

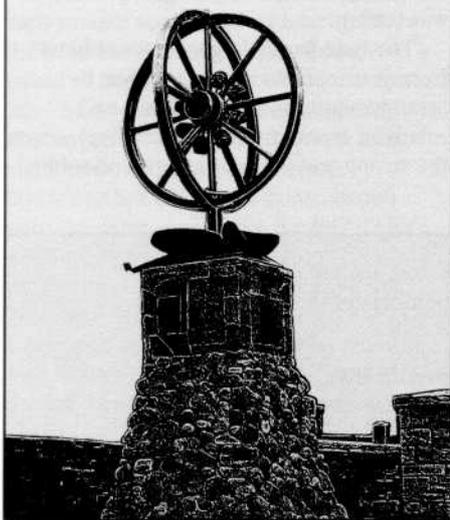
Ontario Mennonite History

THE
NEWSLETTER
OF THE
MENNONITE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF ONTARIO

VOLUME XII
NUMBER 2

SEPTEMBER 1994

ISSN 1192-5515



Russian Mennonite Exodus to Canada, 1924

by J.J. Thiessen and
Herbert P. Enns (*translator*)



Herbert P. Enns

This article appeared in the German-language paper, "Der Bote", on July 14, 1964. I removed it and put it aside, with the intention of translating it some day; for the benefit of my children, Carol and Ken, and anyone else who might be interested in reading of the historic trip our parents undertook, to escape from a land of utter chaos and revolution. Although the article was written by Rev. J.J. Thiessen on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of our coming to Canada, the translation was done in the fall of 1981—57 years since that time.

— Herbert P. Enns.

It was in the month of May, 1924, when, in a letter from the chairman of the Assembly of Citizens of Dutch origin, Rev. B.B. Janz, I was asked to take charge and oversee, during the summer vacation, the transportation of emigrants through Russia, to the border station of Sebesh, in

Latvia. It was to be my duty to protect the emigrants from undue duress, and to promise the authorities that no illegalities on the part of the departing would be attempted. The reason for this safeguard, for either side, but especially so for the emigrants' side, was, the emigrants did not possess individually prepared passports with accompanying photographs, but had received permission to leave as a group, bound for Canada. Following a thorough orientation process with regard to my duties, I agreed to accept the assignment. My acceptance papers are dated June 5, 1924.

My First Assignment

The chairman of the Assembly, Rev. B.B. Janz, had been successful in his negotiations with the Russian authorities that personal passports were not required. The Assembly had prepared a list of names, and these had been reviewed and scrutinized by the police division of the O.G.P.U. According to these reviewed and accepted lists the visas were issued.

Rev. Janz gave into my possession a list with 1,250 names, which I was to take to Moscow to obtain the necessary permission for departure.

I went to the shipping company, Ruskapa, and announced my presence, and was introduced to the representative of the C.P.R., Mr. Nikita Th. Peschkow. He, in turn, introduced me to the director of the C.P.R. (overseas division), Mr. Ovens. Together with him we discussed in great detail and thoroughness the imminent departure of the group.

My next visit was to the Moscow soviet. The chairman, whose name escapes me, received me with a long face and angry eyes. I introduced myself as the authorized representative of the Assembly and asked for the necessary visas. He listened to me, quietly but obviously highly irritated. After I had completed my case, he yelled at me: "You come from that man Janz. Three years I have not crossed myself, but if I could free myself of him, I would cross myself three times." Finally he took the list with the names into his hands, examined it, and dismissed me with: "Come back tomorrow!" When I got out onto the street I realized how highly charged the atmosphere had been in the comrade's office.

How Wonderfully God Helps

Next morning I accompanied Mr. Peschkow to the foreign department. Some passports for foreigners needed to be completed. In due time this was done, and we sought out a quiet place where we could talk undisturbed. We talked about the reasons why our people wanted to leave, and about the difficulties which the government officials placed in the way, thus preventing a smooth exit. He also made me aware, how in 1923 similar trains of emigrants had been detained, and the authorities had permitted personal encroachment on the lives of the departing. He was of the opinion that the departure-kommissariat ought to be informed of the occurrences in order to prevent them from happening again, and generally shield the unsuspecting and frightened group. I immediately set out to do just that.

I walked into the office of the departure-kommissariat and presented the concerns to a woman whose responsibility it was to provide safe conduct for passengers. When she learned that it was Mennonites we represented, she listened intently, and repeated the name "Mennonites" over and over again, as if in deep thought. She gave the impression as though she was trying to recall something out of her past, which had to do with Mennonites. Now she had it. She related to me how, during the time of the first world war, she had worked together with Mennonites in the Red Cross, and how a certain individual had left an indelible impression on her. I soon discovered that I was able to help here to complete here recollection, that she was thinking of a man by the name of Boschman, who had been a teacher in Halbstadt. She also inquired about his brother, who, at the time when I had my conversation with her, had been killed by bandits; but this I did not reveal to her. She promised that her influence and instructions would bring forth the letter of protection I asked for. It took hardly an hour, when she returned, with a copy of the telegram, which was directed to the station-masters from Moscow to Lichtenau—the latter being the departure point—through which the emigration train would pass. The telegram, in Russian, translates as follows:

"Jekaterinoslav, Charkov, Southrail, Kursk, Orjol, Moscow, White-Baltic Rail, Smoljensk, Moscow Ruskapa.

Supplementary to telegram #22/70928 of May 28 in Lichtenau, ordering 50 railway cars to be at the disposal for 1,250 Mennonites. Departure of the Eschalon on June 23, as a military train, over Fjodorowka, Charcov, Kursk, Orjol, Brjansk, Smoljensk, Witjibsk, Polotz, Sebesh. Eschalon must arrive in Sebesh June 28, consistent with agreement and arrival of ship at Libau. Junction stations will provide, on time, necessary locomotives to avoid unnecessary delays. Departure and arrival of train, surrender from one rail-line to the next, and arrival in Sebesh to be confirmed by telegram."

With the telegram safely deposited in my briefcase—examining the document today, it is almost unbelievable that all this took place forty years ago—I hurried back to the office of the soviet, to see what progress had been made in readying the necessary departure permission of the emigrants. Here too, I discovered no hindrances. The comrade had kept his word and confirmed permission to leave. With a glad heart I made my journey home.

Station Lichtenau

Arriving home, I made my way to the station-master at Lichtenau. Was I surprised when I discovered that the telegram, mentioned above, had already been received by him. He informed me that the train cars had been ordered and should arrive shortly. "Hurry, and get the emigrants to the station; the train must leave Lichtenau on June 23," he said, visibly excited.

Notices were now sent out into the villages notifying the people of the date of departure. And the day of departure arrived. That was a busy day, beginning soon after breakfast. Some people arrived on hay wagons, on which they had loaded their packed belongings, some came on foot and still others arrived on horseback. Some came to leave Russia, others came to bid farewell, and still others came out of curiosity. To say, it was a colourful crowd, somewhat disorganized, which gathered at the Lichtenau station, is perhaps, an understatement.

The practicality of the people soon became evident. First, all the train cars (freight cars) received a thorough cleaning and made them comfortable for travel. Then, groups were formed and assigned to cars, the baggage stowed and inwardly prepared to take their leave of the loved ones, who would stay behind. And the time for the final goodbye came. The shadows of the day were getting longer, the sun was setting.

The time to say farewell was at hand: from your native soil, the villages, its arrangements, and from friends and relatives. It was a time for goodbye!...even the strong and the brave wept and sobbed

Ontario Mennonite History is published semi-annually by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6, and distributed to all members of the Society.

Editor: Reg Good

Editorial Committee: Linda Huebert Hecht, Lorraine Roth, Herbert Enns

Financial assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture is gratefully acknowledged.

Inquiries, articles, book notices or news items should be directed to the Editor, Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario c/o Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G6 TEL. (519) 885-0220, FAX (519) 885-0014

openly! Perhaps not all realized the finality of their leaving, an almost holy gravity was visible on the faces of the people. The parting hurt! One part of the people were leaving, the other part remained.

Suddenly the bell sounded, once, and then again. Everyone knew that only a few more minutes were left before the final parting. The throng of people became visibly restless. Now all those leaving had to board their cars, and those remaining had to leave. One more firm handshake; over there, a last embrace; tears flowed. Yes, parting hurts! Three sounds from the bell, the train began to move out of the station—"Auf Wiedersehen! Follow us!" "Auf Wiedersehen in eternity!" one traveller called out. I looked out once more, to the crowd which remained—Elder Abram Klassen; teacher Kornelius Wiens; teacher Peter Giesbrecht; teacher Philipp Cornies, the vice-chairman of the Assembly; Heinrich Bartel, the treasurer. Finally, I saw only a great mass of people with prospects of an uncertain future.

On the train all was silent, each one absorbed in his/her own thoughts. It was evening now, someone began to sing: "Wer nur den lieben Gott laest walten!" ("If thou but suffer God to guide thee"). Soon everyone sang. "Befiehl du deine Wege!" ("Commit though all thy griefs"). More songs were sung. How wonderful that in times of joy and in times of sadness, one could sing the songs of the church, songs which suited the occasion; songs acquired by memorization and now sung with all the fervor of the individuals. Slowly the singing faded. They had sung themselves to sleep. I listened to the rhythmic clanging of the wheels and allowed my own thoughts to wander.

Alexandrowsk

The railway officials adhered to the instructions from Moscow, and the train travelled at speeds, as if possessed, without stopping. We had not expected such precise acceptance of instruction by the officials. Arriving in Alexandrowsk, a friend of mine, Diedrich Walde, confronted me: "Man, can't you do anything with that engineer? He drives the train like a madman, and without stopping. Grandmother fell off the board-bench onto the chest, and broke the lid." (This sentence loses a lot of its humour in translation from the Plattdeutsch—low German). What could I say in reply? We had hoped to make good headway. I was glad when the conductor signalled "all aboard", and we hurriedly sought our places in our respective cars. Stops were made only at large cities, such as Sinjelnjikowo, Losowaja, Charkow, Kursk, Orjol, etc. The passengers tired of the

continuing speed, without stops, and were glad whenever the train was shunted onto a less used siding, where cooking, roasting, eating, resting and washing could be attended to.

A Miracle Before the Eyes of the World

I think it was in Orjol, when the train had barely stopped, that the station-master approached me and asked where we had come from and where we were going. "Actually, the question was superfluous, as he knew the answer. However, I quietly answered him: "The people are emigrants and are on their way to Canada." The man stood before me as though stunned. "Three years I have run my head against the wall of bureaucratic red tape in order to get a visa to leave this country, always without success. And here you come with 1,250 people, with permission to leave..." he was not the only one who marvelled at the possibility of such a large group leaving the country. It was a miracle of God's doing, in the eyes of the world.

The Trip via Smoljensk, to the Border

The trip through the glorious forests of west-Russia was beautiful and at times even enchanting. Most of the travellers had never before seen such vast forests, and whenever the train would make an unexpected stop along the way, the passengers would leave the train, and quickly picked flowers and cut evergreen branches along the railway right-of-way and decorate the cars. Naturally such stops also afforded opportunity to do some visiting in other cars and compare experiences made along the way. No doubt many remembered the saying: "Shared joys increase to double joys, and shared griefs decrease to half the grief."

The Sick Car

The long train also had a special car, staffed with a nurse, to provide needed service and aid for the sick. Only one child became seriously ill, and eventually died. The body was buried at Sebesch. Rev. Jacob Reimer, Rueckenau, spoke words of comfort at the graveside. Several children were born during the trip. This medical car proved to be very practical, and a wise arrangement.

Who is holding you up?

Usually, on arrival at a station I would seek out the station-master to determine what length of time the train was scheduled to stop, and whether it was worthwhile for passengers to leave. When, on one such occasion I again sought out the station-master, he asked: "Who is holding you up? It is annoying having to wait here at the station until midnight for a military train, and then discover it is a train filled with women."

Will there be War?

In Smoljensk I had to telegraph the Riga authorities of the arrival of the train, as well as impending departure for Riga. I drove into the city in a horse drawn carriage (taxi), to send the telegram, when suddenly the driver turned around and asked: "Will there be war?" I asked him what made him ask such a question, and he answered: "The war commandant and his staff left yesterday for the border and today a military train equipped with mine-laying devices is coming through." I realized that our train of emigrants, registered as a military train, was creating uneasiness among the populace.

At the Border

As we came closer to the border, the atmosphere became more tense. The question was asked over and over, is everything in order? Suppose someone would be discovered by the border authorities, who was an illegal passenger, who was not entered on the official list; someone who might try and slip through. Suppose these authorities discovered something in the papers which was not according to the agreements I had made in Moscow? How would I look in the eyes of the authorities, the representative of the Assembly; and the Assembly itself, what bad image would I create for future groups wishing to leave? Much depended on the honesty and thoroughness of this initial trek in order to accommodate future groups. Most of us on the train were anxious the closer the train came to the border. The time of proof soon arrived. The train had barely stopped, when the assistant to the inspector of police stood in front of me. His greeting was friendly. I reported the exact number of passengers, and of the trip itself, when he suggested that we go to the staff quarters of the police. Here I again had to report, in greater detail on registration, border-passage, etc. I was asked whether there was personnel onboard the train who could assist in recording the names of the emigrants into the border book. I reported there were 28 teachers (male), 9 female teachers, a number of post high school graduates and a great number of high school graduates. It did not take long and 16 secretaries were busily involved in registering every emigrant. This went on all night. The inspector was greatly surprised when I came forward with another 16 secretaries in order to relieve the first set. He could hardly contain himself, and finally blurted out: "And you are leaving the country? Our land needs people like you desperately!"

Customs Check

The duty of the customs official, in any country, is, to see that no prohibited goods or articles enter into the country illegally;

likewise, that no specified goods or articles are taken out of the country illegally. Such rules are all well and good, as long as the examining officials adhere to these rules. However it is an unpleasant situation when customs officials intimidate helpless passengers with belaboured questioning. Some of the officials were friendly and their work progressed smoothly. Others were indifferent and hostile. They dug among the belongings of the emigrants, who became scared of what might happen. Under such circumstances Mr. J. had his camera and equipment confiscated. He reported it to me. I begged the official to return the articles, because Mr. J. hoped to earn his living with it in Canada.

Mr. J. was a photographer. "I will leave," said the official to me, "and then you can return the camera to the man." "No," I replied. "I will not return the equipment behind your back, but here, in your presence I will give to Mr. J. what you confiscated." I had Mr. J. brought into our car and he received his camera and attachments and left happily, and the checking continued without further incident.

At the Red Door

Crossing the border, from Russia into Latvia, the train had to pass through a door, painted in red, and decorated on top with a star. At this gate/door border guards had treated the 1923 emigrants miserably. Expecting a repeat performance on this trip, I asked the customs inspector to accompany the train to the border. He agreed. The train had to stop prior to passing through the door, and had barely stopped when a big fat "official" began ordering all wooden planks, which had served as beds and benches, to be removed from the train. How surprised, and irritated, I'm sure, he was, when he saw his superior on board, who immediately ordered a stop to any further "enthusiastic" instructions his underlying might have. The foresight, to have the official come along to the border, turned out to be a wise move.

With the last whistle from the train on Russian soil, the train slowly passed through the door onto Latvian soil. The emigrants wept and waved to me, some, no doubt, that at last they were in a free country; others, perhaps, felt sorry for me, that I had to return, into a lion's den, as it were. I too was overcome with emotion and wept. When the official noticed that I was crying, he said: "Well, well, even their leader weeps." When I was able to reply, I said: "Comrade, how can I remain without any sign of feeling and emotion, when over one hundred of my former students have left this country?" To this the customs official replied: "Platschtje Towarisch!" ("Cry Comrade").



"Thru this gate we entered into the land of freedom, 1924 Latvia, it was still free there."

That summer, 1924, I accompanied three emigrant groups to the border. I accepted these assignments as a privilege, and as an opportunity of being able to serve the brotherhood in this way. Of the 2,526 persons who left Russia that summer, at least 90% were farmers; 113 persons had a high school education, 51 had a post high school education, 60 were teachers and two were university graduates. Aside from this, there were businessmen, labourers, office workers, nurses, photographers, land surveyors, engineers, accountants, etc. in this group as well.

My involvement in this work during that summer, brought me in contact with officials of the C.P.R. and officials of other shipping companies, who were associated with the Ruskapa. It was also my privilege to make contacts with other foreigners on these trips; foreigners who were visiting Russia. Under quite extraordinary circumstances I established

the acquaintanceship with Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Massey in Sebesh. We travelled together to Moscow, dined together and talked about many things. I was able to provide some enlightenment on conditions in Russia, but as a result, almost lost my life. When, on my next trip, I entered the dining car, and being recognized by the waiter, he approached me: "Are you alive?" "Why not?" I asked. He replied: "It was the intention of the G.P.U. police, who were on the train, to have you removed from the train before arriving in Moscow." I surmised that it was not advisable to carry on lengthy discussions with foreigners. Mr. Massey wrote to me later, inviting me to come to

Canada, and teach in Mennonite schools where the English language was not accepted. In 1932 Mr. Massey and I met again, in Canada, in fact at Knox Church, where he and Mrs. Massey were reporting on a trip which they had made to China, and from which they had just recently returned. Later he became Canada's High Commissioner to London, followed by the appointment as

Canada's Governor General a few years after that.

Since 1924, 40 years have passed. In reminiscing on what has been, many of the events are vividly recalled, as though they just happened. Quite a number of those who came to Canada in 1924, are no longer with us. Our emigration from Russia and immigration to Canada remains a miracle in the thoughts of many people. Have we recognized—have we appreciated our rescue from a land of slavery in this light? No doubt many an individual has written down experiences of the old homeland, as well as of the early pioneer years in our newly adopted homeland. It would be too bad if such accounts were to go unnoticed or even lost.

I send greetings to all immigrants who have come to Canada, especially remembering those who came in 1924, who, no doubt, will celebrate the anniversary of their coming to Canada with thanksgiving.

Henry B. Tiessen's Experiences as a Russian Mennonite Immigrant

translated by Herbert P. Enns

The following excerpt is translated from Tiessen's 50 Jahre in Canada: Damals-Heute (Kitchener: privately printed, 1973, pp. 5-14). Tiessen's children graciously consented to this reprint, deeming it an honour to see part of their father's labours circulated among English-speaking readers.

From Russia to Canada

It was in the early 1920's that an ocean liner approached the city of Quebec. Among the passengers on board was also a family named Hoffman. As had many others, they had decided to migrate to Canada. With anticipation they stood on deck of the ship and gazed at the shores, which was to become their home. Uncle held little Mary on his arm, while auntie with little Jake at her side. Even from this distance one could see the upper and lower parts of the city. On steep streets cars could be seen driving at a high rate of speed. The ship drew close to the harbour and finally with some maneuvering, it berthed in its designated place.

Gangplanks were laid on and everyone went ashore. What a wonderful feeling to be able to stand on firm ground once again. Following a warm welcome, extended by Canadian government officials, everyone went into a huge auditorium in which hot meals were served. In addition everyone received a New Testament. Following the meal everyone was given a paper bag, containing the lunch for the continuing journey. Following a five-hour ride the train stopped in Montreal. Some of the train cars, which were designated for Waterloo County, Ontario, were uncoupled here, while the rest of the train continued its journey to western Canada.

Living with the Burkharths

Hoffmans were among those who had come to Waterloo. First to Toronto and from there to Kitchener/Waterloo, the twin cities. At the Kitchener station the train cars carrying the immigrants were disconnected from the train that had brought them to Kitchener, and on a branch line were taken to Waterloo. Every endeavor was made not to raise suspicion among the natives that here immigrants were arriving who would look for employment in the city. However government decree had it that all immigrants spend several years on the farm, and also acquire use of the English

language. "Well", Uncle Jakob said, "we are prepared to work on farms, and learn the English language—the language of Canada."

Arriving at the small station in Waterloo, a colourful scene developed. Neatly tended to a fence, close to the station, stood a number of neat little buggies. On the station platform stood men with black hats and long beards. The women wore bonnets and long skirts. A big, old, respectable man, with a long beard, came forward, cleared his throat once or twice, and then said: "Mia heische Euch alle Willcome zu unscher County. Mia wolle Euch alle mitnehme. Ihr sollt bei unsch halt wohni." ("We welcome you all to our country. We want to take all of you along. You are to live with us"). That sounded good, especially following such a long journey, and it sounded as though the man spoke German. Since no one else responded, Uncle Jakob stepped forward and thanked for the friendly greeting. Orders were now given that all immigrants should gather themselves as families on the station platform. The farmers then came and chose those for whom they had room. Depending on the amount of room they had, some chose larger families, others again chose smaller families.

Uncle Jakob and Mariechen (Mary) and the children Jake and Mary, were standing further towards the end of the line. A man, in his mid-forties, came forward and asked about the Hoffmans. He and uncle conversed together for a while. "Dasch shieht gansch gut ausch," he said. "Kennt mal alle mitkomme, mia kenne gleich fahri." ("Everything is satisfactory. You can all come along. We can leave right away").

To the rear of the station building stood the small wagon, with two brown trotters hitched to it. Everyone got onto the wagon. Mr. Burkhart, that was the host's name, and uncle sat at the front. Mrs. Burkhart and auntie sat to the rear, and Jake and little Mary sat on a blanket on the floor of the buggy. The road led out of the city and into the country. Uncle and Mr. Burkhart spoke sporadically during the drive. Auntie and Mrs. Burkhart gave each other a friendly smile now and then, especially whenever little Mary would throw up her hands into the air and shriek whenever the wagon would pass through a hole in the road, causing it to bump. Jake, on the other hand, sat quietly and pointed to the many cattle grazing in the fields. He thought there must be a million of them.

After they had driven up a steep hill, a beautiful scene unfolded before them. There, before them, at the bottom of the hill, was the Burkhart farm. A long, straight lane led to the house. Along the lane they passed a large chicken barn. The chickens were in the process of going to roost for the night. Next came the yard. To the left was the house. Before them was a large barn (a combination stable and barn), and next several high silos (round reservoirs to store cattle feed). To the right was a large shed and garage (implement shed).

With a big and loud "Hurra" the Burkhart children burst out of the house. Each one wanted to see whom Daddy and Mommy had brought along. There was Jake and little Mary, and the joy was great. Mr. Burkhart admonished the children to calm down and invited everyone to come into the house. While uncle and Mr. Burkhart went into the living room, auntie and Mrs. Burkhart went into the kitchen.

Bevvy, the oldest daughter, was in the kitchen, and had practically finished in getting the supper ready. Horst, the oldest son, just then entered and washed his hands at the pump. When everyone was ready they seated themselves at the table.

Mr. Burkhart was seated at the head of the table, and uncle and auntie were seated on either side, next to him. Further down the table sat Mr. Burkhart with the children. Everyone bowed down for a silent prayer. Immediately following prayer Mrs. Burkhart and Bevvy got up and brought from the kitchen a well prepared beef roast and potatoes. Mr. Burkhart took a long carving knife and cut the roast in pieces. Each one then had generous cuts placed on his/her plate. "Und jetscht," he said, as he passed the potatoes and vegetables, "jeda hilft sich selbscht." "Ma gut eschi," Mr. Burkhart said to little Jake, so dasch der Wind dich nich wegblascht." ("And now everyone helps himself. Eat well, so the wind does not blow you away.") Everything tasted so good, and with water, milk and coffee the food was washed down. Following the main course, there was dessert—pudding and all kinds of pies. At the conclusion of the meal a huge bowl filled with the most beautiful red-cheeked apples were passed around. Yes, it had all tasted very good, especially following the long journey and the time of privation.

After everything had been cleaned up and put away, it was time for a night of rest. Burkharths had a big house, and the Hoffmans were assigned quarters in the addition to the house. Here there were two bedrooms, a guest room and a small kitchen. The meals however, the Hoffmans would continue to eat together with the Burkharths in the large kitchen. It took awhile before Jake and Mary fell asleep, the experiences and surprises had had an overwhelming effect on them. Uncle and auntie too, sat up for a long time, and talked about the wonderful happenings of the day, before they too finally sought their rest.

It was 5 o'clock when the alarm clock rang. And things began to stir, as the chores in the barn had to be done. Uncle still felt tired, but he got up and also went to the barn.

Mr. Burkhart and Horst were already busily engaged with chores. Burkharths had over 40 pedigree milking cows, which had to be milked. Although this was done with electrical equipment, nevertheless it was no small task. Meantime uncle busied himself tending to the horses; he gave them water and their feed, and it reminded him of his own farmstead in the old homeland. After the milking was finished and all the cattle and calves and pigs and kittens had received their water and feed, it was time for breakfast.

At the pump, in front of the house, everyone washed. Whoever wanted hot water, had to get it from the kitchen with a dipper. The breakfast table was generously laden. To begin with, a glass of apple juice was served. This was followed by porridge and coffee. Then came bacon and eggs. For dessert there was pie, cookies and apples. It must be noted that Aunt Mary too, had been busily engaged in the kitchen.

After breakfast the men returned to the barn to attend to the chores which had not been completed before breakfast. In the field they're getting ready for corn cutting. The whole corn plant, stem, leaves and cobs were cut up and put into the silos. Horst brought the load forward and Mr. Burkhart operated the cutting machine, and uncle was in the silo spreading the cuttings as they came in. Some salt was mixed with the cuttings. The cut corn had a pleasant aroma and promised to be good feed for the cattle.

On the farm there was always something to do. In the winter firewood was cut in the back woodlot. The good tree trunks were transported to the sawmill, where they were cut up as lumber. Boards always found good use on the farm. Whatever was left was prepared for the kitchen and ovens. The stables, barns and granary were areas which needed to be

clean at all times. Although the stables were cleaned with a track system, nevertheless the work was hard. Afterwards the manure was driven to the fields with the aid of a manure-spreader, and spread over the field.

The care of the chicken stable became the special assignment for uncle. In this area he had already achieved considerable success in the old country. Because of the heavy workload, the Burkharths had neglected the poultry care, thus they (the chickens) merely existed. Uncle now introduced systematic feeding and care for the flock. Miracles began to happen. The roosters, with their red combs, began to make themselves heard more lustily in the early hours of the morning. The hens showed signs of renewed life and cackled all day long, and laid the nicest eggs. "Neh, so wasch habi mia noch net gesehi," Mr. Burkhart said. ("No, we haven't seen anything like this before.") The chicken business began to take on a profitable aspect of the farm operation.

Auntie too, had become used to her new surroundings. Everyday she would rise early in order to assist Mrs. Burkhart and Bevy with the housework. Since Mrs. Burkhart planned the meals for the day, auntie would brew the coffee and prepare the porridge and set the table. Later, when the children began to go to school it was also her responsibility to prepare the lunches for them. For auntie this aspect of meal preparation seemed very important and also very practical. Many things she did she remembered from her own household days.

Once in a while auntie would experiment in baking "Zwieback", and "Zuckerkuchen". Some time later "Rollkuchen", "Stollen" and "Porzelchen" were introduced to the menu. The children became excited whenever "Porzelchen" were served. Mr. and Mrs. Burkhart favoured the "Borscht" which auntie could always prepare in such masterful fashion. Auntie was able to learn quite a few things from Mrs. Burkhart, which we will refer to again a little later on. But the limburger cheese was one food they had difficulty getting used to.

Little Jake was 6 years of age when he was required to go to school. When the day arrived all the children got up early, to be ready for the walk to school, which was about a mile away. After all the lunches had been made and packed, they all marched off, happy and carefree. Everyone wanted to hold Jake's hand. Auntie stood at the door and watched them go. She waved her hand everytime Jake turned around. She turned away, to wipe a tear from her eye.

Little Mary was at home and played with her doll and the teddy bear. She

pressed them alternately to her breast and shouted for joy as she kissed them. In doing so her hair became quite unkempt. Whenever possible she would climb up, and wherever something was standing she would put her fingers in.

On a Saturday, after supper, the Burkharths and uncle and auntie were still seated at the table and involved in conversation. Since Hoffmans had spent some time now with the Burkharths, Mr. Burkhart wondered whether or not the Hoffmans would want to commit themselves to stay on the farm for one year. Mr. Burkhart would pay Mr. Hoffman \$60.00 a month, with meals and lodging free. It seemed like a very liberal offer, and Mr. and Mrs. Hoffman agreed to accept it. "Ei Agreement," Mr. Burkhart said, "brauchi mia nit schreibi—eh Man, eh Wort" ("An agreement we don't have to write out. A man is taken at his word.") And that was that.

Mr. Burkhart now began to tell something of their early beginnings. It was at the beginning of the 16th century when their movement originated in Switzerland. Because they were severely persecuted because of their faith, they emigrated to the Quaker State of Pennsylvania, United States of America, where they were promised complete religious freedom. However, when at the turn of the 18th century the civil war erupted in the United States, they moved to Canada, thereby remaining under British domination. They were among the first white settlers in Upper Canada (today Ontario). The beginning was hard, but today Waterloo County belongs to one of the best counties in Ontario. Mr. Burkhart continued saying, that generally, they were referred to locally as the Old Mennonites, because of their long residence here. Although they were considered "plain" in their lifestyle, at the same time they were considered progressive farmers, who used the most modern and up-to-date technical equipment available. In their churches, which were located mostly in the surrounding villages, the English language by and large, was the only language used in their worship. They supported missions, schools of higher education and other charitable institutions.

In the northern part of Waterloo County there lived the "Old Order Mennonites". They were exceptionally "plain" in their lifestyle—the men wore black hats, no ties and their suit coats were buttoned to the top. They all wore beards, but no mustache, they were not allowed, since they were a reminder of military customs of years past. In the same manner,

the women were dressed in black, similar to the styles of the Puritan Quaker women of old. They had no telephones and very few cars. If someone purchased a car, he was required to remove all chrome parts, thus avoiding any semblance of pride. Since they were bothered by the tourists with their cameras, they carried with them small pocket mirrors, and in self-defence, would reflect the sunshine into their faces. Modern mankind might smile at some of the practices of the "plain" people, however, to this day they will not accept Old Age Pensions and no Children's Allowance cheques. They help themselves. Uncle Jakob hadn't known that such things existed, and expressed the wish to get to know these people a little better.

Early Sunday Mr. Burkhardt and Uncle Jakob were on their way to the "Meeting House" of the Old Orders. It was a painted white building of wood construction and situated in open country. Soon the open buggies and the covered wagons began to arrive in great numbers. The women with the children were left off at the entrance to the "Meeting House", and the men then continued on to the "railing" where the horses were tethered. After the horses had been covered with nice warm blankets the men also entered the building. The inside of the building was also painted white and the pine-wood floors were nicely scrubbed, and the unpainted benches (pews), because of having sat on them so often, had become shiny. After the hats and bonnets had

been placed on wooden pegs, the men and the boys sat down on one side of the room, while women and girls sat on the other side.

At the front, behind the pulpit, sat five men. A sixth also came forward, greeted them with a handshake and kiss and then seated himself beside them. The latter was a lay-preacher, who had been chosen for that position by lot. Led by a song leader, the assembly sang, in unison, several German hymns, all verses. Some hymns had many verses. Then the preacher spoke in the Pennsylvania-Dutch language on the text, "Live honestly, and in peace with all men." When he had finished the assembly knelt in silent prayer. After an extended period of time the preacher cleared his throat and everyone rose. The service was over.

While the women were involved getting their overcoats on themselves and their children, there was also much visiting. Plans were made where they would visit in the afternoon. It mattered not if ten or more families would gather at one place, the pantry was always full. The men meanwhile had gone to their horses and then with smacking tongues, drove their buggies to the front door to pick up the ladies and children. After all had taken their places they were homeward bound in a regular trot, travelling on the shoulders of the highway.

One morning Mr. Burkhardt came into the stable and asked uncle: "Wirdscht du nit mal gleichi zu a bee foahri?" ("Would

you like to go to a bee?") Well, a bee is a "Biene" in the German language, but how one could drive to a bee, that was something which uncle failed to comprehend; and Burkhardt had no bees. "Mei Uncle Aron Nafziger ischt die barn abgebrennt, en mia welli sie wieder aufbau", ("My Uncle Aron Nafziger's barn burned down and we are going to rebuild it.") Mr. Burkhardt said by way of explanation.

At the Aron Nafziger farm a busy scene was visible. The whole yard was full of buggies. Large frames, the walls of the barn, were being erected. Young men climbed and swung skillfully to the very top and coupled the frame structure together. Soon the rafters were in place and the boards and shingles were nailed on. Everything was done with precision-like accuracy, and everyone knew what he had to do.

While the men were busy erecting the barn, the ladies had prepared a banquet dinner under the large maple tree. There was everything imaginable, nothing was lacking, and the appetite was there too. Ice-cold water and lemonade had been available throughout the day. When the sun went down, the barn was finished.

Henry B. Tiessen taught for thirty-four years in elementary and high schools in Ontario. He now lives in retirement in Tabor Manor, St. Catharines.

People and Projects

A 70th Anniversary Dankfest, commemorating the arrival of Mennonite immigrants from Russia in 1924, will be held at the Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church on 15 October 1994, 9:30-4:00. Lunch provided. Highlights include dramatic presentations, film displays, choral and congregational singing. Jacob Fransen is guest speaker.

The April 1994 issue of *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, an illustrated quarterly published by the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, features Mennonite hymnody. It was designed for individuals interested in the use of specific hymns throughout Mennonite history, for congregations in the process of changing hymnals, and for worship planners attempting to incorporate the finest examples from the hymnic tradition.

Miriam Snyder Sokvitne has donated to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario

the finest collection of 19th century Waterloo County history still in private hands. The collection of family papers, books, photographs and memorabilia was assembled by her father, Joseph Meyer Snyder, and her grandfather, David B. Schneider. Included are the first volumes, dating from 1878, of the *Gospel Banner*, a publication of the United Mennonites, later known as Mennonite Brethren in Christ and now known as the Missionary Church. The collection includes unique turn-of-the-century photographs and a unique copy of *Preaching Plan for the New Mennonite Church in Canada West for the Year of our Lord 1870*, (Berlin, ON: Berliner Journal Office). There is also a diary of David B. Schneider for the years 1858-61, and a copy of *Herkommen and Geschlechts Register der Schneider Familie* (Berlin, ON: Heinrich Eby, 1849), the earliest published genealogy in Canada and the earliest published Mennonite genealogy in the world.

Paul Tiessen and Hildi Froese Tiessen received the **Edna Staebler Research Fellowship** to publish a scholarly edition of **Ephraim Weber's letters**. Ephraim Weber (1902-1955) was a native of Waterloo County. He corresponded with Lucy Maude Montgomery and Leslie Staebler.

Royden Loewen, who addressed the annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario in 1991 on "**The Mennonites of Waterloo, Ontario and Hanover, Manitoba, 1890s: A Study of Household and Community**," published this address in *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 9 (1994), pp. 187-210.

Marlene Epp delivered a paper to the Canadian Historical Association at the Learned Societies Conference in June 1994 on "**The Memory of Violence: Mennonite Refugees and Rape in World War II**." A copy of this paper has been deposited in the Conrad Grebel College Library.

Book Notes

Ruth M. Burkholder and the York Region Genealogy Group, compilers of *Resources for Genealogy in York Region, Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Genealogical Society, 1993), 30 pp. survey primary and secondary genealogical sources for the York Region.

Betty Pries, author of *Seawindrock: The History of MCC in Newfoundland and Labrador, 1954-1993* (Winnipeg, MB: MCC Canada, 1993), 107 pp. provides a brief account of Mennonite Central Committee's presence in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Labrador program was administered by MCC's regional director in Ontario, Harvey Taves, 1954-1964.

Bill Bowman, compiler of *Ancestors and Descendants of Henry [Shantz] Bowman, 1867-1935* ([Gananoque, ON: the author], 1993), provides statistical information on births, deaths and marriages in the Henry Bowman family.

Robert F. Ensminger, author of *The Pennsylvania Barn: Its Origin, Evolution, and Distribution in North America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), analyzes the origin, classification, evolution, diffusion and future of the Pennsylvania barn. He includes a discussion of **Pennsylvania barns in Ontario**, which is illustrated with photographs of the exterior and interior of the **Samuel Bricker barn** at Doon Heritage Crossroads in Kitchener, ON. His sources for this discussion include Peter Ennals' "Nineteenth-Century Barns in Southern Ontario, Canada," *The Canadian Geographer* 16 (1972) 3, pp. 256-70 and Robert Ensminger's "Pennsylvania in Canada," *Pioneer American Society Transactions* 11 (1988), pp. 63-72.

The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario has published an entertaining collection of historic home remedies in *At Your Own Risk*, Vol. XII (1991) of the Canadian-German Folklore Series.

Rosemary Ambrose, compiler of *Waterloo County Churches: A Research Guide to Churches Established Before 1900* (Kitchener, ON: Waterloo-Wellington Branch, Ontario Genealogical Society, 1993), provides a thumbnail sketch of each congregation in Waterloo County and lists the location of known genealogical records relating to each.

John M. Byler, compiler of *Amish Immigrants of Waldeck and Hesse: A Record of 263 Immigrants. With a Record of Their Descendants to Those Who Were Married by About 1865. Plus Historical Records of Germany, Shiplists, Etc.* (Elverson, PA: John M. Byler, 1993) provides genealogical information on families who migrated from the Hesse-Waldeck area in Germany to North America, including Ontario, between 1817 and 1865. Family names are arranged in alphabetical order and there is a comprehensive index that includes names of all persons (women by maiden name), places and ships.

Alice Deckert-Reesor, Deborah Martin Koop and Laura Loewen, compilers of *Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal, 1978-1993* ([Montreal: *Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal, 1993*]), 14 pp. narrate the history of the first and only English-language Mennonite congregation in Quebec. Three appendices include a covenant statement; a list of congregational elders and chairs; and a list of baptisms, marriages and deaths since 1978.

Verna Schwartzenruber and Lorraine Roth, editors of *The John W. Wagler Family History and Genealogy* (New Hamburg, ON: John Wagler Family Book Committee, 1993), 214 pp. identify the relationships of all the Canadian Waglers and trace the descendants of the John Wagler branch of the family. The book includes the same Wagler family background as that of the Jacob Wagler genealogy done in 1989. However, this book includes background information on several other related families and photographs of the site of one of the Wagler homesteads near Ribeauville, Alsace, France. There are many anecdotes and illustrations. There is an index of descendants and spouses.

Velma and Maurice Witzel and Murray Witzel, compilers/editors of the *George Iutzi and Catherine Miller Genealogy, 1801-1992* (Kitchener, ON: Maurice and Velma Witzel, 1992), 406 pp. trace the descendants of one of the Iutzi brothers who came to Canada. Since some of this family began using the spelling Iutzi, the compilers have chosen to use that spelling of the name in the introductory materials. Iutzi is used for persons who retain that spelling. There is a separate index for each of the children of George and Catherine Iutzi; so persons not familiar with the family will need to check each index.

The Trail of the Black Walnut and *The Trail of the Huguenots*, both by G. Elmore Reaman, have been reprinted. They are available for \$25. U.S. plus \$3. U.S. for postage and handling from Genealogical Publishing Co., 1001 N. Calvert St., Baltimore, MD, 21202-6687.

Normand Fortier, in "Guide to Oral History Collections in Canada," *Canadian Oral History Association Journal* 13 (1993), 402 pp. provides a useful survey of oral history collections in Canada. Some unusual Ontario Mennonite sources include The Blodwen Davies Collection at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Oral History Collection at the Kitchener Public Library.

Lovina Weber and Leah Martin, compilers of *Was Grosdaudy un Grosmammy Gsaht Hen: Pennsylvania German Stories, Poems, Proverbs* (Waterloo, ON: The Waterloo Chapter of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1994), 184 pp. provide interesting and entertaining accounts of Pennsylvania-German life.

Elizabeth Bloomfield, in "The Waterloo Township Cadastre in 1861," *University of Guelph Occasional Papers in Geography, No. 21*, 1994, 105 pp. analyzes the complex survey system and land ownership pattern in Waterloo Township, 1800-1861. Tremaine's land ownership map of 1861 is reproduced in 22 detailed sections. A personal index of over 1,500 names of landowners and householders is included, based on both Tremaine's map and the Waterloo Township assessment rolls for 1861.

Pamela Klassen, in *Going by the Moon and the Stars: Stories of Two Russian Mennonite Women* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1994), 144 pp. tells the stories of two Russian Mennonite women's religious lives, as they struggle through World War II, resettle in Canada and grow older.

Marlene Epp, in *Mennonites in Ontario: An Introduction* (Waterloo: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, 1994), 45 pp. narrates a popular account of Ontario Mennonite life. This booklet succeeds *The Mennonites in Ontario* by J. Winfield Fretz.