/1848hist.txt. Woltner based her accounts on the *Odessaer Zeitung* version.

8. MHA, OSA, Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 14914, p. 26. Other sources differ but all agree to just under 2,000 desiatin.

9. The official name was *Fürsorgekomitee der Ausländischen Ansiedler in Süd-Russland* (Guardianship Committee).

10. This endeavour is known as the *Judenplan* settlement.

11. See Harvey Dick, John Staples, and Ingrid Epp, eds., *Transformation of the Southern Ukrainian Steppe: Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies, Vol II, 1836–1842* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 567–572, for details of Cornies's influence over the Bergthal Colony.

12. Unfortunately, the records of The Guardianship Committee of Foreign Settlers in South Russia, Odessa Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, for the relevant years (1850s) are not available to Mennonite archives yet.

13. Jacob Epp noted in his diary in February 1851 that he had applied for land in the new settlement (Harvey L. Dyck, ed., *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851–1880* [Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991], 79).

14. See Rev. Heinrich Doerksen's map in *Preservings* 11 (December 1997): 2.

15. The term Chumak Way more recently refers to a cross Canada/US cycling trail 10,000 km long, established as a cycle for peace event in support of those suffering from war in eastern Ukraine.

16. MHA OSA, Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 14914, p. 20.

17. Ernest N. Braun, "Friedrichsthal: Lost and Found," *Settlers of the East Reserve* (Winnipeg: MMHS, 2009), 143–176.

18. B. Fr. v. Rosen published his first official notice as "Vorsitzender des Comite der Fürsorge" in *Unterhaltungsblatt*, Vol. 4, December 1849, p. 90.

19. *Unterhaltungsblatt*, Vol. 9, February 1854, p. 1.

20. I am indebted to James Urry for drawing my attention to him.

21. MHA OSA, Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 14914, p. 26.

22. Ibid., p. 18.

23. MHA OSA, Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 14914, pp. 36–37 and 43–44.

24. https://stihi.ru/2009/05/21/230.

25. Tim Janzen, "Transfers to the Bergthal Colony," *Preservings* 29 (2009): 79.

26. CMC Waisenamt 8 Auctions, Box 1, Type 8, File 1, image 3536.

27. MHA OSA, Fond 6, Inventory 3, file 14602, p. 73.

28. MHA OSA, "Guardianship Committee," Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 15736, p. 27.

29. MHA OSA, Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 14914, pp. 57–60. My great-great-grandfather.

30. MHA OSA, "Guardianship Committee," Fond 6, Inventory 3, file 15736.

31. Depending on the exact year, rubles (R) were valued at $0.66 to $0.608 per ruble. As the 1870s migration progressed, the currency was downgraded from a return of $0.66 at the beginning to $0.62 a year or two later. Waisenamt records show that all conversions to dollars by 1876 were at $0.6083 per rubel.

32. Cornies founded Neu-Halbstadt as a village specifically devoted to tradespeople in the Molotschna Colony in 1843.

33. *Plan der neuzugründenden Kolonie Friedrichsthal*, MHA, Odessa Archive: Fond 6, Inventory 3, File 14914, p. 12.

34. Waisenamt *Schuldbuch* 1869: Type 4, Box 1, Type 4, Folder 2, image 0266.

35. A.A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien* (1869 in Russian), trans. J. Toews (Odessa: Odessaer Zeitung Verlag, 1887), 230–233.

36. See James Urry, *None But Saints* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), 203.

37. See Dick, Staples, and Epp, eds., *Transformation of the Southern Ukrainian Steppe*, 438–445.

38. *Erklärung* supplement in *Unterhaltungsblatt*, Vol. 7, October 1852, p. 80 ff.

39. *Unterhaltungsblatt*, Vol. 7, July 1852, p. 56 ff. See also Alexander Petzholdt, *Reise im Westlichen und Südlichen Europäishen Russland im Jahre 1855* (Gera: C.B. Griesbach Verlag, 1860), 154–156.

40. My father-in-law described to me how as a boy even in about 1910 he had learned to twist the wheat stems into a string and to tie a swatch of grain with a few deft twists of the wrist.

41. Ernest N. Braun, ed., *Braun: A Gnadenfeld Heritage* (Steinbach: Braun Family Tree Committee, 1999), 5.

42. https://www.google.ca/maps/place/Fedorivka,+Donetsk+Oblast,+Ukraine,+87024/@47.2065592,37.1234416.

43. Petzholdt, *Europäishen Russland im Jahre 1855*, 185–186.

44. Urry, *None But Saints*, 151.

45. Ibid., 203–208.

46. Waisenamt Debt record: 4 *Schuldbuch*, Box 1, Type 4, File 2, Images, 0269, 0274, 0310, 0311, 0321.

47. *Brotschuld* (bread debt) refers to the debt incurred by the Manitoba Mennonites in 1875 as a result of the grasshopper plague and the loss of the year's harvest. The money was borrowed from the Canadian government using collateral offered by Ontario Mennonites, who extended a large private loan as well.

48. Delbert Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach: D.F.P. Publications, 1990), 187. Last mentioned in Waisenamt records in 1872.

The Search for the Mennonite Centennial Monument in Zaporozhzhia, Ukraine

by Werner Toews, Winnipeg

On March 16, 2021, I learned through a Facebook post that a large piece of the destroyed Mennonite Centennial Monument was found in an area now called Upper Chortitza, a suburb of Zaporozhzhia, Ukraine.

The piece, thought to be the base of the monument, was found by Max Shtatsky, a senior research scientist at the Khortitsa National Reserve, located on Chortitza Island. Max has been involved in researching the history of the Mennonites from the village of Chortitza and the surrounding area for many years.

On October 1, 1889, the Chortitza Mennonites celebrated the 100th anniversary (1789–1889) of the first Mennonite settlement in Ukraine with two church services. The first was at 9:00 am in the Chortitza church, and the second was an outdoor service at 2:00 pm because of the large number of attendees. Local dignitaries were invited, and two choirs performed as part of the celebrations. Messages of congratulations were sent by various government officials, including the Governor of Jekaterinoslav.[1]

In 1890, to commemorate the 100th anniversary and as a symbol for future generations, the Chortitza Mennonites decided to have a monument built and have it placed in a prominent area of the village.

The following announcement was published in the *Mennonitische Rundshau*: "To commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of the Chortitza Mennonite colony, the Mennonites in the government district of Jekaterinoslav will be erecting a granite monument in the village of Chortitza. The estimated cost of the monument will be between 4–5 thousand rubles. The monument will be funded by donations from Mennonites."[2]

After the construction of the monument was completed, it was placed at the intersection of three streets in the village of Chortitza.[3] The monument was constructed with 12 grey granite stones and featured an impressive towering obelisk.

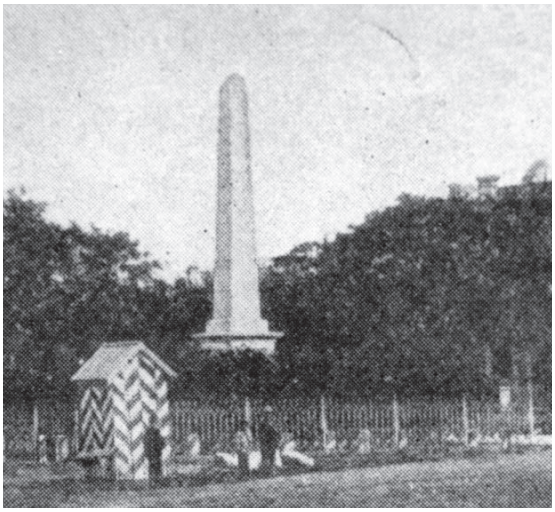


Photo of the Centennial Monument in Chortitza, Ukraine, taken sometime after 1890, but before 1938. Photo credit: MAID CA MHC PP-4-044-194.0.

Information on the stone mason who carved the stones was provided by Joan Kirk in an article published in the *Mennonite Historian*. Based on family stories she heard from her mother, it is believed that Joan's great-grandfather, Heinrich Hamm, carved the centennial monument stones. Hamm was a stone mason who lived in the village of Chortitza and carved many of the gravestones in the Chortitza cemetery. In the article, Joan recounts a story of her mother who, as a child, watched Hamm carve the monument stones while playing at his feet.

A little mystery and intrigue were created in the story when Joan revealed the following piece of information: "While he was carving the Centennial Monument (*Denkmal*), Grandpa swore her to secrecy as to anything she saw while he was working on this monument. It seems that the base of this monument was hollowed out and the documents from the *volost* (district) were sealed in it."[4]

A piece of the Centennial Monument recently uncovered in a suburb of Zaporozhzhia, Ukraine. Photo credit: Max Shtatsky.

During the ensuing years, the monument sat at its location relatively unscathed until 1938. In 1995, Johann Epp, the last *Oberschulz* (Mayor) of the Chortitza settlement, who was then living in Germany, provided his recollection of events surrounding the disappearance of the monument. "It was not soldiers who destroyed the monument; it was a group of workmen directed by the NKVD (KGB) in 1938."

Epp went on to say that the monument consisted of 12 stones, which were removed and buried in the courtyard of the Wallman residence. Epp also provided a sketch of the monument to the editors of the *Mennonite Historian*.[5]

In a 1996 *Mennonite Historian* article, Peter J. Klassen supplied a photo given to him by Karl Stumpp that was described as the base of the monument. The photo was taken circa 1942, when Stumpp was in Chortitza during the German occupation of Ukraine in WWII.[6] It was reported that all the stones were located during the occupation, and the monument was reassembled. It is believed that after the Mennonites of Chortitza left with the retreating German army in 1943, the monument was again taken down by local authorities and possibly destroyed.

From that time onward, there was little interest in discovering the fate of the monument until 2011. That was when Max Shtatsky started exploring its origins and seeking clues in the area where the monument had been located. A search for information from local and state archives was met with negative results. The only piece of information located by Max was a hand written note in a book he found at a local library. The self-published book exploring the history of Upper Chortitza was written by a local historian. The note indicated that the monument was destroyed in 1950. Time passed with no leads or further information, but the fate of the monument stones remained on Max's mind.

The search was reignited this year, when Max and a group of local citizens were inspired by a photo taken in 2004.

The photograph of what was believed to be the monument base was taken by Mrs. Ella Federau, who was in Ukraine acting as an interpreter for a Mennonite mission group from Canada. The photograph was later published in *Building on the Past* by Rudy Friesen.[7] In the black and white photo, the base was clearly visible above ground and appeared to be situated in a wooded area. This part of the monument closely resembled the same one that was photographed in 1942.

On March 11, after a search of an area approximately 90 meters from its original 1890 location, Max located the base of the monument. It was buried in a wooded area and had most likely been moved from the 2004 location. After the dirt was removed from the base, it was measured and found to be 1.3 m x 1.3 m square and 45 cm high. The granite base was estimated to weigh approximately 1.8 tons. Two inscriptions were visible on the base and were identified as *Zum Andenken* (in memory) and *первые поселенцы* (first settlers).[8]

A few days later, a truck with a crane was hired and the base was transported to the Khortitsa National Reserve property on Chortitza Island.

The plot to this story took a twist on March 23 with the discovery of a sketch that added new information to the story.

It was already known that the piece discovered by Max and the pieces in the two photographs from 1942 and 2004 were one and the same. This was determined by the Russian inscriptions observed on the stone and the inscriptions in the two photographs. From 1996 until now, this piece was described as the base of the monument.

However, after further analysis of the stone, using information regarding the standard structure of monuments, it seemed unlikely that the base would be engraved with any inscriptions. The engraved pieces are usually located on the upper part of a monument. Typically, the "die" component of the monument contains decorative carving and inscriptions. The die is usually located on top of the base with the inscriptions situated closer to eye level.[9]

The size of the monument also came into play when determining whether the newly discovered piece was, in fact, the base. Initially, the Centennial monument was thought to be five meters high, based on the measurements of the located piece and using technology that is capable of measuring objects in photographs. An old photograph of the monument had been analyzed in this fashion, and it was concluded that the monument was five meters high.

However, a book by the late Arthur Kroeger, provided to me by Lawrence Klippenstein also on March 23, contained information and a sketch of the monument. The book contained a hand drawn sketch with a caption that stated the size differently, "The main monument consisted of 12 stones in light gray granite; it was 30 feet high."[10]

I also discovered that the book contained the inscriptions located on the four sides of the monument. The first words of one inscription started with *Zum Andenken*, which were observed on the piece discovered by Max.

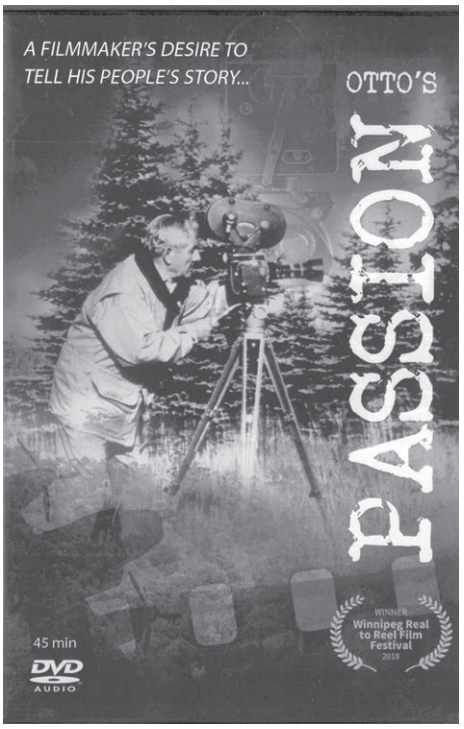
Later that day, while discussing this new information with Max, we realized that the newly discovered stone was not the base but part of the die. After a revaluation of the old photograph, we determined that the newly discovered piece was the upper most part of the 3-piece section of the die. It was also confirmed that the original height of the monument was 9 meters. Based on the 9-meter height and the size of the located piece, it was estimated that the original base would have been 2.4 x 2.4 meters square.

This brings a new perspective on the size of the Centennial monument and an appreciation of the engineering required to construct such an impressive structure. The search for the balance of the stones continues.

Endnotes

1. "Hundert Jähriges Jubiläum der Chortitzer Mennoniten Kolonie," *Odessaer Zeitung* No. 292 (30 Dec 1888 / 11 Jan 1889), pp 2–3.
2. *Mennontische Rundschau* (11 Jun 1890), p 2.
3. https://chort.square7.ch/Chortiza/chortiza.html
4. Research on the family of Joan Kirk indicates that her mother was not born at the time the monument was created by H. Hamm. Perhaps the story of Hamm carving the stones was witnessed by a relative who later shared that story with other members of the family.
5. "The Chortitza Centennial Monument—Further Comments," *Mennonite Historian* 21/3 (Sep 1995), p 9, https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/21.3.MHSep95.pdf
6. Peter J. Klassen, "The Chortitza 100th Anniversary Monument—Again," *Mennonite Historian* 22/1 (Mar 1996), p 10, https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/22.1.MHMar96.pdf
7. Rudy P. Friesen, *Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture, Landscape and Settlements* in Russia/Ukraine (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 2004), 114.
8. https://www.061.ua/news/3051236/v-zaporozenasli-postament-memoriala-stoletia-cto-o-nem-izvestno-i-kak-on-vygladit-foto?fbclid=IwAR0hFOfR-pKIf7qRwQ2gMTxnF87ASh24sVNuarWedBzUgt7njCTYPp7q-KA
9. https://www.babcocksmithhouse.org/GraniteIndustry/Anatomy/Anatomy%20of%20a%20monument.pdf
10. Arthur Kroeger, *Biography of Johann Bartsch the deputy* (Winnipeg, 2002), 27a.

Film and Book Reviews



Otto's Passion. Documentary film directed and produced by Andrew Wall, Refuge 31 Films. 45 min.

Film review by Glen Klassen, Steinbach

A well-done biographical film is one of the best ways to learn about a person from the past. This is true especially when the actors portraying the "biographee" do a good job of interpreting his or her personality and character in the film. In this regard, Daniel Kovacs does not disappoint. He does an especially believable job in *Otto's Passion*, portraying the middle-aged Otto Klassen (1927–2018).

In the film, viewers are introduced to Otto, a driven man, living for the celluloid that adorned his cluttered basement workroom. One must remember that, while he was toiling at his filmmaking, he was also a very successful bricklayer and businessman.

Andrew Wall's approach to his documentary films is to mix many elements into the presentation: narration, old footage (it is not always clear whether they are Otto's or not), interviews with historians, interviews with people who knew Otto well, and live action. Never a dull moment.

Otto started to learn his filmmaking avocation as a young lad drawn into Hitler's propaganda machine. At the end of the war, he and his mother escaped from the Soviet zone of partitioned Germany and made it to Paraguay with many other

Mennonite refugees on the *Volendam*, a Dutch ocean vessel. Eventually, they were able to immigrate to Canada and begin a whole new life. He made his home in Winnipeg and lived until 2018, making more than 50 documentary films in German and in English over the span of his life. He was not entirely self-taught; he worked together with David Dueck (*And When They Shall Ask*, 1983, 2010) and then also took advantage of mentors at the CBC.

In *Otto's Passion*, old film clips are interspersed with an impressive line-up of talking heads, including historians (John J. Friesen, Royden Loewen, Conrad Stoesz, and Gerhard Ens), Otto's children, his close friend Henry Dahl (who steals the show!), as well as Jenny Gates, his biographer. They speak of an extraordinary man, forever working for his family and for his beloved avocation: making films about the Mennonite people on three continents. He richly deserved the honorary doctorate awarded to him by the University of Winnipeg in 2007.

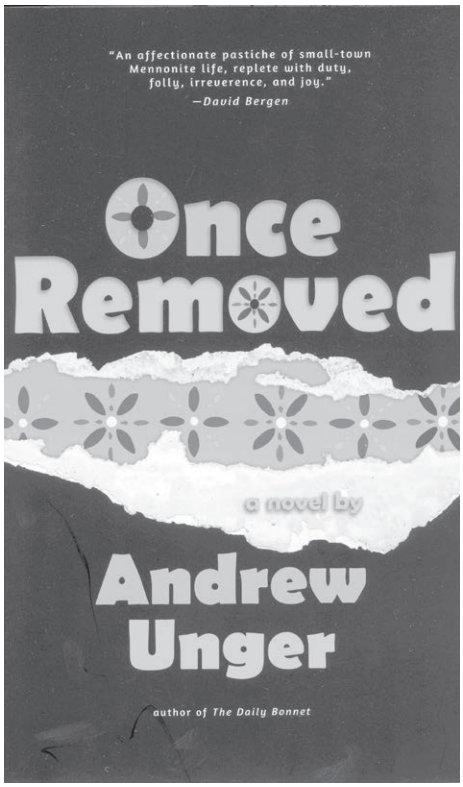
What a life! Losing a father in Ukraine, living through the ghastly events in war-time Europe, starting from nothing in the jungles of Paraguay, and finally building two very successful careers in Winnipeg. All of this is faithfully captured in *Otto's Passion*.

Andrew Wall is the producer, writer, director, and editor of the film. He has been in the business since 2006 in all these capacities, making mostly documentary shorts, TV episodes, and longer documentaries. Mennonite-themed films are an important subset of his projects, but by no means his only interest.

Otto's Passion is almost purely biography, sensitively developed by a producer who is equally passionate about his subjects and his craft. It is a fine tribute to a fellow filmmaker. After the passing of David Dueck (2019) and Otto Klassen (2018), we are fortunate to have a filmmaker like Andrew Wall in our midst with such a breadth of interests and skills. Wall takes us into Mennonite history and then out of it into contemporary themes, using technology that was not available to his predecessors. I believe that he also has the advantage of producing films full-time; for Dueck and Klassen, it was something they did after work, in their spare time. Wall is already encouraging even younger filmmakers through his Refuge 31 Films company. The future of "Mennonite" filmography is indeed bright.

Copies of *Otto's Passion* can be purchased at Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Glen Klassen is a retired microbiology professor, having taught at the University of Manitoba and Canadian Mennonite University. He is also the editor of Heritage Posting*, the news magazine of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.*



Andrew Unger, ***Once Removed*** (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2020), 271 pp.

Reviewed by Selenna Wolfe, Winnipeg

I loved *Once Removed*. As my dad likes to say, "I laughed, I cried, it became a part of me!" Or maybe it feels like this because in some ways the story already was a part of me. The book's protagonist, Timothy Heppner, lives and works as a ghostwriter in the small fictitious Mennonite town of Edenfeld, Manitoba. In the first few pages of the novel, Timothy meets with one of his clients in their small-town diner, where customers drink their coffee and watch everyone in town go about their business. Before engaging with the server, Timothy thinks, "The urge to make small talk with strangers is something I have to suppress and, thankfully, at my age I still can, but I'm sure in twenty or thirty years I'll be the guy chatting up the server" (p.13). Through this scene and author Andrew Unger's great whit—Unger also produces *The Daily Bonnet*, the Mennonite satirical news website—I was immediately brought back to the small Mennonite town I grew up in.

Ghostwriting does not pay the bills, so Timothy controversially also works for the mayor's Parks and "Wreck" department. The job on its own is not controversial; however, it is Timothy's position on the Preservation Society that puts him at odds with his passions. While on the job, Timothy tears down century-old trees and buildings that in his free time with the Preservation Society he is trying to save. As Timothy tries to navigate between his work obligations and what he wants, we learn more about the history of Edenfeld and the Mennonites.

If you are an avid Mennonite history buff (which is a strong possibility because you are currently reading the *Mennonite Historian*), *Once Removed* may not be your typical book of choice. First, it is a novel, and, second, it is based in the present day. However, Timothy's experience as a researcher and Mennonite history writer is very relatable. For example, when Timothy is working on Mr. Harder's family history book, he uses other history books and issues of *Preservings* as source materials (p. 16). Then when Timothy is working on writing a history book of Edenfeld, members of the Preservation Society provide Timothy with valuable primary sources. Timothy received "a shoebox full of old letters that [Mrs. Friesen] translated from German and Mr. Wiebe found all these amazing black-and-white photos of early-twentieth-century Edenfeld's Main Street taken from the top of the feed mill" (p. 104). Timothy even visits an archives!

Here is the best part: even if you are not a history buff, you will love this hilarious and thoughtful book! The characters are forced to think about progress and what that means for them and their town. Progress is something we deal with in everyday life. Who knows, maybe for some, *Once Removed* will be the perfect introduction to kickstarting their passion for family history? I believe this is possible because everyone has inside of them what *Once Removed* has within its pages: humor, love, history, and curiosity.

Selenna Wolfe is the Administrative Assistant at Mennonite Heritage Archives. Some of her many tasks include printing and mailing the Mennonite Historian.