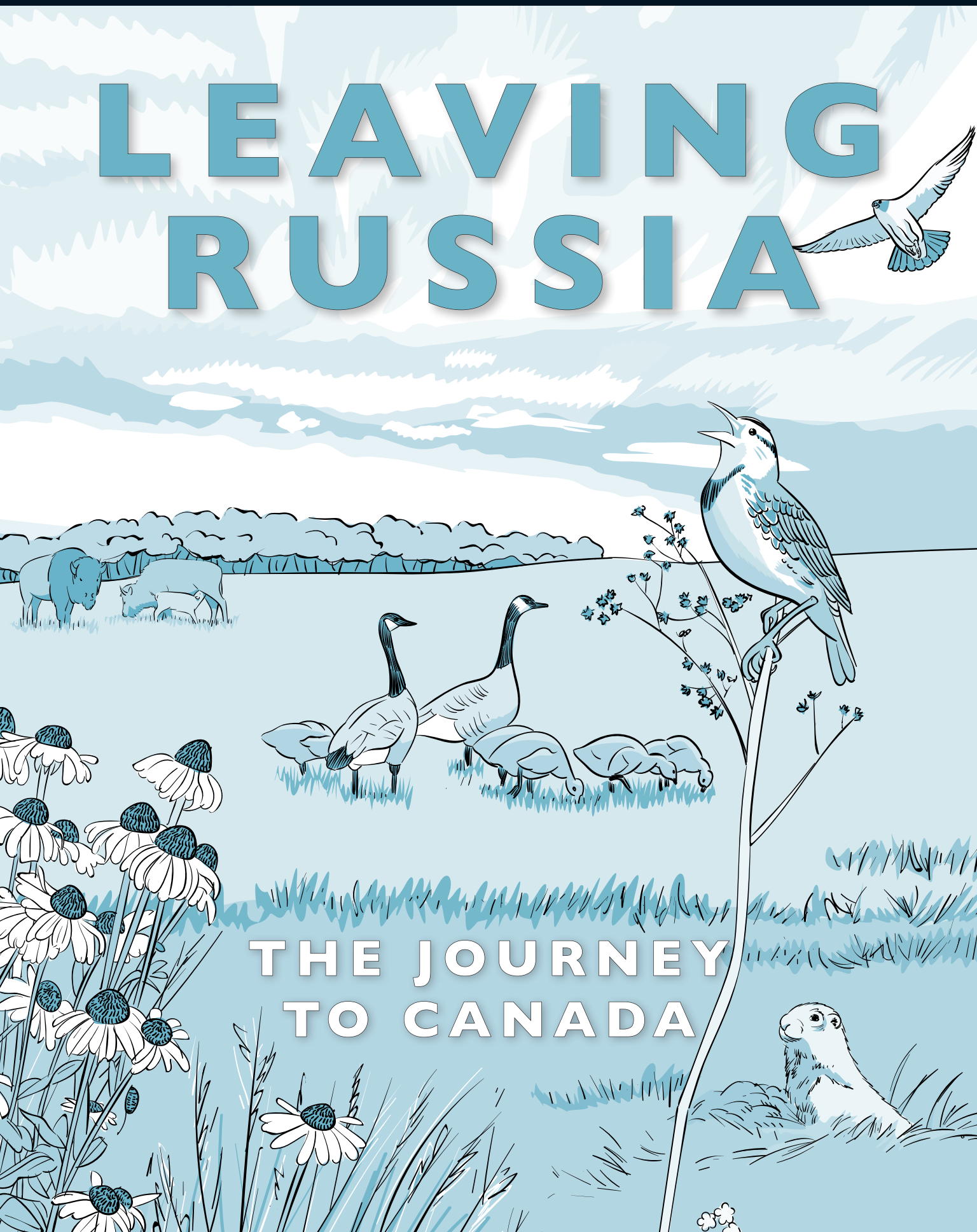
LEAVING RUSSIA



THE JOURNEY TO CANADA

LEAVING RUSSIA

Mennonite History for Young People
Volume Four

LEAVING RUSSIA

THE JOURNEY TO CANADA

Rosabel Fast

D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation
2018

Rosabel Fast has taught language arts and social studies in elementary schools and written readers for German Mennonite schools in Mexico. She holds two graduate degrees, in history and adult education, with a specialty in teacher education. She applies her passion for, and delight in, engaging learners through the use of authentic, interesting and relevant content, and in creating educational resources for learners and their teachers. Her series Mennonite History for Young People is one of these resources.

D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation,
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PROVINCES WITH MENNONITE SETTLERS

The first Mennonites in Canada settled in Ontario. Later, Mennonites from Russia settled in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of a people who moved from Russia to Canada in the 1870s. The story begins in the 1870s and ends around 1922. The people in the story are Old Colony Mennonites.

This is a true story about the past. It is a history. In writing history, we can only tell the stories that we know about, those that were left behind for us. History is the truest story we can tell with the information we can find.

History is not about people who died long ago. It is about people who were alive in the past. To enjoy history we must get into the lives of the people. As we learn facts from the past, we start to think about what it must have been like to have been there. The more information we find about the olden days, the closer we come to knowing what it was like to live in those days.

Then we can start to think about what history means. What would our forebears, our grandparents and great-grandparents, want us to know about them? What would they like us to remember about them? What would they like us to learn from them? What would the Mennonite pioneers have wanted us to know about their faith in God?

The Mennonites in this story also knew their history. That story begins in 1525 with a group of people called Anabaptists. Part of that story is told in an appendix at the back of the reader.

* * *

In this reader you will also find vignettes. These are short stories that introduce a section of history. To write the vignettes, I looked at the facts and information that I had about the past. Then I wondered what life must have been like in Canada. What was life like, for children, young people and their families? I wrote the vignettes to describe what their experiences could have been like.

— the author

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Bold words

In this reader you will find words in **bold** letters. These are words that you may not know. The meaning of a bold word may follow the bolded word. You will also find the bolded words and their meanings at the back of the reader, in the order they are used in the reader.

Italicized words

You will also see *italicized* words. These are words from a language other than English: German, *Plautdietsch* (Low German) and sometimes Spanish. Usually, the English word comes right after the italicized word. Do you like to learn new words from another language?

Yes? At the end of the paragraph you will find a guide for pronouncing foreign words. Use the guide to pronounce the italicized words.

No? Don't worry. You do not need to read the Plautdietsch or German or Spanish to understand the stories in this reader. You can jump right to the English meanings that come after the foreign words.

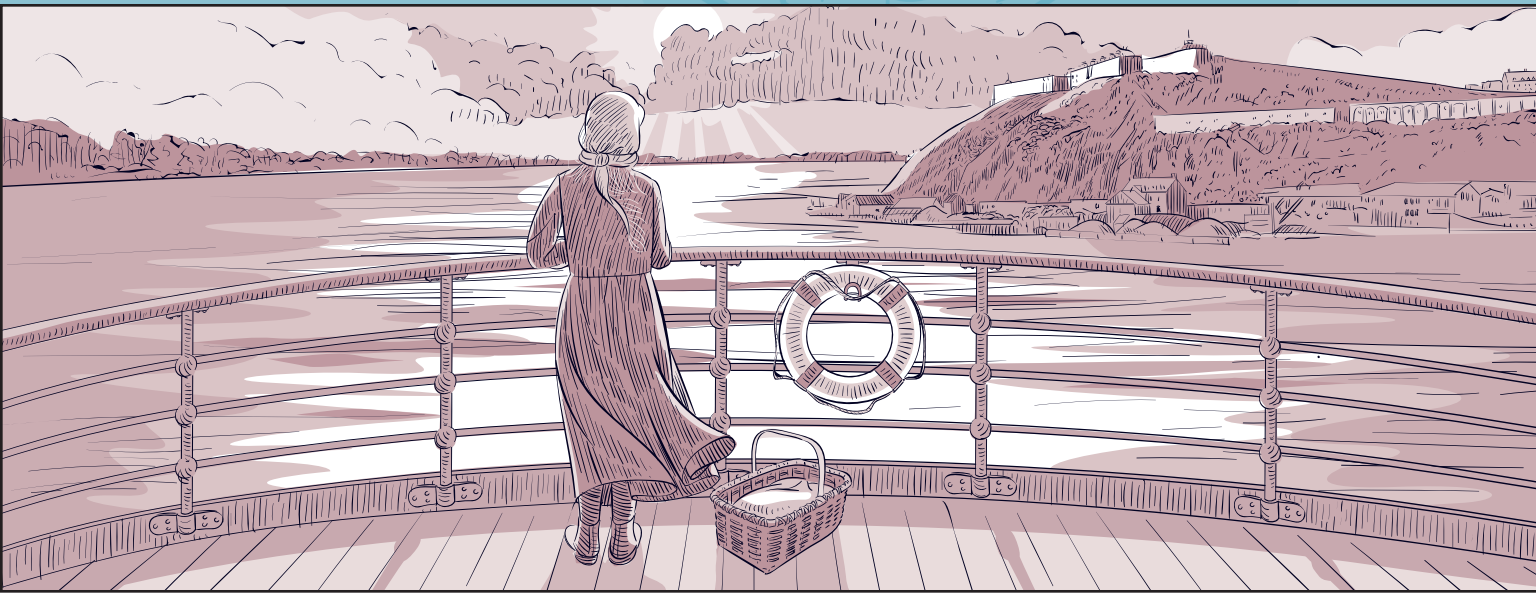
Another use for italics is emphasizing an English word. For example, writing "The train *roared* into the station." means that the roar was loud.

What does a small star* or dagger† after a word mean?

A star* (called an asterisk) or a dagger† (called an obelisk) after a word — like this* or this† — means that you can find more information about the word at the end of the paragraph or page.

CHAPTER ONE

A "New" World Across the Atlantic!



1 INTRODUCTION

There was something new in the air, all over Europe. Everyone was talking about a "new" world across the Atlantic Ocean: a place where life would be better; a place where you could decide how you wanted to live. If you were poor, you might get rich. If you needed land and wanted to farm, you could get land. It was also said that in that land across the ocean, there was

Life in Russia was very good for many Mennonites.

religious freedom. No one had to be afraid to say what they believed. You could **practise your faith** openly.

The world that people in Europe were talking about was not really a "new" world, even though it was a new idea for them. The people who lived in that world had been there for as long as anyone could remember.

In Russia, Mennonite colonists were also talking about this "new" world. Colonies were large **tracts** of land that Russia had given to its settlers from Europe. Different groups of settlers lived separately from each other. Each group had their own colonies. Each had their own schools, churches and lifestyles. They even had their own colony government. Mennonites were one of these groups of colonists.

The first Mennonites came to Russia in 1788. They named their colony Chortitz*. By now Mennonites had lived in Russia for almost 100 years.

* Pronounced GORE deets

Russia was their home, yet they weren't Russians. Over time, Mennonites had become "a people" in Russia, with their own Mennonite culture. They lived in beautiful villages. They spoke German and Plautdietsch*. The children went to village schools, and families went to their own village churches on Sundays. Mennonites were excellent farmers and business people.

Chortitz was the first Mennonite colony in Russia. Molotschna was the second large colony. When this *new* colony opened, Chortitz became the *old* colony. The people who lived there were now the Old Colonists. Bergthal and Fürstenland were two daughter colonies of Chortitz. Because they had come from the old colony, Bergthalers and Fürstenländer were often called "Old Colonists," as well.

2 THE 1870S

The 1800s were times of change in Russia. **Industry**, or factories and businesses, was becoming important. **Agriculture** also changed as farms grew larger. These changes meant that education changed. Schools needed to become modern. For Russia, changing times also meant that its colonists (groups who lived on colonies) needed to learn Russian, as well as their own languages.

In the 1870s, **progressive** Mennonites were also pushing their people to change. How school teachers taught, how farmers farmed, how ministers preached in church — all were old-fashioned. The progressives urged the people to take on new ways of doing things. "We need to change," said the progressives.

Such modern ways did not suit everyone. Many Mennonites loved and kept their **traditions.** Tradition-keepers wanted life to stay as it was: simple, humble and peaceful. They lived and worked together in their villages, on their farms, in their churches and schools. For keepers of tradition, this was the best way to live. It was what their Christian Mennonite faith taught them.

Meanwhile, Russia was changing its colony government. Mennonites had been promised their own village and colony government. The new

* Pronounced PLAUT deetch

system expected colonies to be part of the new Russian government. For many Mennonites, this new system meant that Russia was breaking the promise that had been given to them.

Having their own government was important for all Mennonites in Russia. This freedom had become part of being Mennonite. Mennonites' faith in God and their everyday life went hand in hand. On a Mennonite colony, the government and church leaders worked together. The Mennonites also *liked* being independent and governing themselves.

In Russia, the Mennonites had **prospered**. Life on their colonies was very good. This was so, especially for those who had land. Most Mennonites were farmers. They needed farmland to make a living. In the past, most farmers had enough land. But now the colonies were running short. The large group of landless people said things were not fair. Those without land had to find other work, often for the richer landowner. As well, only landowners could take part in the colony government.

In the 1870s, Mennonites also worried about their **independence**. They were being pushed to become more Russian. It seemed that they might even lose their colony government. Maybe they would also lose their German language. "Mennonites don't even know Russian!" is what their neighbours were saying. "How will they ever become Russian if they speak only German?"

Lastly, Mennonites worried about one of their special permissions of being **pacifists**. Mennonites believed that all war was wrong. Settling quarrels between countries by killing each other was never right. Better ways to keep peace must be found.

In 1788, **Czarina** Catherine the Great had invited the Mennonites to settle in Russia. She had understood. She promised the Mennonites that they would never have to join the **military**. But times had changed. All young men in Russia now had to train in the army. If there were ever a war, Russia wanted to be ready. So, it seemed that Catherine's

promise to Mennonites might be broken.

Mennonites had good reason to be worried. Russia was taking a new look at them. Wasn't it time for these "Germans" to learn Russian; and why should their young men not have to do military service? Everyone else had to.

These questions troubled the Mennonites. But many were hopeful. They were quite sure they would find a way to solve the problem. Others did not think so.

3 A VISITOR FROM A "NEW" WORLD

Then a visitor arrived on the colonies, a visitor from a new land. His name was William Hespeler, and he came from Canada. Canada! What a strange name. But this Canada was a real place. It was not just some "new world," far away across the ocean.

Today, Canada is a big country with 10 provinces and three territories. In 1872, it had six provinces. The newest one was Manitoba. Mr. Hespeler had come to Russia, to invite people to settle in Manitoba. He was looking for farmers who would cultivate the wide-open grasslands of Manitoba. These farmers would grow wheat and other grain for Canada. On the Russian Mennonite colonies, Mr. Hespeler found just the farmers he was looking for.

In Chortitz, Bergthal and Fürstenland, Mennonites were listening. Those who did not have enough land were especially interested. The keepers of tradition, who worried about the changes in Russia, also listened. Mr. Hespeler's invitation was a good one. He said that in Canada they could freely follow their faith in God. In Russia, this freedom might soon be taken away. Many liked what Mr. Hespeler was saying.

This history is about Old Colony Mennonites who listened eagerly to William Hespeler. Most were keepers of tradition. Many also needed land. They accepted Canada's invitation. In the 1870s, they decided to move to Manitoba, Canada. Those who moved came from the Bergthal, Fürstenland and Chortitz colonies.

Another group was also very interested in Manitoba. They were the

*Kleine Gemeinde** Mennonites on the Borsenko Colony. Kleine Gemeinde is German for "Small Church." Members of this small church were also keepers of tradition. Pacifism was especially important for them, and they, too, needed land. The Kleine Gemeinde also have a small part in this history.

* Pronounced KLINE uh Guh MINE duh

THIS MIGHT ALSO INTEREST YOU . . .

MENNONITE MIGRATIONS: NETHERLANDS, PRUSSIA, RUSSIA, CANADA

The first Mennonites in Europe were called Anabaptists. Anabaptists were people who left the large state churches to start their own. For this "crime," many were put in prison and often **executed**. Menno Simons was one of the Anabaptist leaders. He lived in the Netherlands. Over time, Anabaptists came to be named after their leader and called Mennonites.

Hunting and killing Anabaptists in the Netherlands stopped in 1574. Meanwhile, many Dutch Mennonites had moved to nearby Prussia (where Poland is today). In Prussia they were safe. But getting citizenship was not easy. This made life hard for them. When they got an invitation from Russia, the Mennonites listened carefully.

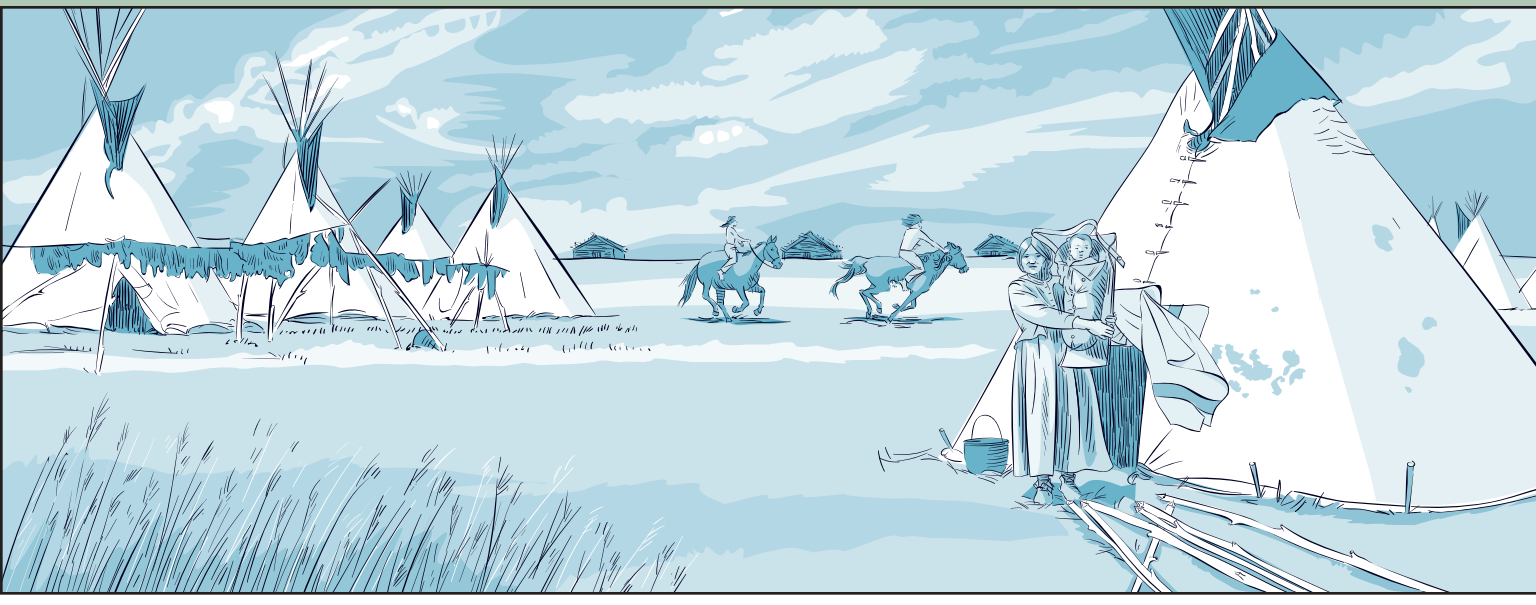
Czarina Catherine the Great was asking them to come live in Russia. In 1788, the first group left for Russia. There they settled

in villages on land that Russia had laid out for them. These settlements of newcomers were called colonies.

After almost 100 years in Russia, the Mennonites got another invitation. This time, Canada was looking for settlers. This new country was looking especially for farmers to settle the prairies in the West. This story is about the Mennonites who moved from Russia to settle in Manitoba, Canada, in the 1870s.

CHAPTER TWO

Kaunada, Kanada, Canada



What a strange name. *Kaunada* in Plautdietsch, *Kanada* in German and Canada in English. Mennonites in Russia spoke Plautdietsch and German. In Canada people spoke English or French. Canada was a new country, looking for settlers from Europe who wanted to start a new life in a new country. Mennonites in Russia were as eager as many other Europeans. What might a new life in Canada be like? they wondered.

1 "EMPTY" LAND AND THE DREAM OF NATION BUILDERS

From the Atlantic to the Pacific. That was the dream. A **nation** that would stretch from sea to sea: from the Atlantic Ocean across the continent of North America to the Pacific Ocean. That was Canada's dream in 1872.

To the south, the United States had the same goal. Both countries already had settlers on the Atlantic coast. There were also settlers in the West, along the Pacific Ocean. Both countries had **claimed** the land between the two oceans.

A border between Canada and the United States had been measured and marked. This did not mean that the United States would respect that border. What if their new settlers moved a little too far north into Canada? Well, maybe they would just take that bit of extra land for the United States. As long as the land was "empty," a borderline was easy to cross.

It was clear to Canada's young government that its land in the West needed to be settled quickly. There would be no cities yet, not for a long time. But there would be small towns. It was farmers, however, who were the most important. Farmers would settle the open prairies in the middle of Canada. They would turn miles of grass into fields of wheat.

2 MANITOBA

Plans were made to bring thousands of Europeans to settle in Manitoba. In Russia, a group of German farmers called Mennonites looked interesting. So, the government called on a German Mennonite in Ontario. His name was Jakob Y. Schantz. Mr. Schantz was a farmer-business man in Berlin, Ontario. (Berlin was later called Kitchener.) The government asked him to travel to Manitoba. There he would inspect the land and write a report. Mr. Schantz was interested immediately.

Jakob Y. Schantz asked another Mennonite, Bernhard Warkentin, to join him. Mr. Warkentin had come from Russia. He wanted to see what

settling in Manitoba might be like. By the time his trip to Manitoba was over, Mr. Warkentin had decided. Manitoba was not for him. He did not like:

- the mosquitoes;
- the very cold winters;
- and the fact that Manitoba did not have railroads.

Bernard Warkentin also noticed the **Aboriginal** people in Manitoba. They seemed very restless. Mr. Warkentin was right about these people. They were restless, and for good reason. That story will be told later.

Mr. Schantz's opinion was just the opposite. He liked Manitoba. He knew about the Russian Mennonites. Manitoba would be exactly right for them. This is what he wrote in his report. Manitoba has:

- plenty of prairie grassland that does not need to be cleared of trees;
- enough trees for timber for building;
- land that has not been divided up by railway companies;
- rivers and trails, along which settlements can be built;
- winters that are dryer and steadier than in Ontario;
- and plenty of free land.

Mr. Schantz added: Large tracts of land ***en bloc***, in one piece, would let Mennonite settlers live close together and keep their own language and village customs.

Yes, thought Mr. Schantz. He had found the right land for the right people.[1] As soon as he got back to Ontario, Mr. Schantz met with government officials. He persuaded them to send an invitation to the Mennonites in Russia. "Make the invitation as attractive as possible," said Mr. Schantz.

3 WILLIAM HESPELER GOES TO RUSSIA

That is how William Hespeler came to be in Russia in 1872. Mr. Hespeler was a German immigrant who had done well in Canada. He would meet the Russian Mennonites with an attractive promise. They could get land

en bloc, set aside just for them. They could live side by side in villages, just like they did in Russia. And they would always be free of military service, in times of peace and war, no **loopholes**. Mr. Hespeler knew this promise would be good news for many Mennonites in Russia. It would go right to the heart of Mennonite pacifist faith.

As soon as Mr. Hespeler arrived in Russia, he got to work. Russian officials saw how eagerly the Mennonites listened to Mr. Hespeler. They were not pleased to see them invited to move to Canada. So as quickly as possible, Mr. Hespeler organized a group of men to come to Canada with him. Then Mr. Hespeler was told to leave Russia. Now! And he did. Russia was not pleased to see her good farmers looking at land in Canada.

Before he left, Mr. Hespeler wrote this report about the Mennonites he had met:

> These are hard-working, sober, moral and intelligent people. A great number of them have **accumulated** a lot of riches. Some own from 10,000 to 14,000 acres of land. They are excellent **agriculturists**, or farmers. They have very good farm buildings, all made of brick. They live in good houses. In their homes, they **excel** in order and cleanliness. I also found **prosperous** merchants, manufacturers, and mechanics.[2]

Mr. Hespeler's report pleased Canadian government officials. In fact, they thought about hiring him as a land agent. An agent would get $2 for every person who decided to move. But Mr. Hespeler did not accept the offer. "No," he said. "These are reasoning, thinking, cautious and educated people. They would not want one of their own people to be paid in this way. It would feel like **dealing** in people."[3]

By spring 1873, the group that Mr. Hespeler organized in Russia were on their way to Canada. They were called **delegates** because they went to Canada **on behalf of** Mennonites in Russia.

4 THE DELEGATES' JOURNEY

Mr. Hespeler had warned his government about American land agents. These agents would be on the lookout for travellers going to Canada. The agents would stop as many travellers as they could. Then they would invite them to come and look at land in the United States.

As Hespeler had said, "We do not want the delegates surrounded by ever so many land agents and runners."[4] So the Mennonite delegates were greeted by a Canadian at each port where they stopped.

Russian Mennonite Delegates:

ë E bfkof` e T fb_b)? bodqe ^i @l il kv
ë Ghl _ Mbdpop)? bodqe ^i @l il kv
ë @l okbifr pQ bt p)? l opbkhl @l il kv
ë A^s fa Hi^ppbk)? l opbkhl @l il kv
ë Ghl _ ? r iibo)J l il qp` e k^@l il kv
ë I bl k^oa Pr a boj ^kk)J l il qp` e k^@l il kv
ë @l okbifr p? r e o)Hka bmbka bkq
ë Cfs b l qe bop^ipl g fkba qe b ddl r m+

The delegates' first stop in Canada was Ontario. From there they set out on a four-day trip to Manitoba: first to Fargo, North Dakota, by train, then by boat up the Red River to Winnipeg. In Winnipeg, the governor and his entire **ministry** were waiting for them. Five teams of horses and wagons, with camping equipment, were ready. Soon the delegates were on their way. They would see eight townships of uncultivated prairie lands. The land was 56 kilometres southeast of Winnipeg. Along the way the delegates learned that Canada's Queen Victoria was married to a German. So was her daughter. This pleased the travellers.[5] They, too, spoke German.

But the trip was not pleasant. It rained a lot. The trails they took were poorly travelled. Mosquitoes were thick. The land they saw was low and wet. Some of the delegates now asked to see land in North Dakota, south of the border.

5 MÉTIS ATTACK

When Bernard Warkentin visited Manitoba with Jakob Schantz, he reported that the Aboriginal people were restless. Mr. Warkentin was right. They were restless, and they had good reasons for their feelings.

In 1870, the province of Manitoba was founded, partly by the *Métis*[*]. Métis were **descendants** of Scottish and French fur traders and their Aboriginal wives. The Métis settled with their families on land along Manitoba rivers. They farmed the land and also hunted buffalo. They were natives of Manitoba. They belonged on the land, and the land belonged to them.

When Manitoba became a province, the Métis planned to be part of the new government. Louis Riel, one of their own people, was to be the governor of their new province. But that was not what Canada's government — far away in Ontario — planned. Manitoba was to be governed by the English. The land was to be filled with farmers from Europe. These farmers would turn Métis buffalo hunting grounds into fields of wheat.

So the Métis would not have their own Canadian province. Instead, they would be just one group among many new settler groups. And settlers were coming to Manitoba fast. The Métis knew that buffalo and wheat fields did not mix, and the buffalo would have to move. So, it is no surprise that the Métis were angry. They were also very worried. Who did these strangers think they were, moving in where they did not belong? The newcomers would settle on land that fed and clothed the Métis.

* Pronounced MAY tee

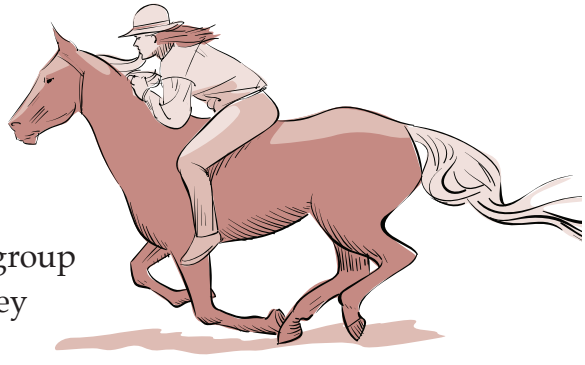
* * *

On July 1, 1873 — Canada's sixth birthday — William Hespeler took his Mennonite visitors to see land west of Winnipeg. At the Métis community of White Horse Plains, the group stopped for the night. Mr. Hespeler took his guests to the hotel. There, a group of Métis men were drinking in the bar. One of them struck a horse that belonged to a Métis guide in Mr. Hespeler's group. Like others in the bar, this man was not pleased. He did not like Europeans looking at their land! And he was not pleased to see a Métis working for a land agent. The atmosphere in the hotel was not friendly.

William Hespeler saw that he had to act. As quickly as possible, he got his group settled into the hotel. He made sure their door was locked. Later, Alexander Morris told the story of what happened. (Mr. Morris was the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba.) He wrote, "These visitors were Mennonites, who do not know how to fight. So they were in great danger. Their hotel was surrounded by an **infuriated mob**, a very angry crowd."[6]

Lieutenant Governor
A Lieutenant Governor represents the king or queen in a Canadian province.

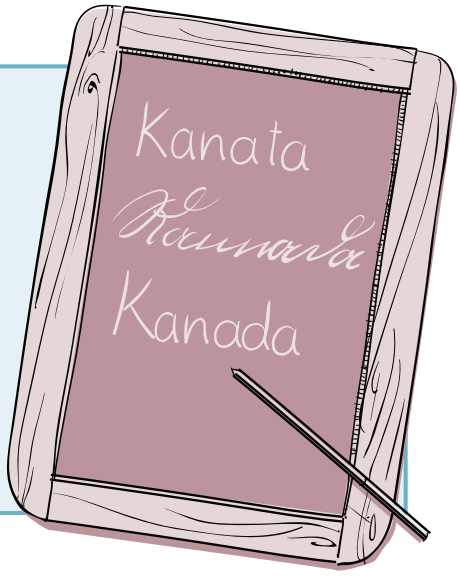
William Hespeler stood guard by the door. He had a pistol at his side and a sword in his hand, ready to hold back the attackers. "If I had not been there," said Mr. Hespeler, "the delegates might not have lived to tell their story. Their brethren in Russia would never have heard about the land and freedom waiting for them in Manitoba."



A fast rider from the hotel rode off to warn the government. Government officials sent a group of soldiers to arrest Métis ring leaders. Later, they

heard that bad weather had spoiled the Métis' plot. They had planned to close all roads from the hotel. Because of a rain storm, this did not happen. If they had followed the plan, the clash between the Métis and the visitors would have come to a violent end.

Kanata
Canada's name was borrowed from the native people. The settlers name for their new homeland was not Canada, Kanada or Kaunada, but Kanata. Kanata is a word that means settlement, village or land.



The Métis were only one group of native peoples in Manitoba. Aboriginal people had lived on this land for as long as anyone could say. By 1875, they had been moved off the land that was their home. They were forced to live on small tracts of land called reserves. These cruel acts of **displacing a people** are part of Canada's history

The Mennonites who settled in Manitoba did not know much about this history. Today, their great-grandchildren do know. They know that for

Secretary of Agriculture
The Secretary of Agriculture was the member of Canada's government in charge of decisions the government made about farming in the country.

their ancestors, Canada was a new beginning, with plenty of free farmland. They also know that for Aboriginal people, it was the end of life as they had always known it. They know that the Métis life of farming and hunting also changed. As you read this Mennonite history, do not forget this other side of the story.

6 CANADA'S PROMISE TO RUSSIAN MENNONITES

By July 23, 1873, the delegates from Russia were back in Ottawa. There they met John Lowe. He was the government's Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Lowe placed into the hands of Mr. Klassen, Mr. Peters, Mr. Wiebe and Mr. Toews their agreement with the government of Canada.

This document gave Mennonites the following "advantages to settlers": free land, no military service for their men and freedom to follow their Mennonite faith.[7]

Back in Russia, a group of Mennonites was ready and waiting. As soon as this promise was in place, they could begin their move. They were excited about moving to a country called Canada. What would this Canada hold for them?

* * *

The Mennonite agreement promised:

- no military service;
- eight townships of free land, divided into quarter-sections, one for every male 21 years or older;
- transportation costs for up to $40 per adult from Hamburg, Germany, to Fort Garry, Winnipeg;
- supplies for the trip across the ocean;
- blocks of land reserved for Mennonites only, to settle as a group in villages;
- more land to be added later for $1 per acre;

- full exercise of religious principles and education of children without restriction;
- and the right to affirm instead of swear in taking the oath. (The right to settle en bloc and to educate their children as they wished were promises especially for Mennonites.)

THIS MIGHT ALSO INTEREST YOU ...

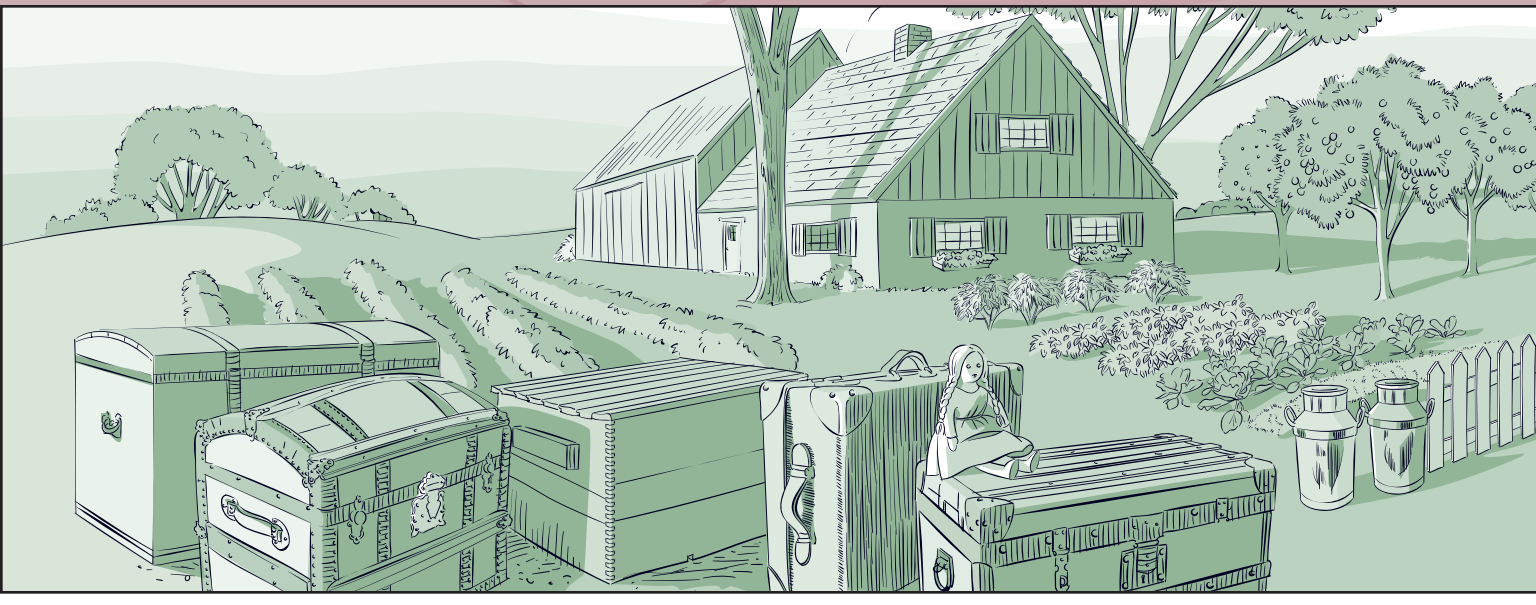
PACIFISTS IN CANADA

Mennonites were not the only pacifist settlers in Canada. Earlier pacifist settlers had already made an agreement with the government. The Mennonites from Russia were part of this agreement. It went like this:

Any person bearing a certificate from the Society of Quakers, Mennonists or Tunkers, or any inhabitant of Canada, or any religious denomination, otherwise subject to military duty, but who, from the doctrines of his religion, is averse to bearing of arms, and refuses personal military service, shall be exempt from such service, when balloted in time of peace, or war, upon such conditions, and under such regulations as the Governor in Canada may from time to time prescribe.[8]

CHAPTER THREE

A New Beginning in Canada



In 1875, Ältester Johann Wiebe, his wife Judith Wall, their children, friends and neighbours said goodbye to Russia. Several other ministers also decided to move to Canada. Ältester Gerhard Dyck came to say goodbye. He did not think moving to Canada was necessary. But he gave Johann Wiebe and the people his blessing.

A total of 1,100 people **emigrated** from the Fürstenland Colony. Almost everyone from the Bergthal Colony moved to Canada. There was also a

large group from the Chortitz Colony that decided to emigrate.

Most of these people hoped to make a new start in Canada. They wanted to: live simply and humbly, with neighbours in villages, on a colony, separate from the world around them. They wanted to have their own colony government that was guided by their church.

In Canada, their colony had a new name. The government of Canada called it the West Mennonite Reserve of Manitoba.

There was also an East Mennonite Reserve in Manitoba, on the east side of the Red River. The first villages on the East Reserve were:

Blumengart, Blumenhof, Blumenort, Burwald, Chortitz, Ebenfeld, Friedenstahl, Gnadenthal, Hochfeld, Hochstadt, Kronstahl, Neuanlag, Neuenberg, Neuendorf, Rosenfeld, Rosengart, Rosenthal, Schoenfeld, Schoensee, Schoenthal and Schoeweise.

The East Reserve is not part of the Old Colony Mennonite story told in this reader, but it is also an important part of Manitoba Mennonite history.

1 THE MINISTER'S MOTHER REMEMBERS

In 1965, Isaak M. Dyck, Ältester of the Old Colony Mennonite church in Mexico, wrote his **autobiography**. The story below, about Isaak's mother, is based on this autobiography.

Isaak's mother told good stories, especially in winter. Manitoba winters were long, but the days were short. It was the evenings that were long. After dark, even Mother had to stop working. She could still knit or darn socks by lamplight, but she had to stop running around. Isaak, who was eleven, had to do the last chores in the barn after dark. Then he, too, had nothing to do. He liked best to settle himself on the floor, with his back against the warm oven wall. This is when Mother sometimes started to tell stories about her girlhood. Here's how the adult Minister Isaak Dyck retold one of his mother's stories.[9]

> What especially got my attention was when my mother told how she, together with her parents, travelled from Russia to Canada.

MENNONITE RESERVES IN MANITOBA

In the 1870s, two groups of Russian Mennonites settled on two reserves in Manitoba. They were called the West Mennonite Reserve and the East Mennonite Reserve.

> They crossed the great Weltmeer*, or ocean, and were on the water for 12 full days. It's no wonder I was astonished. I had lived my whole life without ever seeing a ship. I certainly had never seen an ocean. Mother told me often that she travelled on the same ship as Ältester Johann Wiebe. She had such great trust in the Ältester when she was small, that she was completely without fear. If Ohm†, or minister, Johann was on the ship, the ship surely could not sink!
>
> One evening a great storm was **tossing** the ocean and the ship. The front end started to tremble and shake. It shook so hard that everyone was terrified. Before she went to bed, Mother saw her beloved and loving Ältester go to each cabin where our people were staying. He encouraged everyone, young and old, to pray. He said they should pray that in the wild waves, the ship would not have to sink. He reminded everyone of a story in the *New Testament*.

The **disciples** and their Saviour were also caught in **terrifying** waves on the sea. Jesus was sleeping in the boat during a storm, and his disciples became very afraid. They woke up Jesus and cried, "Lord! Help us or we will go lost." Jesus said to them, "You, small of faith! Why are you so scared?" Then Jesus commanded the wind and the sea to be quiet, and the sea became completely still.

Isaac's mother said that they also had prayed. They prayed that their loving God would keep them safe, so the ship would not go under. When she awoke the next morning, the storm had settled itself. The ship was sailing on a perfectly smooth sea. She could not even imagine that they had had such a wild storm in the night. Together everyone sang a song of thanksgiving. With happy hearts they thanked God for all his good works.

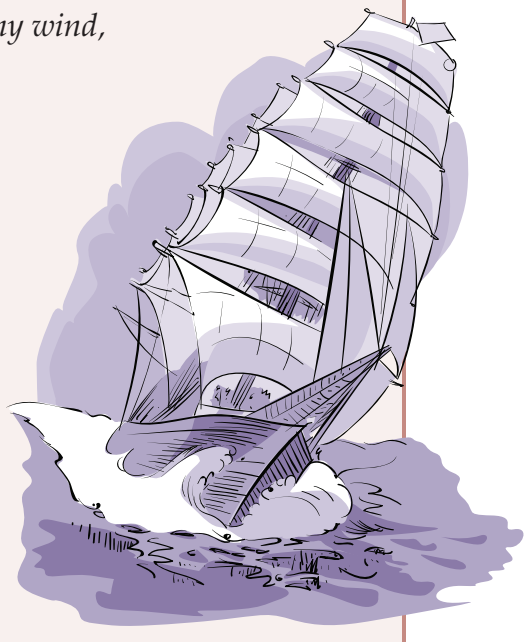
---

* Pronounced VELT mare
† Pronounced OWm

TO THINK ABOUT ...

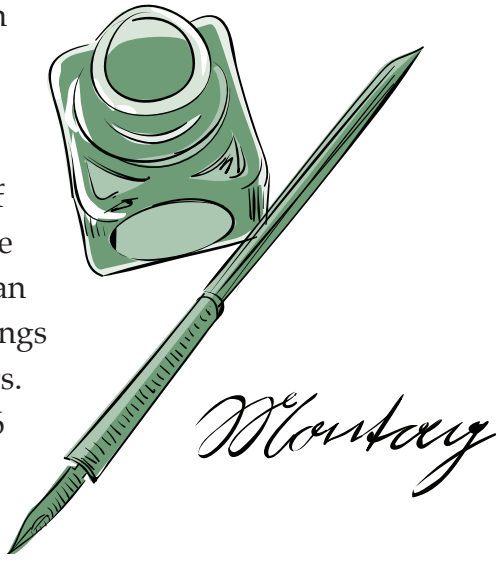
Ältester Isaak M. Dyck wrote the story about his mother and Ältester Johann Wiebe, when he was an old man. The story reminded him of Psalm 107. (Ältester Dyck would have been reading this psalm in German.)

They that go down to the sea in ships,
that do business in great waters;
These see the works of the Lord,
his wonders in the deep.
For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind,
which lifteth up the waves thereof.
They mount up to the heaven,
they go down again to the depths:
Their soul is melted because of trouble.
They reel to and fro
and stagger like a drunken man
and are at their wits' end.
Then they cry
to the Lord in their trouble,
and he bringeth them out from
their distresses;
He maketh the storm a calm,
so that the waves thereof are still.
Then they are glad because they be quiet;
so, he bringeth them unto their desired haven.
Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness,
and for his wonderful works to the children of men.



2 JAKOB FEHR: A YOUNG MAN WITH A DIARY

Jakob Fehr was off to Canada, to a new world. He took a notebook, pen and plenty of ink with him on the trip; he was ready to record his adventures. Canada was not completely new to Jakob. His grandparents, Jakob and Helena Fehr, had already lived in Manitoba for one year. They had gone with their two teenaged boys, Jakob's young uncles, Johann and Dietrich. The Fehrs had moved in 1874 with another group of Mennonites. This group was called the Kleine Gemeinde because the group was smaller than Jakob's group. Jakob had already learned things about Canada from the grandparents' letters.



Young Jakob was born in 1859. He was 16 when he travelled from Kronsthal Village in Russia to Fort Dufferin in Manitoba. The trip took six weeks.

The day before Jakob's family left, he took one last walk through Mother's garden. He had hoed that garden many times. Even when he was just a young boy, he had dug up many beds for planting. His father had bought him a small spade that was easy to handle. His mother told him where and how to dig. Today, Jakob zigzagged his way through the garden. In the orchard, trees were blooming. Others already had fruit on them. Jakob would never get to eat that fruit. He walked out of the garden and closed the gate.

In the house everyone was packing. The last thing to be packed was a sack of Reeschjes*. These roasted buns, dipped in hot coffee, would be simple meals for them on their trip.

*Pronounced RYEsh yis

In his diary[10], Jakob wrote:

At the Gangplank

Next morning Mother's brother, Uncle Johann Wiens, came with his horses and vehicle. He would take us to our boat. The boat was **anchored** in the Dnieper River at Neu-Chortitz. We said our goodbyes with tears in our eyes. Then we got into the wagon.

For some time the road went uphill. We could look back and see the village. Our yard and house were at the end of the village. We could see it for a long time. We kept turning back for just one more look at our home. We could still see all the people gathered by the fences along the village street. We moved farther and farther away, until the people looked like a black line. Then we reached the top of the hill. We saw the flat prairie before us. Our village was gone from sight. As we got close to our boat, we saw that the hill was covered with people and vehicles. The boat was also full of people. When we got there we could hardly get close enough to unload.

The boat had a **gangplank** that was ... about 10 feet (three metres) wide. It ran from the boat to the shore. People were walking back and forth on it. Tears ran down their cheeks. The handkerchiefs in their hands were wet.

The churches' song leaders were gathering on the bridge. As soon as they had room to move on the bridge, they announced the first farewell song. When the people began to sing, a mighty sound rose. It moved along the river to the hills. Its echo spread far and wide.

I had never seen this many people at one time before. They were saying goodbye to loved ones. They would never see each other again. There was much weeping and crying. It was a day I shall never forget.

Suddenly, a shrill whistle, with a **penetrating** tone, came from the boat. Now the captain took his place on the gangplank. He called in a very loud voice. "THOSE WHO WANT TO LEAVE THE SHIP, LEAVE NOW. THOSE WHO WANT TO STAY, STAY." The wall of separation had begun. The captain blew his whistle again and again. Finally, the gangplank could be pulled up onto the deck.

The ship began to move. Farewells sounded through the air in full tone. Men waved their caps. The women waved their kerchiefs. This went on until we came to a bend in the river. Now we were completely separated.

Our ship sailed south at 2 p.m. At 7 p.m. we reached the big city of Nikopol. On the trip we saw beautiful orchards and vineyards and large **estates**. Oh, how beautiful was the region and climate we were leaving.

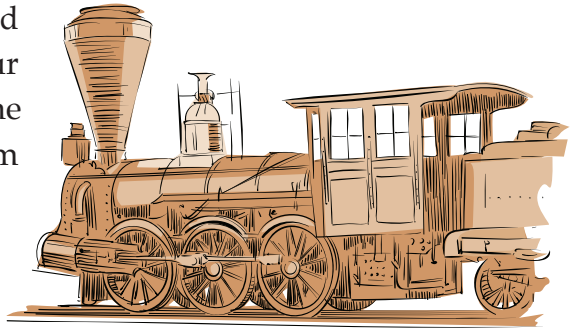
At Nikopol we met the Fürstenländer. They were also a Mennonite Gemeinde (church). This group had moved from the Chortitz Colony to the Fürstenland Colony. A number of them also wanted to move to Canada. They joined us here, and we travelled together. The Fürstenländer were brought by small boats to our big boat. Their Ältester Johann Wiebe was among the group. Again there were sad goodbyes. Little children began crying for their beds. They wanted to go home.

We continued down the Dnieper River till we reached the city of Kherson. Here we boarded a larger boat. This boat took us across the Black Sea to Odessa. In Odessa, we set up a large camp. The men camped in a circle, and the women and children slept inside the circle. Next morning for breakfast, we had our Reeschjes with hot coffee.

Goodbye, Russia

We got on a beautiful train in Odessa. It was a wonderful trip.

The train took us to the border of the Russian Empire. Here we changed to a different train. It crossed over a corner of the Austrian Empire, on the way to Germany. We continued on to the city of Hamburg. We stayed at this seaport for almost a week. One of our ministers, Jakob Wiebe, was with us, and he led a church service. Jakob Wiebe was from my village of Kronsthal.

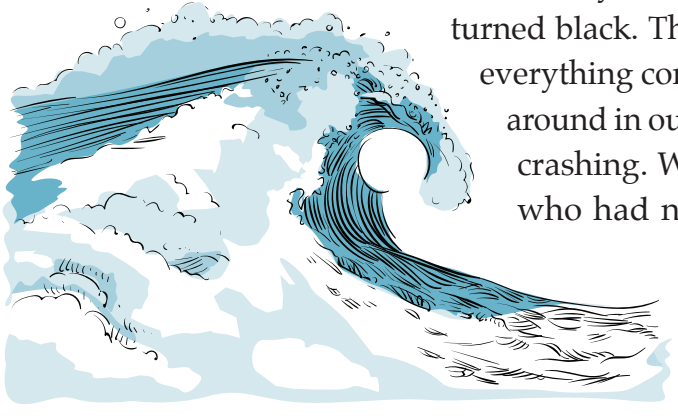


Soon it was time to leave. We were finally boarding a big ship. The ship would take us across the North Sea to England. On this trip we were struck with dreadful sea sickness. Finally, we got to Hull. Here we had a great sadness. One of the women on the ship died. Her husband had to leave her body to be buried in a strange land. He had to keep on travelling with us into the unknown.

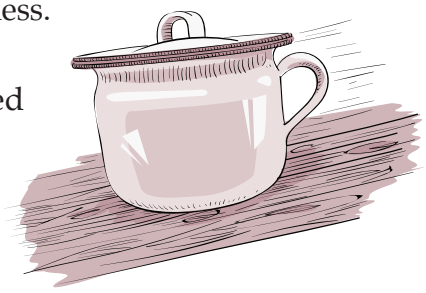
Across the Atlantic

From Hull we travelled across England by train, to Liverpool. There a ship was ready for us — a mighty ocean liner. It would take us across the Atlantic Ocean. Late in the evening the ship began to move. When we awoke in the morning, we had landed on the island of Ireland. When we went up on the deck — we had to go up every day for fresh air — the water was like a mirror, as far as the eye could see.

The quiet lasted for two days and two nights. On the evening of the third day, the wind began to blow. The water turned black. The fierce whirling wind changed everything completely. Our chamber pots flew around in our cabin. We heard rumblings and crashing. We thought we might die. Those who had not yet learned to pray learned now. Even the captain asked us to pray to the Creator to have



mercy on us. We were also struck with sea sickness.



But all became better again. The waves calmed down. The sea became friendly and smooth. But the children lay sick.

Land!

On day eight we got the news! Through his telescope, the captain could see America. Joy streamed into our hearts. By 2 p.m. we could see a small black line with our naked eye. We soon saw that the line was individual mountains. Then we saw small white dots. We thought they might be large stones. They turned out to be large buildings, when we got closer! We entered the Gulf (of St. Lawrence), which had mountains on both sides. The gulf got narrower and narrower. The mountains came closer and closer together.

A Warm Welcome

By now, evening had begun to fall and it got dark. Electric lights sent out beams from both sides of our ship. Soon we saw **innumerable** lights, like a world of stars. We had reached the port city of Quebec. The ship sent out three sets of flares to announce our arrival. The gates were opened. We were invited in as new Canadian immigrants. The queen had made sure we would be welcomed. We also got a wonderful meal.

* * *

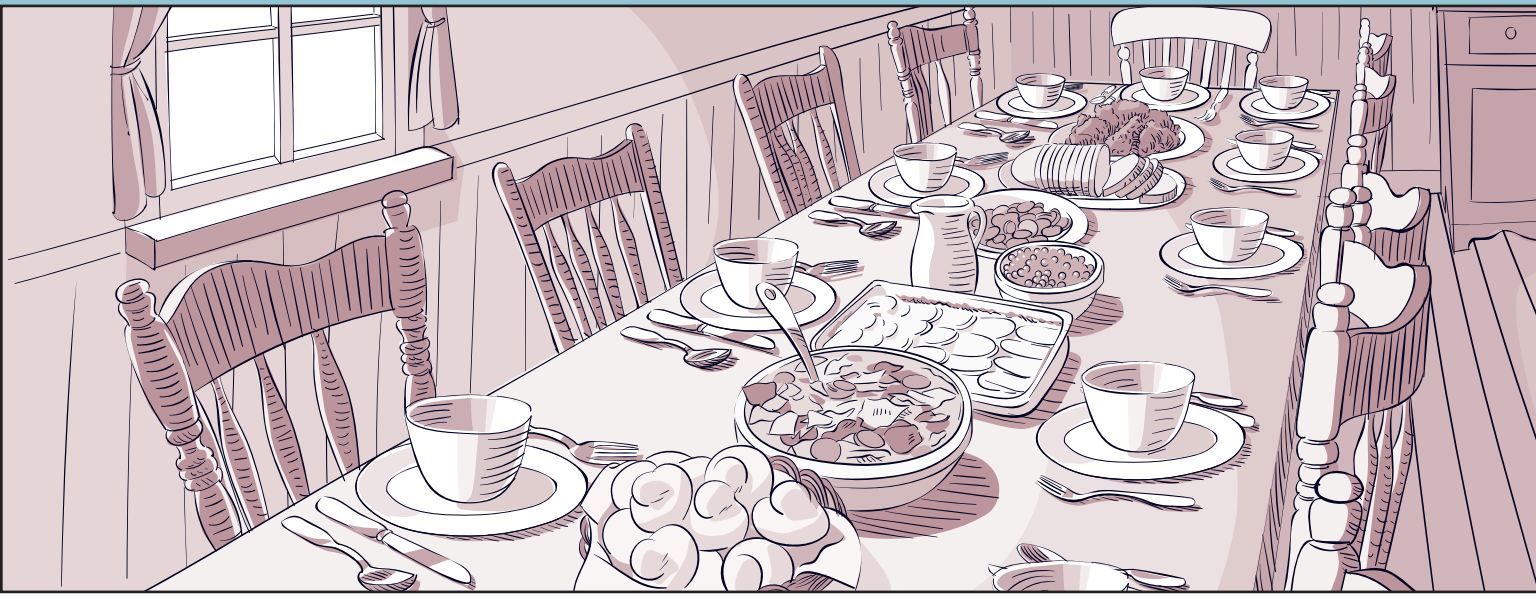
In Russia, Mennonites had been foreign colonists for many years. In this new land they would be Canadian citizens.

TO THINK ABOUT . . .

Jakob's story is full of new and interesting things to see and experience. It is also a story about a big decision that his parents and many other Mennonites made. Imagine how you would feel if you knew that you might never see your grandparents, your favourite cousins, your house and most of your things, ever again.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dutch Mennonites Meet Swiss Mennonites



1 STRANGERS WHO WEREN'T STRANGERS

Brubaker, Eby, Frey, Hostetler, Metzker, Schantz — what strange names. Not Fehr, Heide and Friesen, or Froese, Dyck and Banman, like their own Dutch names. Were these people real Mennonites? They did speak German like the Russian Mennonites did. They dressed like Mennonites. But the most important thing right now was their **hospitality**.

When the Mennonites from Russia arrived in Canada, they were welcomed by the Swiss Mennonites in Ontario. This group called themselves Swiss Mennonites because their forebears came from Switzerland and other parts of Europe. They had moved from Europe to the United States. From there, some had moved to Ontario in the late 1700s. When the Mennonites from Russia arrived in Ontario, the Swiss Mennonites were already settled and well off. They were also **hospitable**, generous and ready to help new pioneers.

The **forebears** of Mennonites from Russia were Dutch. This is why so many had Dutch surnames. The Russian and Swiss Mennonites both knew German. It was their language for reading. Their bibles and hymn books were written in German. At home, the Russians spoke Plautdietsch. The Swiss Mennonites spoke Pennsylvania *Deitsch*. Deitsch and Plautdietsch are both forms of German. They sound similar.

When they first met each other, Swiss-Ontario and Dutch-Russian Mennonites were strangers. And yet they weren't. They felt like sisters and brothers, or maybe more like cousins, but somehow from the same family. The newcomers trusted the old-timers. The old-timers welcomed the newcomers. They would make sure the newcomers found their way in Canada.

2 DECIDING AGAIN

Back to Jakob Fehr's diary …

> From Berlin, Ontario, we went by train to a new town called Fishers Landing. There, we met a large crowd of people. They were Mennonites from the United States. These Mennonites urged us to come with them to Kansas. The winters were much warmer there, they said. They told us that other groups had tried to settle in Manitoba. These groups had failed. They said winters in Manitoba were cold and **raw**.
>
> But our leaders reminded each other that we had an agreement.

THIS MIGHT ALSO INTEREST YOU . . .

THE EARLIER MEETING

This was not the first time that Swiss and Dutch Mennonites had met. Both groups remembered stories from long ago. They were not yet called Mennonites at that time. They were Anabaptists, who left their state church and started their own church.

Being Anabaptist was against the law in Europe. The punishment for being one was often death. In Switzerland, this law was especially harsh. Anabaptists who lived there had to find places to escape to.

Many went to the Netherlands. There, the Dutch Anabaptists made sure these refugees had enough to eat and homes to live in. They also gave them money to travel when they decided to move to the United States. In the United States, Swiss Mennonite families could finally live in peace and safety.

> Queen Victoria had promised that we could keep our customs in Canada. We could also practise our faith freely. We had a contract with Queen Victoria. We did not want to break it. Part of our group did decide to go to Kansas, anyway. They left us here. The rest of us went on to Manitoba. We boarded a train to Emerson, Manitoba, and got there in two days.

The train took Jakob's family to North Dakota in the United States. From there they took a riverboat up to Manitoba.

Jakob and his family travelled from North Dakota to Manitoba in a riverboat like this.

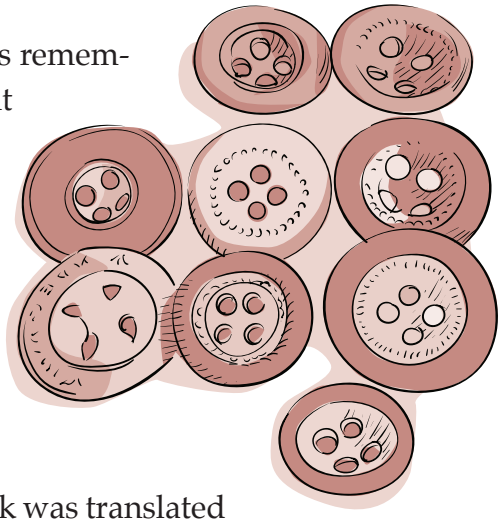
3 JAKOB SCHANTZ: THERE WHEN YOU NEED HIM

Jakob Schantz began life as a farm boy, like all the other boys he grew up with. His family was part of a Mennonite community in Waterloo County, Ontario. It was clear to Jakob's people that this boy would go far in life.

Mr. Schantz was an **entrepreneur**. He was always looking for new ways to do things. Making connections with people was important for making sure his ideas worked out. Mr. Schantz was good at finding and making the right connections. A simple example of his

connecting with people was the spelling of his German name. He added a "t" so that Mr. Schanz became Mr. Schantz. Now English people could pronounce the name correctly. Mr. Schantz was also concerned about people. He was quick to see what they needed. Then he set out to make things better for them.

Jakob Schantz began with new **enterprises** on his own farm. He grew fruit, made maple syrup and set up a sawmill. From farming he moved into the contracting business. He encouraged others to get into manufacturing. Mr. Schantz's largest enterprise was the Dominion Button Works. The factory grew quickly into a business with 300 employees. The Dominion Button Works made Jakob Schantz rich. In the 1880s, he was the richest Mennonite businessman in Ontario.



But it is not the button factory that Mennonites remember today. For them, Mr. Schantz's most important work was the Russian Mennonites' move to Manitoba. He had invited them to come. When they arrived in Ontario, he was there to meet them. Then he saw them through, until they were all settled in.

In 1872, when Mr. Schantz travelled to Manitoba with Bernhard Warkentin, he wrote a report. The report was published in a small book called, *Narrative of a Journey to Manitoba*.[11] The book was translated into different languages. This way, it could be used all over Europe to invite new settlers to Manitoba. Several hundred thousand booklets were handed out in different places in Europe. (Mennonites were not the only settlers invited to settle Manitoba!)

Before the Russian Mennonites arrived, Mr. Schantz had decided what land would be best for them. When their delegates came to check out the land, he had already planned their land tour. He then travelled with the delegates all the way to Manitoba.

When the new settlers decided to move to Canada, Mr. Schantz made sure they got good travel rates. He also ordered supplies for their journey. In Canada, he helped with farm equipment. He knew what they would need and helped them get it.

JOURNEY TO MANITOBA

All the way from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Manitoba.

The new Mennonite settlers also needed money when they got to Ontario. Their new land was free, but getting started in Manitoba was expensive. The Canadian government was happy to lend the Mennonites $100,000. Why? Because the Ontario Mennonites **guaranteed the loan**. In fact, they added their own money to the government loan. Jakob Schantz was in charge of both loans.

The Russian Mennonites paid back every dollar of

VIGNETTE . . .

KJNALS AND HAUNS

Kjnals*, 34 years old, and Hauns, 33 years old, had found a bench in the sun. They were at the very top of their river-boat. The boat was **churning** its way up the Red River to Fort Dufferin, Manitoba. From their lofty seat, they could almost see their new land, if they squinted hard against the sun.

"Na," said Hauns (H), "we're almost home."

"You think so? I can't say that this feels like home to me. But I think we got ourselves a good man," said Kjnals (K).

H: "It looks that way."

K: "*Onns Jakob Schantz es nussht domm*†, our Jakob Schantz is not at all stupid."

H: "No. He knows what he's doing."

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* Pronounced Ch nahls
† Pronounced nussh dum

K: "He definitely has experience in this kind of thing. And he has done well for himself. He's the richest Mennonite in Berlin. Did you know that?"

H: "That's what they say. I think he's also a good man. Isn't that right?"

K: "For sure. I like him. One can feel right at home with him. *Uck en Jeistelja**, *kjempt*† *mie soo fäa*‡. Also a spiritual man, it seems to me. And there isn't a question he can't answer."

H: "Nusscht domm, no, not at all stupid. He finds out exactly what we need and then he figures out how to get it for us."

K: "Yep. With Jakob Schantz, I think we might do all right in Manitoba."

* Pronounced YEIS tel ya
† Pronounced kjempt me
‡ Pronounced zow FAY ah

these loans. It took them 32 years. In 1907, Jakob Schantz travelled to Manitoba to receive the last payment. He was 85 years old. Mr. Schantz had travelled from Ontario to Manitoba 25 times. This was his last trip.

The Russia Mennonites loved Jakob Schantz. He was a man like them. He had a Mennonite Christian faith. He spoke German. When he spoke, people knew what he meant. He was someone they could trust, and he was very good at his job. He knew how to help new settlers succeed.

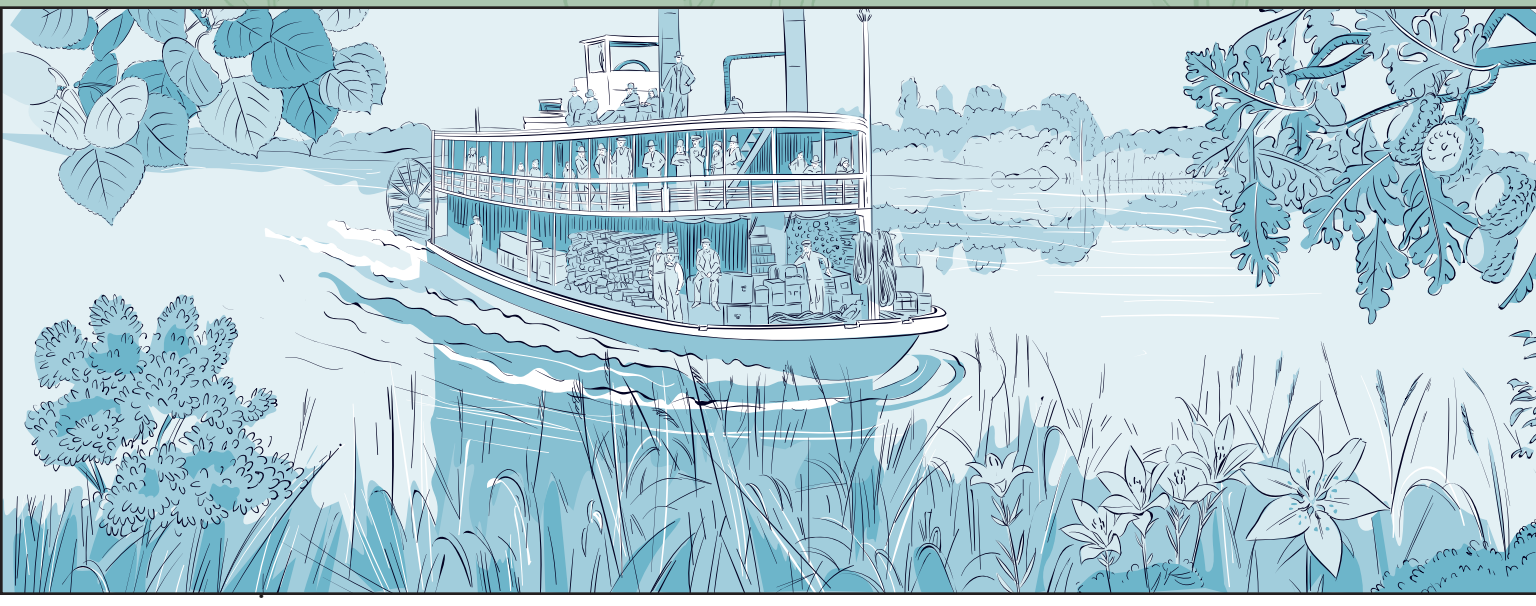
The government of Canada also liked Jakob Schantz. In 1874, there were 1,400 Mennonites in Manitoba. Five years later there were 7,000. The Manitoba Mennonite settlements **flourished**. As more and large Mennonite families kept arriving from Russia, there was enough land for all of them. Mr. Schantz was one important reason for their successful settlements.

In 1909, Jakob Y. Schantz died. He was buried in the First Mennonite

Church Cemetery in Berlin, Ontario. Jakob Schantz was remembered as a quiet, **unassuming** man. He was also a man with a big voice that had a deep, organ-like tone. It was a voice that people did not forget. The Manitoba Mennonites remembered that voice, and they never forgot the man.

CHAPTER FIVE

Arrival in Manitoba



1 STANDING ON MANITOBA SOIL

The first group of Mennonites from Russia came to Manitoba in 1874. Another large group arrived in 1875. The new settlers' trip across the Atlantic Ocean took 12 days. After that they still had hundreds of kilometres left, to get to their new home in Manitoba. Between 1870 and 1880, about 7,000 Russian Mennonites settled in Manitoba.

VIGNETTE . . .

AUNSCH AND OT

Aunsch* and Ot† grinned at each other. They were the two oldest Giesbrecht girls. And they had just arrived — in Manitoba, Canada! They were at the end of their journey. Never in their lives had they seen so many new things in only six weeks: a Russian train; Europe; an ocean liner; hours and hours of water; and finally, land that got closer and closer. And then they stepped off the boat and onto Canada!

But not yet "home." Another ship down "Canada's mighty St. Lawrence River." That's what the "steward" called the river. Yes, a steward — what a funny English word. This river was even bigger than their mother's beloved Dnieper, back home in Chortitz. From there, on to Berlin, Ontario, and a different kind of Mennonites, who had been very kind to the travellers. Yet another train, and finally to North Dakota, United States. There, the travellers had **boarded** this riverboat.

And now they had "arrived" — another good English word. And they were about to "disembark." Yet another new word: embark — to get *on* a ship, and disembark — to get *off* a ship. Every moment of this trip had been interesting. And now it was over. Their long journey had come to an end.

The air smelled fresh, and the sky was clear. It looked almost like the sky in Russia. The girls looked out over the crowd of people. They **scanned** the group to see if they could find any of their family members. And there was mother! But what was wrong with her? Tears were running down her cheeks. What

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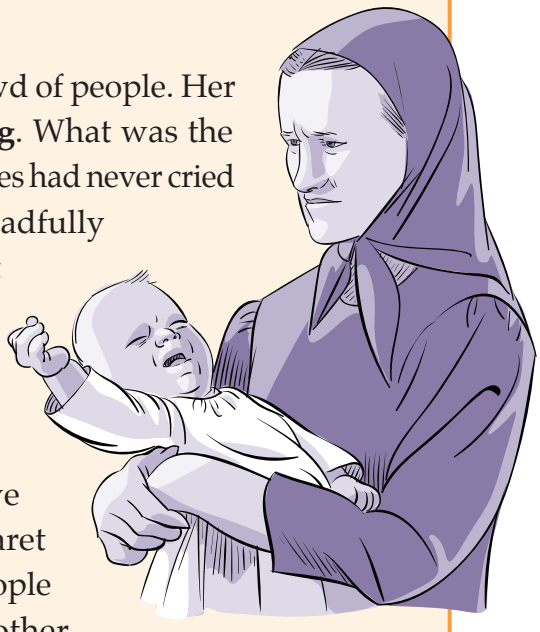
* Aunsch is short for Anna.
† Ot is short for Agatha. Pronounced Oat

could this mean? Who could be sad on such an important day? Should they go and ask? No, that would be embarrassing. Later they would see if they could find out what was wrong.

MARGARET



Margaret stood alone among a crowd of people. Her three-month-old baby was **wailing**. What was the matter with this child? Her other babies had never cried like this. And why was she so dreadfully tired? The crowd of people had just stepped off the boat. They were on the bank of the Red River, in Manitoba.The woman standing beside Margaret looked **annoyed**. How much longer would she have to listen to that baby cry? Margaret just looked away. She saw other people laughing and talking with each other. How could anyone be happy? Margaret held her baby tight, trying to keep from crying herself. But this time she couldn't stop herself. Tears began to roll down her cheeks. What was happening to her? What was she doing here, far, far, FAR away from home and away from her own mother? The others had all wanted to move: her husband Jasch*, the girls, Aunsch and Ot, Jasch's whole family. Margaret hadn't been ready to leave Russia, but what else could she have done? She had no choice but to go, too.

* Pronounced Yah sh

The riverboat from Emerson came gently to a stop. It had landed on the muddy bank of the Red River at Fort Dufferin. But the travellers on that boat were not yet home. They waited in Fort Dufferin for six long weeks. Only then could they move to their land. Their friend, Jakob Schantz, had made sure they had a place to stay while they waited. Three very large sheds had been set up for them. It was a place to stay, yes, but not at all like being in a new home.

Some of the people had left family members back in Russia. Others had left relatives in Ontario: elderly grandparents and young families. Saddest of all, not everyone had made it to Canada. Some had died along the way. By now they were also short of food. Mothers were waiting anxiously to see if they would have enough. They especially needed milk for the babies.

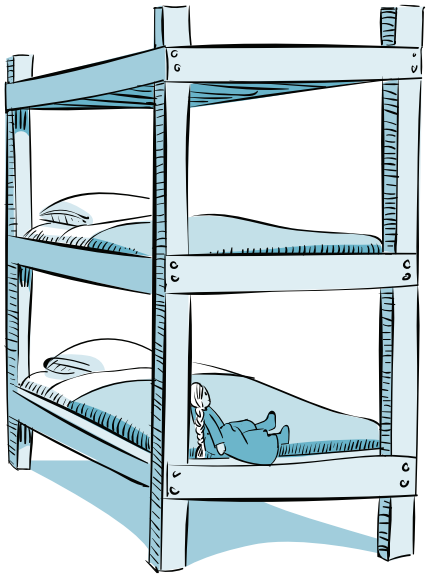
2 BACK TO JAKOB FEHR'S DIARY

Jakob continued:

> The Mennonites in Ontario offered to buy cows for us. If we left some men behind to drive the cattle, they would get us a herd. The Ontario Mennonites also kept some of our old people. They needed to rest from the long trip. Some of our poor people stayed in Ontario to pick fruit. They would live there for a year to earn money. Then they would follow us to Manitoba.
>
> When we got to Fort Dufferin, all I could see were three immigration sheds. The government had them set up for us. We needed all the space in the sheds and more. There was little room to move. There was also still sadness. We missed the people who were not with us anymore.

Jakob called Fort Dufferin, a "**mourning** place." He wrote:

> There was still **yearning** for the true friends we had left behind. We missed our home. There was also sadness over the many children who had died on the trip. I walked along the shore of the river today. I saw someone sitting on a tree stump here; another on a stump over there. I had to think about Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion."



In his diary, Jakob also wrote:

> My smallest brother died at the immigration sheds.

Jakob had lost his brother and his home, his beautiful *Heimat*, with its precious fruit trees. Here in Manitoba, he could see only rolling prairie grass, all the way to the horizon.

3 GETTING THINGS DONE WHILE OTHERS WAIT

Six weeks was a long time to wait. But during that time important things got done. First, a problem about their land had to be worked out. This land had no trees! How would families build log houses without trees? How would they make a fire in their cookstove without firewood? Second was the question of hay. Grass for hay grows on low land. The Mennonite land had no marshes nearby. If their work horses and milk cows were to make it through the winter, they would need hay to eat.

Jakob Schantz and William Hespeler were ready to help. They went off with a group of men to see what could be done. Along the bottom of the Pembina Hills was a nice piece of woodland. That piece could be added to the Mennonite reserve. There were also hay marshes nearby. These, too,

could be added to their reserve land. The land also had to be **surveyed**. All this took time.

* * *

Back at Fort Dufferin, the immigrants waited. Children got in the way. Young people got bored. Fathers tried to make plans. And mothers watched their babies. Day by day the milk supply got lower. Would they lose yet another baby?

And then the cattle arrived! The women got right to work. There was not a woman or girl among this group of immigrants who did not know how to milk a cow.

4 GETTING ORGANIZED: FIRST THE CHURCH

THIS MIGHT ALSO INTEREST YOU . . .

ORGANIZING

While the people at the immigration sheds waited, important thing got done. First, Minister Johann Wiebe got busy. He wanted to organize a church while everyone was still together. All adults in the group were members of a Mennonite church in Russia. But they belonged to different churches. Six weeks was enough time for Johann Wiebe to make one new Gemeinde, or church, for everyone.

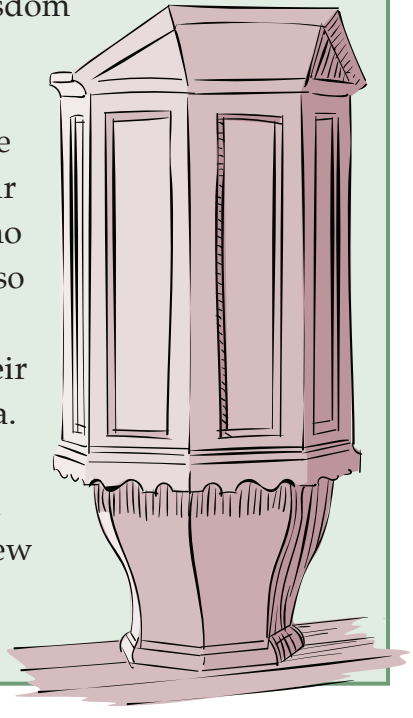
Next, the people had to choose an Ältester. That decision was

easy. They chose Johann Wiebe, who already was an Ältester in Russia. Once they had an Ältester, the people could become a church. They called themselves the Reinländer Mennonite Church.

Later, a group of ministers was chosen. The ministers would work with Ältester Wiebe in their village churches. Deacons were chosen to look after people who were poor, sick or lonely.

Johann Wiebe was now the leader of a large new Gemeinde. His Gemeinde back in Fürstenland had been small. When he needed advice, he had talked with older ministers. In Manitoba, the Ältester worked with a mixed group of people. Not everyone agreed with him. Some people had come to Canada because they wanted more freedom. They did not agree with strict church rules in Russia. This made Johann Wiebe's work **complicated**.

But the people were a Gemeinde — a group of Christians who belonged together. They all had one faith. Their Ältester and other church leaders were villagers and farmers, like everyone else. They did not have high levels of education. They asked God for the wisdom they needed to lead the people. The people understood that their leaders were also chosen by God. Ministers were to be shepherds who looked after their flock, not rulers. This was what Menno Simons taught many years ago. It was also what the first Christians believed.



The Mennonite settlers brought their church model with them from Russia. But nothing in Canada stayed exactly the same. Their Russian church model became a little bit Canadian in their new home.

5 THEN THE GOVERNMENT

Now it was time for step two: organizing a government for the Mennonite Reserve. At Fort Dufferin, Ältester Johann Wiebe urged the people to elect a *Vorsteher*[*]. The Vorsteher looked after everyday life. Electing a Vorsteher was another easy decision. Isaak Müeller had been a good Vorsteher in Russia. He was the man for the job. Peter Wiens was hired to work with Mr. Müeller as the secretary.

By now the people had divided themselves into village groups. As soon as they were ready, each village **elected** a *Schullt*[†]. The Schullten looked after everyday things in a village. They worked together with the Vorsteher. Jakob Fehr's village elected his father as Schullt. He was also named Jakob Fehr.

* Pronounced FOOR schtay yer
† Pronounced Shullt

Elected Leaders of the West Mennonite Reserve

Team of Ministers (*Lehrdienst*[*]):
Johann Wiebe — Ältester (Lead Minister)
Jakob Wiens, Gerhard Paetkau, Cornelius Peters — *Lehrer* (Ministers)
Government (*Vorstand*[†]):
Isaak Müeller — *Vorsteher* (of the West Mennonite Reserve)
Peter Wiens — Secretary
Jakob Fehr — Schullt (Village Mayor of Reinland)
Other elected leaders:
Brandschullt[‡] (Fire Warden) — organized firefighters
Herdschullt[§] (Animal Warden) — looked after animal needs

* Pronounced LAIR deenst
† Pronounced FOOR sh tah nt
‡ Pronounced BRAHNT schullt
§ Pronounced HAIRD schullt

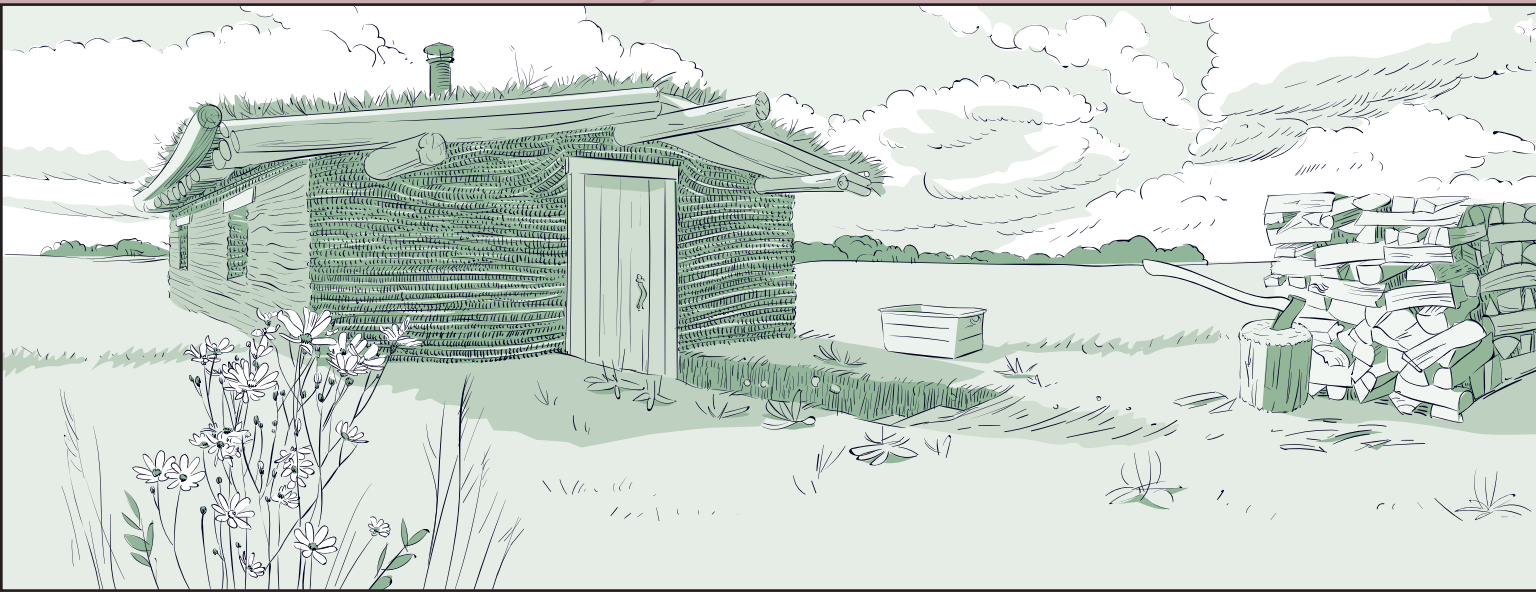
Mennonite Church Words

Gemeinde (German): a group of village churches that belong together. Most villages had a church building. They also often had a minister who lived in their village.
Ältester (German): One of the ministers was chosen to be the lead minister. He was called the Ältester.

A new Gemeinde was usually named after the village of its Ältester. The new Gemeinde in Manitoba was called the Reinländer Mennonite Gemeinde. Yet their Ältester, Johann Wiebe, lived in the village of Rosengart, not Reinland. In Russia, the Wiebe family did not live in a village called Reinland, either. But the new Mennonite settlers must surely have had a good reason for choosing Reinland as the name of their new Gemeinde.

CHAPTER SIX

Getting Settled: Homes and Villages

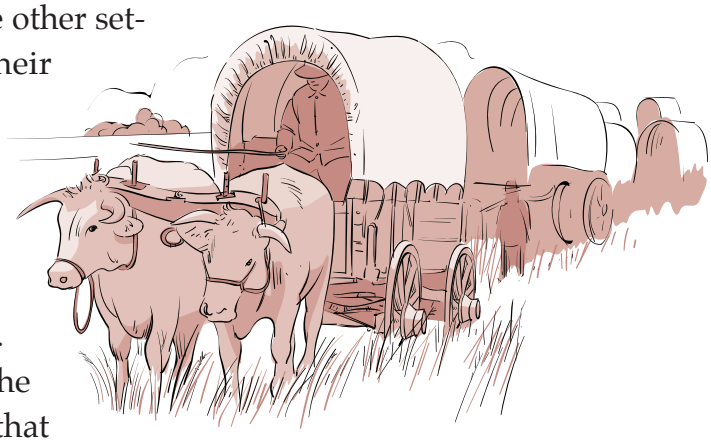


1 READY TO GO!

After many long days in their crowded immigration sheds, the time of waiting was over. This is how one writer described the scene:

> Excitement at the Dufferin immigration houses! Their land had been surveyed. Sections of land were numbered. Each piece was

given a village name. Then **lots** were drawn to see who would get which village site. And so the day had finally come. The settlers could move on to their land.[12]



Together with his family and the other settlers, Jakob Fehr travelled to their land by wagon train. This long row of wagons was pulled ever so slowly by teams of oxen. First the wagon train travelled west along the border. Here, there were woods and meadows. Then it turned north. At noon the travellers arrived at a big farm that belonged to a French family. They got a warm welcome. The women and girls quickly got to work. They pulled large iron pots off the wagons and began to cook dinner. The settlers also bought pailfuls of fresh potatoes from the French farmer. Potatoes were part of most Mennonite meals.[13]

The patient oxen needed three days to **plod** their way to Jakob's village site. His village had drawn the name Reinland. Village Reinland would become the main village of the West Mennonite Reserve in Manitoba.

2 THE FIRST "VILLAGE," WITH MORE TO FOLLOW

As soon as Jakob and the rest of his villagers arrived at their site, they got to work. Their first job was to set up a circle of tents. These first "homes" were given to them by the Canadian government. And "that was Village Reinland, in the summer of 1875: a circle of tents and campfires."[14]

Seventeen more tent villages were set up on the West Reserve. They were called: Blumenfeld, Blumengart, Blumenort, Blumenstein, Chortitz, Ebenfeld, Hochfeld, Neuenburg, Neuendorf, Neuhorst, Osterwick,

Land and Population

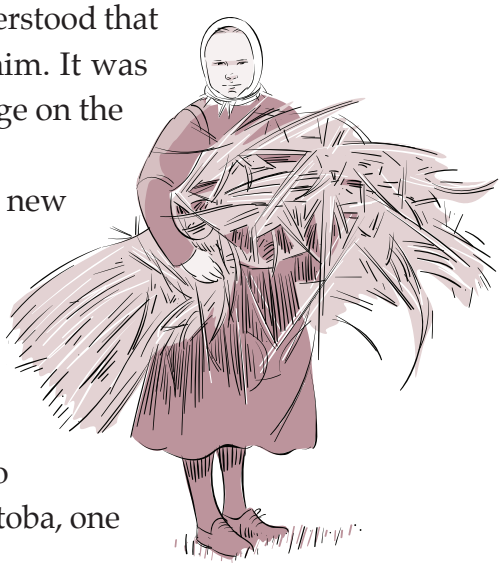
The West Mennonite Reserve had 102 square miles (264 square kilometres) of land that was set aside just for Mennonites. The land lay between the Red River and the Pembina Hills in western Manitoba.

During the first summer, in 1875, close to 1,000 settlers moved on to the West Reserve. That was 303 families. In 1876, 147 more families arrived. In 1877, 35 families followed, for a total of 485 families. They settled in 25 villages.

Rosengart, Rosenort, Rosenthal, Schanzenfeld, Schönwiese (and Rosenfeld on the east side of the reserve).

Village names were brought to Canada from Russia. They were often made up of German words, like: *Blumen* — flowers; *Rosen* — roses; *Hoch* — high; *Neu* — new; and *Schön* — beautiful. The first word was paired with a place, like *Wiese* — meadow; *Gart* — garden; *Feld* — field; *Dorf* — village; *Thal* — valley; or just plain *Ort* — place.

There was one village, Chortitz, with a Russian name. Chortitz was the name of their old colony in Russia. There was also Schanzenfeld. As you know, Jakob Y. Schantz had been very helpful in getting Mennonites settled in Canada. The new settlers understood that this friend needed to have a village named after him. It was said that Schanzenfeld was the most beautiful village on the West Reserve.



Village names in Canada didn't always match the new Canadian villages. For example, Thalbach means "Valley Creek." It wasn't in a valley and didn't have a creek. The name likely came to Canada with families who had lived in Thalbach, Russia.

The Mennonites were sturdy, experienced farmer men, women and young people. But they had a lot to learn in Canada. They also had to work fast. In Manitoba, one

had to be ready for winter *before* winter came. Buildings had to be built, hay cut and stored, firewood cut and stacked to dry, lumber cut for buildings, food grown and stored for winter, supplies bought and stored.

The children, youth, men and women all had their jobs to do. All the time there were lists running through the heads of the adults, who were checking off everything they had to see to: bread and blankets, hay and horses, wood and water, and on and on. All had to be ready before the snow flew. Food and water came first. Then came shelter, a place to live.

3 HOW TO BUILD A WINTERPROOF SHELTER

There was no time to build houses that first year. They had to think hard about how they would keep warm. Temperatures in Manitoba went as low as -40 degrees Celsius in winter. Warm wooden homes like they had in Russia had to wait. For their first homes, the new settlers used **sods**, blocks of earth and grass, to make tiny houses. They called these little buildings *Semlin**.

Shelter One

As soon as their tent village was set up, the Fehr family started building shelters. Jakob built the Semlin. He explained:[15]

> Now the busy work of getting ready for winter began. Father told me to dig a hole in the ground. He and Johann would get firewood from the forest. They also got wood to build the frame of our house. When the frame was built, we set it into the hole that I had dug. It fit nicely in place. Then we set up **spars**, rafters, and nailed down **laths**, thin flat boards for the roof. All the wood was cut by hand.
>
> To cover the roof, I cut grass by the creek with a **scythe**. We had brought the scythe from Russia. My sisters gathered the long dry grass into bundles, then tied up each bundle to make a grass sheaf.

* (Polish) Pronounced ZEM lin

My grandfather used the bundles to **thatch** the roof of our new house.

This was the dwelling for our family, two oxen, two cows and one pony. (Yes, sometimes the animals lived in the Semlin, too.) The little house was pleasant and warm. We used it for two years.

After our shelter was done, we cut grass to make hay for our cattle. We had to cut and dry enough hay to last for the winter. On October 3, eight inches* of snow fell. Our hearts became sad. Then the weather became very beautiful. Winter closed in on us on October 25.

Shelter Two

Klaas Wall, from Village Neuhorst, wrote this letter to his family in Russia. The letter has more details about building shelters.

> I want to report how we built our shelters. For our house, we first dug a hole. The hole was 29 ½ feet long, 12½ feet wide and 2 ½ feet† deep. The inside walls and the floor were covered with boards. The roof was first covered with split oak wood. Then we **plastered** it with clay. Finally, we covered the roof with earth. And so, we believe we have a beautiful warm room ready for winter.
>
> We also dug a hole for our cattle barn 16 feet long and 16 feet‡ wide. We put up walls of split logs around the hole. We covered them with earth. The roof is just of hay. We had no time to nail down poles and laths. It was already getting quite cold. We got our wood from some distance away. It was mostly oak. This hard wood makes good firewood for our iron stoves.[15]

---

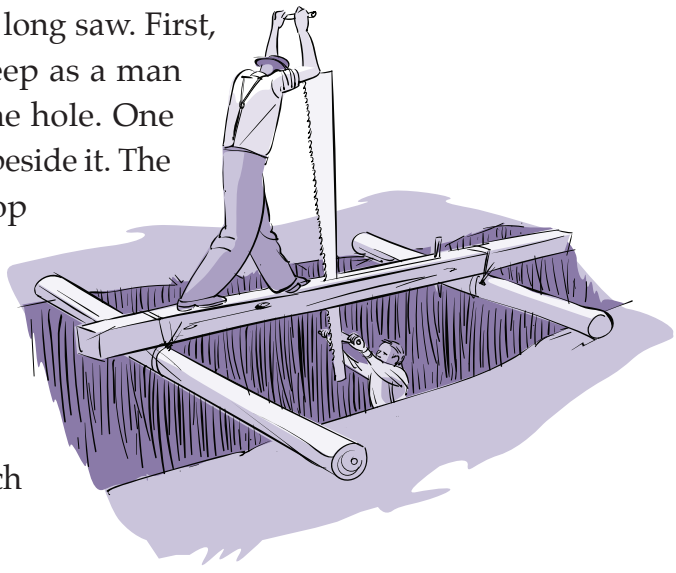
* 20 centimetres
†8.99 metres by 3.81 metres by 76.2 centimetres
‡4.88 metres by 4.88 metres

4 REINLAND'S SAWMILL

Back to Jakob Fehr's diary …

> We were lucky to have a forest nearby. It had plenty of trees for lumber. My father bought a saw to cut logs into boards for the people in the area. They almost ran our house down — all wanting to have their lumber cut! That is how we earned money to buy flour. (Large families needed a lot of flour to make enough bread for everyone!) The second winter Father and I cut wood to build a house. By the third winter we had a house to live in.

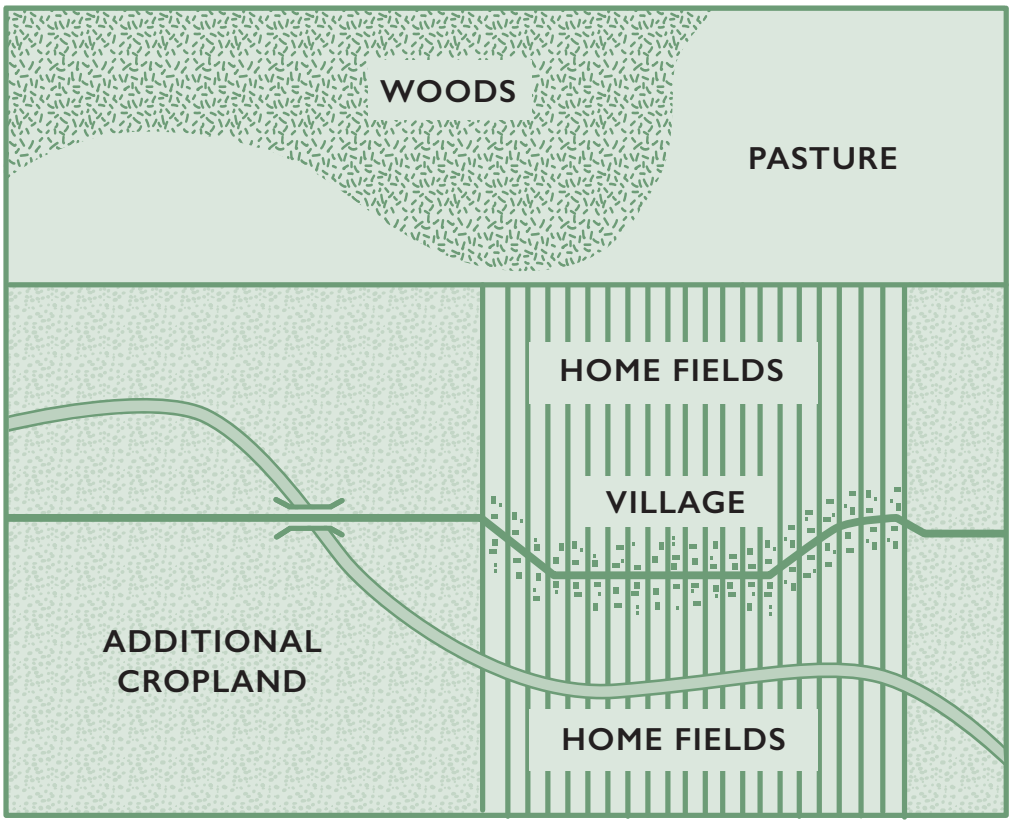
Our saw was called a *Brettschneideisen**, or a board-cutting iron. Two men worked the long saw. First, we dug a long narrow hole as deep as a man is tall. A log was placed across the hole. One man stood in the hole and another beside it. The end of the log lay between the top man's feet. The man in the hole pulled the saw down. The man above pulled the saw up. Up and down went the saw as the log was pushed forward. The Fehr sawmill cut all the boards for the first church on the West Reserve.[16]



5 RUSSIAN VILLAGES IN CANADA

Back in Russia, Mennonite villages had a certain pattern. The new settlers in Canada used the same pattern. They had waited six weeks before they could move to their land. Waiting in three crowded immigration sheds was

* Pronounced BRET Shneyed Eye zen



A typical village plan.

not pleasant. But waiting had one good side. When the travellers finally got to their land, all the village plans had been made. Each village had a long street marked off. Large farmyards were measured out on both sides of the street. Each family already knew which lot was theirs when they arrived.

Mennonite settlers were hard workers. In a couple of years, all the village plots had new houses and large barns. The houses were set back from the street. Young orchards were growing well in the large front yards. Behind the farmyards were long strips of land for growing crops: one strip, the width of their yard, for each farm. At the end of the village was a large cow pasture with plenty of grass. Every morning the cows were sent out to the pasture. In the evening, they walked back to their barns for the night. Around the village was additional land for more fields. And in the middle of each village stood the school. This was the Russian Mennonite village plan. It also worked well on the Canadian prairies.

VIGNETTE . . .

PETER

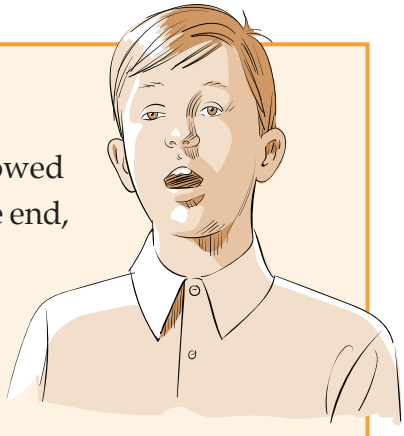
It was September 17, 1876 — Peter's 13th birthday. He had finished his last year of school in spring. After that came summer, and he had worked like a man. This year his birthday fell on a Sunday. That meant he shared his birthday with the first **house of worship**, a church building, on the West Mennonite Reserve. Peter's village, Reinland, had been chosen to get the first church.

Getting the church ready for today, for the first worship service, had been a big job. Peter looked up at the fat cover of dry yellow grass thatch on the roof. To Peter, it looked heavy and soaked with sweat. At least that's what it had felt like. He had been out there with the men, cutting the tall prairie grass. As soon as the grass was dry, Peter was there, **heaving** it on to wagons. After it was tied in bundles, he had carried the bundles up the ladder to the roof. Peter had worked 11-hour days in the heat.

He had also been there when they moved the heavy logs that made up the walls. For a couple of days, his shoulders had ached fiercely. But muscles soon harden. Peter had worked like a grown man. Actually, in his opinion, he had worked quite a bit harder than some of the men in his village.

* * *

This Sunday morning a crowd of people had gathered. They were packed tightly around the steps that lead into the new log church. At just the right moment, Ältester Johann Wiebe came striding through the crowd. He wore the high boots and



black coat of an Ältester. Behind him followed their five ministers, two deacons and at the end, two song leaders.

When the **procession** reached the steps in front of the church door, the first song leader called out a hymn number. He toned the first line of the hymn. Slowly, the crowd around him joined in. Peter had always liked this hymn. But he had never heard a group sing it so loudly — loud, shrill and beautiful, all melded together. The tones vibrated through Peter's chest. He wasn't a singer and usually he just listened to the hymns. But today was different. He found himself humming along. Then he started chanting the words in a quiet monotone. So why not sing along? No one would even hear him in this din. Without further thought, Peter fell in line with the packed crowd around him. Speaking, chanting, singing, what did it matter? By the next stanza, he might actually be singing at top volume, like everyone else.

6 SETTLERS WITH THE RIGHT EXPERIENCE

Canada's way of settling the Manitoba prairies was called **homesteading**. Each family got a tract of land called a homestead. New settlers often had no neighbours nearby. Each family lived and worked alone. If they wanted to keep their homestead, they had to plow the land and plant wheat on it.

Mennonites got all their land as one block, which they divided into villages. No Mennonite family was left alone on the open prairies. All had neighbours close by. Mennonites were also used to wide open prairies and

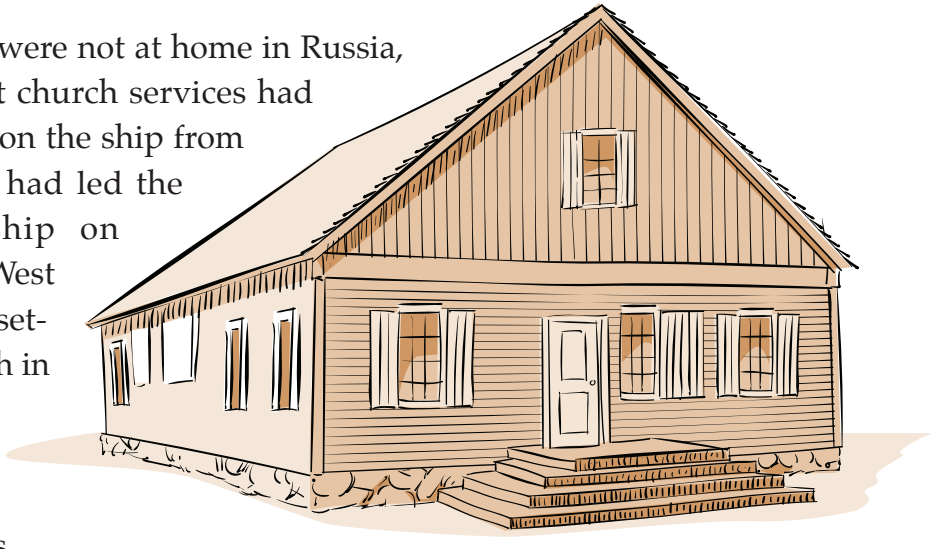
cold winters in Russia. And in Canada they had found freedom. They could keep all the customs that were part of their faith. Living together in villages was one very important custom.

Many homestead settlers had never been farmers. Even so, they had to become grain farmers. Mennonites were already excellent, experienced farmers. They also knew how to plant trees. In their Russian Mennonite villages, there had been a law about planting trees. Trees were needed to keep back fierce winter winds. Trees were also needed for wood. In Manitoba, the Mennonites began to plant trees as soon as they could.

The Mennonites in this story arrived in the middle of summer. That was just enough time. They had to be ready for their first extremely cold Manitoba winter. Russia also had a cold climate. So, the Mennonites understood how important it was to be ready for winter.

7 A HOUSE OF WORSHIP

Just because they were not at home in Russia, did not mean that church services had stopped. Already on the ship from Russia, ministers had led the people in worship on Sundays. On the West Reserve, the new settlers met for church in people's homes. But they needed a house of worship. As soon as shelter and food were taken care of for every family, they built their churches.



The first church in Village Reinland.

The first church was built in Village Reinland. On September 17, 1876, the doors of the new church were opened with a hymn.

Here is the last stanza of *Schliesz auf Jerusalem Die Thore*:

Schliesz' auf Jerusalem, die Thore,
Und lass dein Volk zum Tempel ein,
Damit wir singen in dem Chore,
Denn dieser Ort soll heilich sein.
Ach höret! Hier ist Gottes Haus,
D'rum zieht die Sűndenschuhe aus.

Unlock, Jerusalem, the doors.
Into this temple, call your people,
To join the singing of the choir,
Because this place is holy.
Listen now! Take off your shoes of sin.
This is the house of God.

Once they had a church building, the people said that Manitoba had begun to feel a little bit like home.

APPENDICES

1 Baptized Again: Mennonite Beginnings

On January 21, 1525, in Switzerland, a small group of people started a new church. At that time, churches in Europe were state churches. The church and government worked together. All babies were baptized and became members of the church. This meant that all adults were members of the church. The small group that had gathered believed this was wrong. They also believed that the state churches of Europe had become **corrupt**. They were no longer doing what churches were meant to do. A new model was needed.

A new model would follow the example of Jesus Christ. When Jesus lived on this Earth, he loved people. The followers of Jesus, who were called Christians, did the same. They were not powerful, greedy or rich. They shared what they had with each other. They followed the teachings Jesus had taught them.

At the meeting on January 21, the small group again talked about the church. But this time they did more than talk. They acted. Using a pitcher from the kitchen, they poured water on each other's heads. In this way, they baptized each other. With this act, they were stepping out of the old church model into a new one. Going against the state church was a very brave act, because the state church was very powerful.

From that important day on, the group was filled with joy. The stories about Jesus in the *New Testament* had come alive for them. They could not help but tell others what they had experienced. Everywhere people were ready to listen. The teachings of these Anabaptists spread across Switzerland. From there it spread to other countries in Europe.

When they heard what was happening, the leaders of the state church became very concerned. These **rebels** were going directly against the church. They had to be stopped. Together, the church and the government made a new law. No adults or young people were to be baptized again, and all babies *must* be baptized. The punishment for disobeying these two laws was very harsh. But laws could not stop the Anabaptists. They kept right on teaching anyone who was ready to hear them.

2 How Anabaptists Came to be Called Mennonites

A Priest Wonders About a Right Path

In the 1530s, in the Netherlands (Holland), a Catholic priest was thinking hard. He wondered if his church was on a wrong path. He wondered if he should even be a priest. Was he teaching people the truth? Was he living right? He felt that priests, like him and his friends, should do more than play cards. Playing cards was one of the pleasant ways they passed the time. The priest often felt ignorant. He did not understand things he needed to know. Sometimes he felt that he didn't even understand the *Bible*.

The Dutch priest's name was Menno Simons. *Mennist* is Dutch for "follower of Menno" or in English, *Mennonite*. He was one of the leaders of the early Mennonites.

Menno's training for this work started when he was a boy in school. His school teachers were **monks**. Monks were Christian men who lived separately from the world, in **monasteries**. Their work was to study **Scripture**, the *Bible*, help the poor, pray for people, run schools for children and so on. Their life was simple. They tried to live together peacefully and to help their neighbours. At his school in the monastery, Menno heard the *Bible* read every day. He also learned **Latin**. Latin was the language used for reading and writing.

Like Menno Simons the priest, many monks wondered if the church was on the wrong path. The church had become very rich, very powerful and corrupt. The monks also wondered about their monasteries. Were they doing what monks are meant to do? Not all of them were. Many monasteries had also become corrupt.

Menno Simons Learns Something New

As Menno wondered about his church, he read the *Bible* to look for answers. As he studied the *Bible*, his sermons got better. People liked his preaching. They listened carefully to what he had to say. Still, Menno felt that his life was wrong. Then one day something happened that stopped him short.

This is what Menno Simons wrote about the event:

> Today, March 20, 1531, a god-fearing, **pious**, good man named

> Sicke Freerks Snijder was executed at Leeuwarden. He was killed for the crime of being baptized.[17]

At the execution, Menno Simons heard that Sicke Freerks Snijder was an Anabaptist. Ana is Latin for "again." Anabaptists were adults who had been baptized again. They had already been baptized as babies.

Menno Simons wrote:

> It sounded very strange to me to hear of a second baptism. So, I read the *Bible* and thought carefully about what I read. I could find no report in the *Bible* about **infant** baptism.[18]

At this time, Menno did not yet know what had happened in Switzerland six years ago.

Tragedy

Some years later, Anabaptist teachers came from Switzerland to the Netherlands. Menno Simons was still serving his church as their priest. He was also looking for something new. He wanted the joy that the Anabaptists had in their hearts. Menno wanted to be baptized again. But he was afraid. He wasn't sure what he should do.

Then a terrible thing happened, not far from Menno's home. A small group of Anabaptists were taking a very wrong path. They believed that Christ would set up a kingdom on this Earth. One day, these men decided to march into the city. They planned to take it over in the name of Christ. To their surprise, they were attacked by government officers. Some of them were killed. One of the men who died was Peter Simons. History does not tell us for sure, but Peter Simon's may have been Menno's brother.

Menno Simons was shocked and **stricken with grief**. How could peaceful Anabaptists — who loved even their enemies — have attacked a city? He felt that the deaths were his fault. He was a priest. He should be teaching people the right way. Besides Peter Simons's group, other Dutch Anabaptists had also become violent. Menno grew more and more troubled. Finally, in 1536, when he was 40 years old, he made a decision. He was baptized again and became an Anabaptist. Soon he became an Anabaptist leader.

A Shepherd and a Name
Menno wrote:

> I knew the teachings in the *Bible*. I was trained to lead people in matters of faith. To me the poor Anabaptists looked like sheep who did not have a shepherd. Then a group of Anabaptists came to visit me, secretly. They asked if I would use the talents that God had given me and become their leader. I said, "Yes."[19]

These were dangerous times for Anabaptists. They were hunted down and often killed for their faith. Menno Simons also became a hunted man. He had to move from place to place. If he stopped anywhere for too long, he would be captured and put in prison. After that he would likely die a terrible death, like Sicke Freerks Snijder.

So, Menno Simons moved quietly from one place to another. As he travelled he taught the people.

For the state church, Anabaptists were a dangerous group. Now they were also seen as violent people. Menno, together with other leaders, brought the peaceful Anabaptists back together. These leaders needed to show people that Anabaptists were upright, not violent people.

As Menno Simons taught the people, he also wrote down the lessons he taught. Soon he got his own printing press to print these lessons. Now Anabaptist teachers could use them to teach each other. We still have many of Menno's lessons today.

In all the years that he taught the Anabaptists, he was never caught. His family also stayed safe. One historian wrote this about Menno Simons: "Menno's skills in organization and leadership, his concern for the people, and his ability to write were just what the scattered Anabaptists needed."[20] Because of his work as a teacher and writer, Anabaptists all across Europe took on Menno's name.

3 Johann Wiebe's Vision

In the 1870s, Johann Wiebe was a **reformer**, one who corrects things. When he saw that something was not right, he set out to make it right. Johann Wiebe

Menno Simons was born and baptized in 1496 and rebaptized in 1536. He died in 1561.

was the leading church minister on the Fürstenland Mennonite Colony in Russia. Ältester Wiebe saw three things that needed to be reformed. None of them was easy to set right, because they were part of the church system in Russia.

First was the colony government. Colonies had their own government,

which ordered everyday life. The church guided the people in their faith in God. On a Mennonite colony, the rules for everyday life were also part of the teachings of the church. Work and faith were meant to work together.

In the 1870s, colony government and church leaders were moving apart. Government leaders were elected by the colony, but they worked for Russia. Some of these leaders did not think working with the church ministers was important. Others believed it was. But both groups had to obey Russian rules and laws.

The second problem was about **inequality**, or not all of the people having the same chance. Mennonite colonies had rich families who owned a lot of land. There were also families who could barely make a living. Some rich people were using their money to hold power over those who were not rich. In his *Bible*, Ältester Wiebe read about people like this. Here is what he read:*

> Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you. You are left to live alone in the midst of the land! Ah, you are so **shrewd**, so smart, in your own eyes! You do not think about the deeds of the Lord, or see the work of the Lord's hands!

Besides inequality between the rich and the poor, Johann Wiebe was very concerned about violence. The colonies had rules about how to deal with disobedient people. The Mennonite custom for this problem was to persuade. The ministers and others talked with people about changing wrong behaviour. But now people who disobeyed laws were given hard labour, put in prison, fed only bread and water or even whipped. Such violence shocked Johann Wiebe. Those who used violence were still welcome members of the church.

Johann Wiebe did not think people who disobeyed the law should go unpunished. But that was the work of the government. It was the government who made the laws, not the church. In a Christian community, love, not violence, should be the rule. In a Mennonite village, the church should guide people in living together in peace.

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* Ältester Wiebe would have been reading from the German Luther translation of the *Bible*.

Many Think the Same Way

Many people agreed with their Ältester. In their villages, they had traditions that fit their faith. On small, mixed farms, neighbours worked together to grow food. Selling what they grew gave them the money they needed to live. The children and youth learned from their parents, their village and their teachers to be Old Colony Mennonite Christians. Those who agreed with Johann Wiebe wanted to keep this faith and lifestyle. For this group, it seemed, Russia was not a good place to live in this way anymore. For this group, Canada was a place to start over again.

NOTES

1. Epp, Frank H. (1974), p. 189.
2. Ibid., p. 187.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 190.
5. Ibid., p. 191.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 192.
8. Ibid., p. 26.
9. Dyck, Isaak. (1994), p. 16.
10. Zacharias, Peter D. (1976), pp. 34–41.
11. Shantz, J.Y. (1873).
12. Zacharias, Peter D. (1976), pp. 45–46.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 46.
15. Ibid., pp. 85–87.
16. Ibid.
17. Williams, George Huntston. (1992), pp. 589–91.
18. Ibid.
19. Zacharias, Peter D. (1976), p. 189.
20. Loewen, Harry and Steven Nolt. (2010), p. 70.

EIGHTY WORDS! THAT MIGHT BE NEW FOR YOU

Chapter One

practise your faith. Live the way your faith teaches you.
tract. A piece of land.
industry. Factories and businesses.
agriculture. Farming.
progressive. Taking on new ideas or ways of living.
traditions. Old ways of doing things.
prospered. Did well, made a good living.
independence. Not being ruled by others.
pacifists. People who believe that war, fighting and hurting others are wrong.
Czarina. The empress or ruler of Russia in the past.
military. To do with war and fighting.
executed. Killed for doing something that is against the law.

Chapter Two

nation. A country and its government.
claimed. Took as their own.
Aboriginal. The first people who lived in a country.
en bloc. As a group.
loophole. A way to get out of a situation.
accumulated. Earned and saved money.
agriculturists. Farmers who grow food.
excel. Be good at something you do.
prosperous. Well off or rich.
dealing in. Buying and selling.
delegates. Those who work in the name of someone else.
on behalf of. Stand in for someone else.
ministry. A group of leaders in a government.
descendants. Those who come after, like children, grandchildren.
infuriated mob. A very angry crowd.

displacing a people. Making a group of people move off their land or out of their home and putting them somewhere else.

Chapter Three

emigrated. Moved from one's own country to a new country.
autobiography. One's life story.
tossing. Rising, falling and moving back and forth.
disciples. Followers of a teacher.
terrifying. Very frightening.
anchored. A boat in water kept in one place with an anchor (heavy object on a rope).
gangplank. A narrow, movable board that connects one location to another, like the shore and a boat in nearby water.
penetrating. Loud or high (voice).
estate. Large piece of land, together with its buildings, that belongs to one family.
innumerable. Very many, so that they cannot be counted.

Chapter Four

hospitality. Welcoming visitors or newcomers.
hospitable. Kind, friendly, helpful to visitors.
forebears. Those who come before, like grandparents and great-grandparents.
raw. Harsh or unpleasant.
churning. Turning and moving, like water in a waterfall.
entrepreneur. Someone who starts a business.
enterprise. A business.
guarantee the loan. Promise that the loan of another person will be paid.
flourished. Did very well, grew.
unassuming. Not needing other people to admire you.

Chapter Five

boarded. Got on, as on to a boat or ship.
scanned. Looked back and forth into the distance.
wailing. Crying loudly.
annoyed. Somewhat angry at or bothered by.
mourning. Feeling sad about what has been lost, like a homeland or someone who has died.
yearning. Wanting something very badly.
surveyed. Measured.
complicated. Not easy to do.
elected. Chosen to be a leader or to take on some other job.

Chapter Six

drawing lots. A way of seeing who wins what, in a competition.
plod. Walk very slowly.
sods. Blocks of earth and grass.
spars. Rafters on which to put a roof.
laths. Narrow thin boards.
scythe. Long knife for cutting tall grass or grain.
thatch. To cover.
plastered. Covered.
procession. A group of people walking in a line.
homesteading. Settling on a homestead (large piece of free land).
house of worship. A building like a church for worshipping God.
heaving. Lifting something very heavy.

Appendices

1 Baptized Again: Mennonite Beginnings
corrupt. When an organization is not doing what it is meant to anymore.
rebels. People who go against the rules of the country, a school or other system in which they live.

2 How Anabaptists Came to be Called Mennonites

monks. A group of men who use their life to work, help others and worship God together.

monastery. The home of a group of monks.

Scripture. Writing that teaches about one's faith. For example: The *Bible* is the Scripture of Christianity.

Latin. An old language of Rome.

pious. Good, thoughtful, full of faith.

infant. Baby.

stricken with grief. Very sad about losing someone or something. For example: someone who has died.

3 Johann Wiebe's Vision

reformer. One who changes a situation that needs to change.

inequality. Not being equal. For example: when one group is very poor and another is very rich.

shrewd. Good at making decisions and understanding people's actions.

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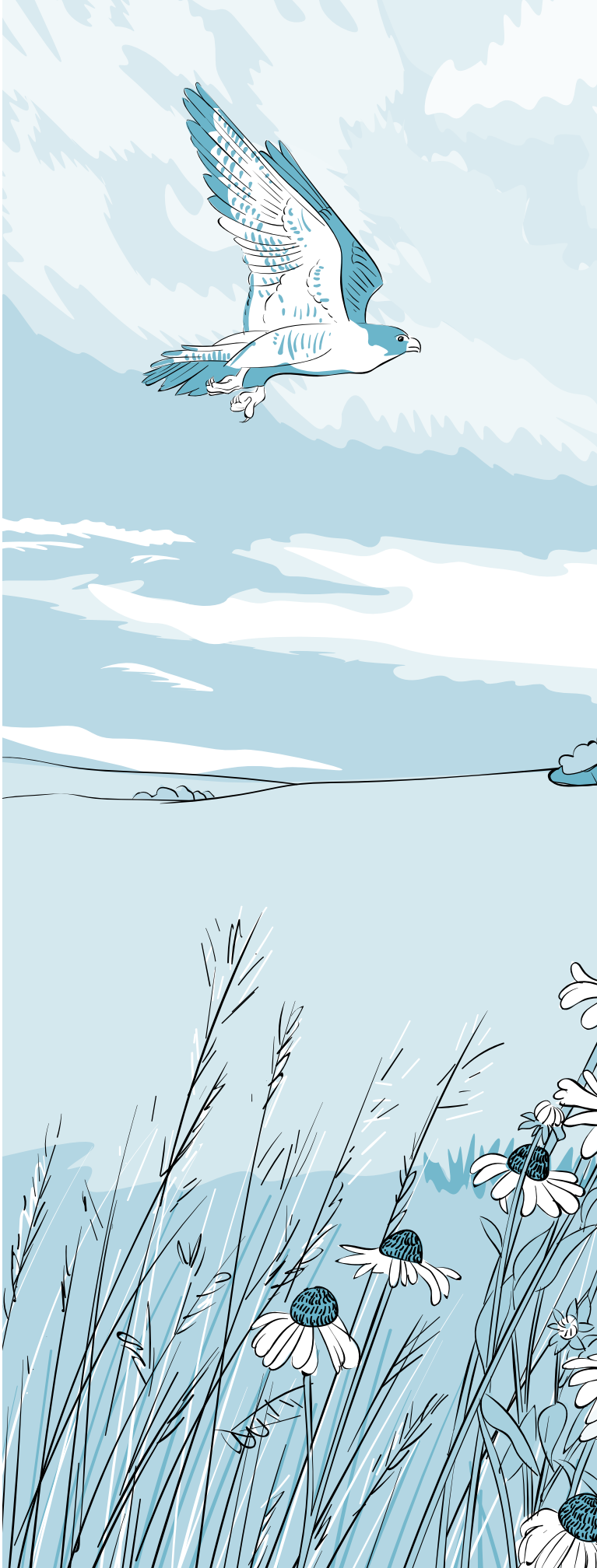
In *Leaving Russia: The Journey to Canada*, you will read stories and other information about a group of new settlers in Canada. This group arrived in Manitoba, Canada, in the 1870s. They were called Mennonites, and they came from Russia. After a long voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, as well as more trips by boat along several rivers, they arrived in North Dakota, United States. From there — as one storyteller remembers — they travelled, ever so slowly, by wagon train, pulled by oxen.

The oxen took them to Fort Dufferin, Manitoba. Here the Mennonites got a big, warm welcome from Canada's government. Why? Because they were experienced farmers. They knew how to grow oats, rye, barley and other crops on wide-open Prairie land. They were exactly what the government of Canada was looking for. As for the Mennonites, they had found just the right land for themselves. But this is just the beginning of the story...

On the cover: Even before settlers from Europe arrived on the Prairies of Canada, this wide, so-called "empty" land wasn't actually empty at all. It was filled with animals, flowers, birds and even a few trees. The land was also home to a people who had lived there for as long as anyone could remember.