

# A Brief History of the Heinrichs Family

by Gerald B. Heinrichs

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i) Foreword

*Few will have the greatness to bend  
history itself, but each of us can  
work to change a small portion of  
events, and in the total of all those  
acts will be written the history of  
this generation.*

- ROBERT KENNEDY

Too often people have asked about my ancestry and I've replied with a vague statement about Mennonites and Germans. A combination of curiosity and embarrassment over my ignorance were the motivation for this project.

The Heinrichs family can be grateful of its Mennonite heritage for a number of reasons. One reason is that Mennonite history is remarkably well-documented. I believe that a person of Mennonite ancestry is able to trace his or her ancestry with more detail than most other people. In Canada, the United States and Europe, there are many historical sources for Mennonites and the bibliography to this work is testament to that fact. As much as possible I have tried to identify my sources and give credit to people who have done the original research. I highly recommend all the works that I have listed as sources.

I have not written a complete history of the Mennonite people. If I did so this essay would become a lifetime's project and I would merely be repeating what more competent people have already done. This essay is a brief family history and no more.

Many thanks to everyone who helped me with this project. The list includes the staff of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B. C., Ruth Heinrichs, Regina and the interviewees listed in the bibliography.

Gerald B. Heinrichs  
Regina, Saskatchewan  
April 1994

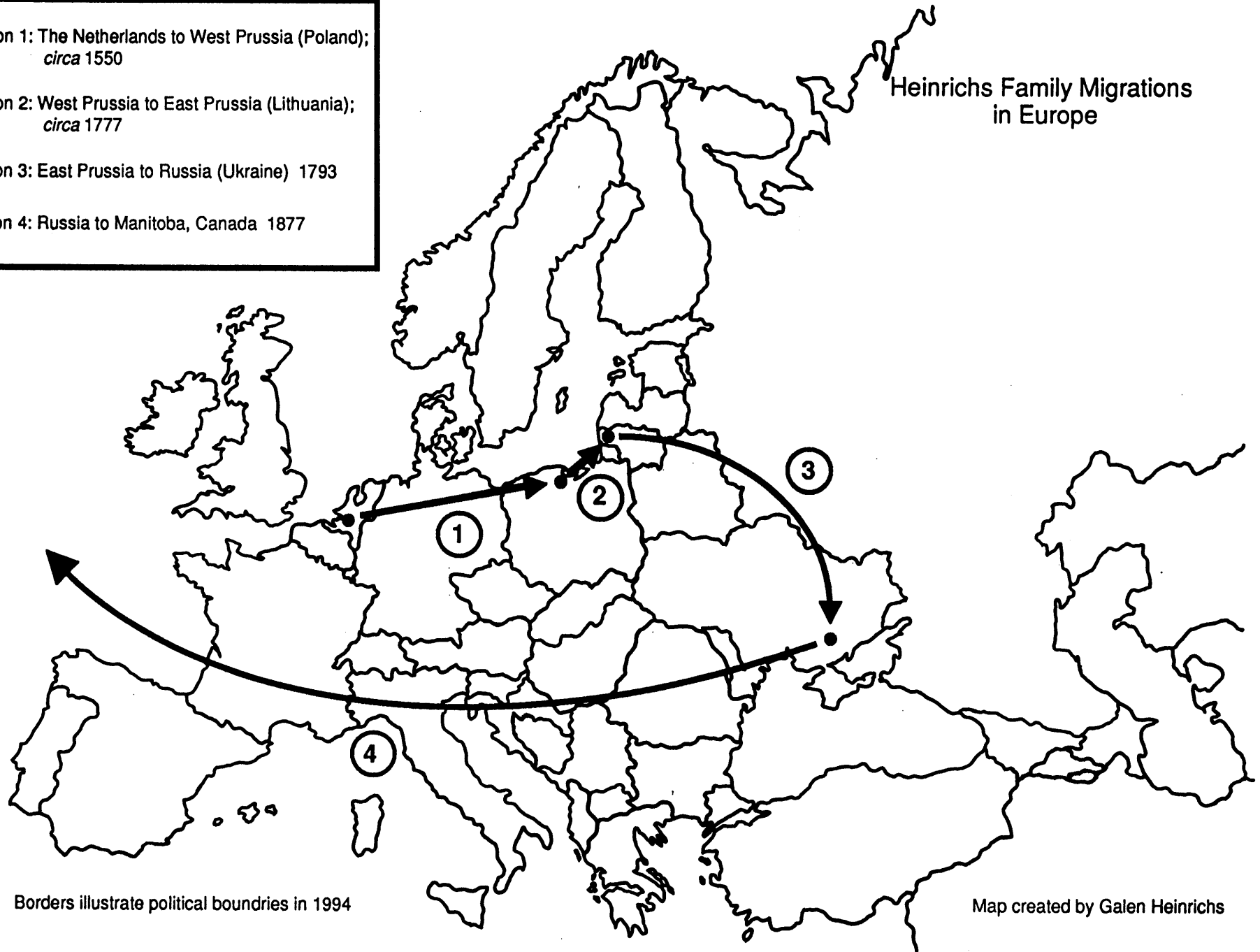
Migration 1: The Netherlands to West Prussia (Poland);  
*circa 1550*

Migration 2: West Prussia to East Prussia (Lithuania);  
*circa 1777*

Migration 3: East Prussia to Russia (Ukraine) 1793

Migration 4: Russia to Manitoba, Canada 1877

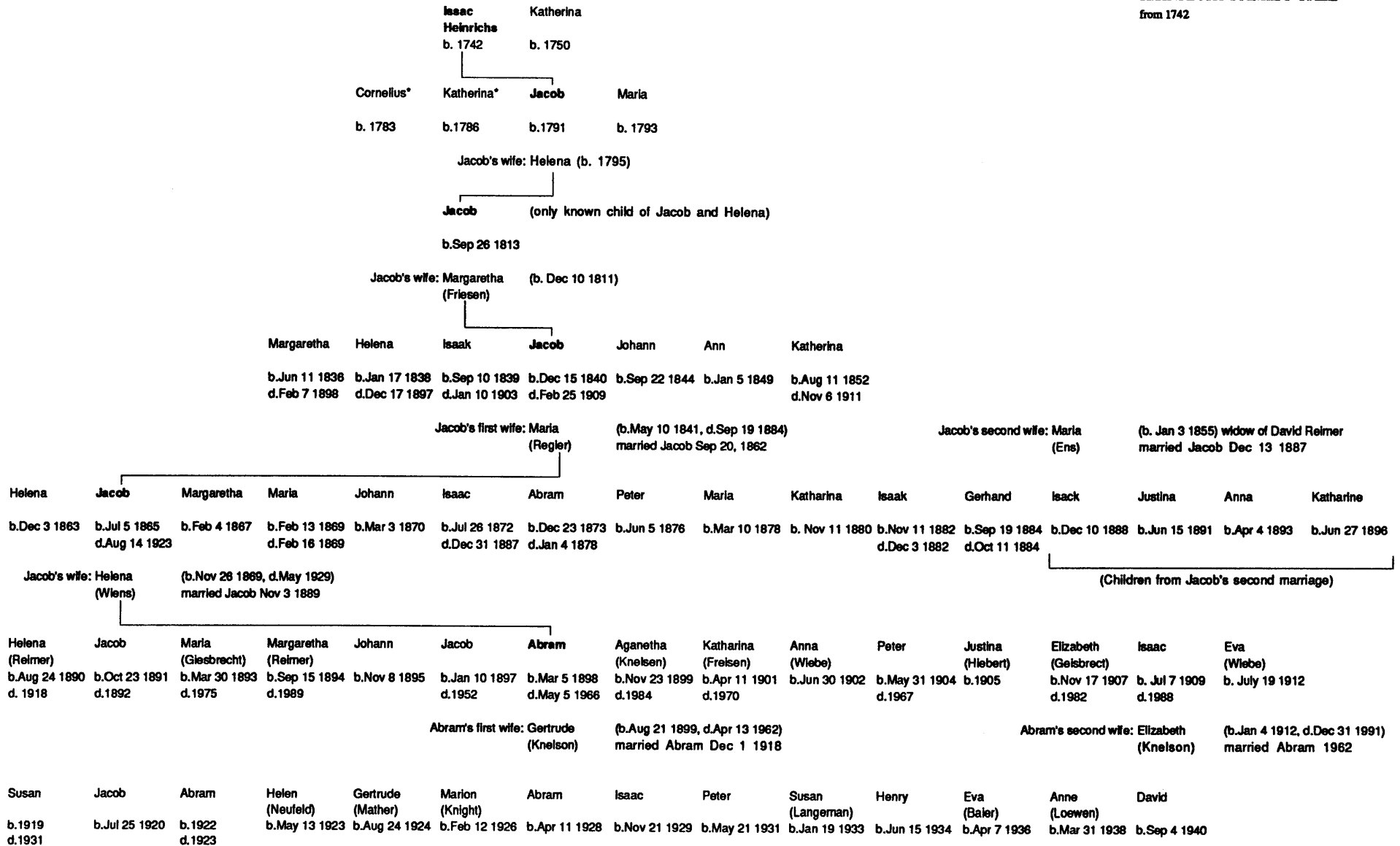
## Heinrichs Family Migrations in Europe



Borders illustrate political boundaries in 1994

Map created by Galen Heinrichs

# HEINRICHS FAMILY TREE from 1742



Each line of names lists a generation of children  
Name between generations is wife of direct ancestor

\* It is arguable whether these were children of Isaac

Diagram created by Galen Heinrichs

## 1. Mennonites and Anabaptism

Sooner or later, everyone asks the question: "Who am I and where did I come from?" The answer to that question depends on how far back in history you want to look. The Heinrichs family traces its most direct ancestry to Dutch-German Mennonites who migrated to North America from Europe.

Mennonite history begins with the Reformation movement in Europe during the sixteenth century. The Mennonite religion was one of several Anabaptist faiths that grew in the 1500's. Anabaptism is the name of a religious movement or "awakening" that challenged the Roman Catholic Church of the time. The Mennonite religion was one of many Protestant religions that evolved during the Reformation. The Anabaptist movement began in Switzerland but quickly it spread and grew in Germany and the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to say that Anabaptism is a religion that opposes the baptism of children and chooses to "rebaptise" adults. However, that was only one of the beliefs of a very radical movement. Imagine you are living in the Netherlands 500 years ago. For centuries the Roman Catholic Church had been the dominant organized Christian religion in Western Europe. Christians in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands became unhappy and skeptical about the church, its traditions, and its interpretation of the Bible. They questioned why the church was so wealthy; why church services were in Latin; why priests could not marry; why mass had to follow peculiar formalities; why children were baptized; and what was the proper interpretation of communion. In October of 1517 the most famous Protestant leader, Martin Luther, published a list of ninety-five items that displeased him about the Catholic church.

Although the Mennonite church is named after its most famous leader, Mennon Simmons, he was not the earliest founder of the religion. Conrad Grebel, Thomas Müntzer (d. 1525) and Ulrich Zwingli (d. 1531) are generally given this credit. Menno Simmons is the most prominent founder, likely because he was a peaceful Anabaptist and leader of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands. Among other

things, the church that Mennon Simmons envisioned had the following beliefs:

1. Nonparticipation in government. Mennonites were not to hold public office. However they were to obey the laws of the land as long as the laws did not contradict their religious principles.

2. Nonresistance. Mennonites were not to take up arms. Their determination on this principle and strength in others caused some to call them "wolves in sheeps' clothing".

3. A belief in sharing possessions. Like many protestants, Mennonites were troubled by the wealth of the Catholic church especially given the poverty of many of its parishoners. The noted Mennonite historian C. Henry Smith describes the Mennonite view of sharing property in the following words:

In the matter of private property, neither the Swiss Brethren nor their fellow Anabaptists elsewhere, with the exception of the Moravian Hutterites, were communalists, as was often charged against them. Benefices and fat livings held by the clergy, they decidedly opposed; but they did not object to private possessions of the laity. Compassion for the less fortunate, however, must constrain the possessor of an ample store of worldly goods to share his surplus liberally with the needy in case of distress. The Christian, after all, is merely a steward of his possessions, they said.<sup>2</sup>

4. A belief in shunning the vices of the secular world. Mennonites disapproved of many "bad habits". Again we turn to Smith who summarized their belief as follows:

The Brethren, on the other hand , insisted from the start that the new faith must bear fruit in purer living. Conrad Grebel informed an early applicant for baptism that church membership required of him that he be free from adultery, gambling, drunkenness, usury, and other vices of the day . . . Kessler, describing the daily life of the Swiss Brethren, says of them-

'Their daily walk and deportment appears to be upright, godly, and entirely blameless. They shun costly clothes, avoid excessive eating and drinking, wear coarse clothing, and broad felt hats. They go about humbly, without weapons, neither swords not pikes, but with a short

bread knife. They seem much more concerned about living an upright life than the Papists.'<sup>3</sup>

The early Anabaptists openly challenged the doctrines of the Holy Roman Empire. The Catholic church was not tolerant of this type of dissention. There was a strong backlash against Mennonites and other Anabaptists throughout West Central Europe. Anabaptists were seen as a threat to the state. They were anarchists. Therefore Catholics were quick to persecute them. A further explanation of this persecution is provided in these words:

Church and state had been so closely linked in the medieval period that the state considered it a part of its duty to enforce the accepted belief of the established state church. If the church declared someone a heretic, he was considered dangerous to the state and removed from society. Anabaptists were considered heretics. Their name, given to them by their opponents, was chosen to point to an ancient heresy. In the Roman Empire anyone who was baptized a second time was put to death. These views continued to prevail in the sixteenth century, especially also in the Netherlands, which were under the despotic rule of Spain. Charles V had been more tolerant of Luther in Germany because he needed the military and political support of the German princes, but he was determined to stamp out the Reformation in the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup>

The persecution often turned to cruel violence. The following text describes the fate of one Anabaptist, Michael Sattler in 1527:

Sattler, an ex-monk, was apprehended while engaged in missionary efforts in South Germany and tried in Rottenburg. The court decreed that he 'shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution and cut out his tongue, and then throw him upon a wagon, and then tear his body twice with red hot tongs, and after he has been brought within the gate he shall be pinched five times in the same manner.' This order was carried out literally, and was followed by burning at the stake. The charges made against Sattler were that he preached against the real presence of the flesh and blood of Christ in the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, infant baptism, worship of Mary and the saints, oaths, warfare, extreme unction, communion of one kind, and finally that 'he had left the monastic order and married a wife.'<sup>5</sup>





The execution of Leonard Bernkop, Salzburg, 1542.



The torture of Ursula of Essen, Maastricht, 1570.

A similar fate met a group of more radical Anabaptists in Amsterdam and is described as follows:

The town hall on Dam Square was the focus of civic power. In February 1535, in the early days of Protestantism, a group of Anabaptists, men and women, enraptured by a doctrine proclaiming absolute simplicity and absolute equality, rushed naked into the streets to call the people to repentance. They also, briefly, took possession of the town hall. The civic guard retook it and the Anabaptists who survived were put to death on a platform just outside. Their chests, the sentence said, must be opened while they were still alive, 'the heart removed and thrust into their faces, whereupon they are to be beheaded and quartered. Their heads are to be mounted on stakes on the town gates, and their parts to be hung outside the gates.'<sup>6</sup>

Studies show that up to 2,500 Anabaptists were martyred in the Netherlands and Belgium by 1574.<sup>7</sup> Martyrs' Mirror by Thieleman Jansz. van Braght was written in 1660 and documented the persecution of Mennonites in the sixteenth century. Some scholars claim that next to the Bible, this has been the most influential book on Mennonite history.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to know the early history of Anabaptism. The early history explains the saga of Mennonites and the Heinrichs family. It is because Mennonites were persecuted that they migrated from country to country. It is because Mennonites avoid public office and violence that they chose to migrate rather than trying to change the country where they lived. Further, the culture of Mennonites has more meaning when the early history is examined. The tradition of ban and abstinence explains the conservative Mennonite dress and the aversion to the vices of the secular world.

Since their earliest days, Mennonites have been searching for the freedom to practice their religion in peace. This search eventually brought the Heinrichs family to Saskatchewan.

## 2. We Came From the Netherlands

There is little doubt that the Heinrichs family traces its oldest ancestry to the Netherlands. The journey of Dutch Mennonites to Canada left clear footprints in historical records. We know that the Heinrichs family came to Canada from Russia. Most of those Mennonites moved there from West Prussia and East Prussia. Those Mennonites fled to Prussia to escape the fervent persecution in the Netherlands. C. Henry Smith verifies the Dutch origin as follows:

These settlers [who settled in Prussia] came from various provinces of the Netherlands: Holland, Friesland, Groningen, Brabant, Flanders, and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

In the Mennonite Encyclopedia there is no separate mention of anyone named Heinrichs with this particular spelling. However, there are a number of individuals with similar names all of whom were Dutch and lived in the Netherlands in the eighteenth century or sooner. The following is the list:

**Hendriks** (Hendricx, Henrixen, Hendrikse), **Jacob** (Later called Jacob Hendrics Smit), until his death in 1724 a Mennonite preacher of the United Flemish and Waterlander Noorderkaai congregation at Blokzijl (q.v.), Dutch province of Overijssel. . . <sup>10</sup>

**Hendriks** (Hendricksz), **Laurens**, appointed deacon of the Amsterdam Mennonite congregation "bij 't Jam" in 1656 . . .<sup>11</sup>

**Hendriks, Laurens**, a Mennonite preacher a Nijmegen, Dutch province of Gelderland, from 1690 until about 1714.<sup>12</sup>

**Hendriks, Pieter**, was a preacher of the (Groningen) Old Flemish Mennonite congregation at Sappemeer, Dutch province of Groningen. <sup>13</sup>

**Hendriksz, Jan**, a Dutch Mennonite elder, was present at a conference held at Harlingen on Dec. 19, 1566, to settle the Frisian-Flemish quarrels. <sup>14</sup>

**Hendriksz** (Hendriks, Hendricksz, Hendricx) **Joost**, b. 1592, d. March 2 1644, at Amsterdam, was a preacher of the Flemish Mennonite

congregations of Harlingen 1626-31 and Amsterdam 1631-44.<sup>15</sup>

**Heynrick Cornelisz**, an otherwise unknown Anabaptist martyr, arrested at Leiden, Dutch province of South Holland, on the night of Jan. 24, 1535, and beheaded on Feb. 3, 4, or 5 of that year at Leiden. Together with a number of other martyrs Heynrick died singing. He was probably an adherent of Münsterite principles, though this fact is not evident from the sentence.<sup>16</sup>

**Heynrick Willemsz** (Willemken van Stellingwerf), a Dutch revolutionary Anabaptist, follower of Jan van Batenburg (q. v.), was beheaded at Utrecht in the Netherlands on July 21, 1544.<sup>17</sup>

**Heynrick (Heyndric) Willemsz**, an Anabaptist martyr, a native of Hazerswoude, Dutch province of South Holland, was burned at the stake at The Hague on April 25, 1534. He belonged to a group of revolutionary Anabaptists, whose execution was dated by van Braght . . . in 1532.<sup>18</sup>

**Heyndrick Pietersz**, a grain merchant and active in early Dutch Anabaptism.<sup>19</sup>

**Heyndri(c)k van Dale**, an Anabaptist martyr, was drowned at Antwerp, Belgium, on April 3, 1562, because he "persisted in his heresy of rebaptism." . . . Van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, who calls him simply Hendrik, gives Aug. 15, 1561, as the date of the death of a group of seven martyrs which included Hendrick.<sup>20</sup>

The Heinrichs name may have been spelled in one of these different ways in the sixteenth century. Given the many changes in the language of the Mennonites after they left the Netherlands it would not be surprising that the spelling of a surname would be changed. Records as recent as 1795 show direct members of the Heinrichs family with the spelling Heinriks.<sup>21</sup> One Dutch researcher at the Centraal Bureau Voor Genealogie in The Hague, Netherlands claims that the family name Heinrichs is a patronymic or variation of a Dutch family name. The Dutch name Hendriks was suggested as the likely origin.<sup>22</sup> The similarity between the surname Heinrichs and the German proper name Heinrich is too obvious to be overlooked. It is possible that the Dutch name Hendriks was altered to mimic this more familiar German name. This may have occurred some time after the predominant Mennonite language changed from Dutch to Low German. As well, it was common

for Mennonites from the Dutch province of Friesland to form a surname by adding an "s" or a "z" to a first name. Heinrichs may be an example of this similar to Peters, Isaacs, Janz, or Pauls.<sup>23</sup>

There is further proof of the Dutch origin of the Heinrichs family. In his book Story of the Mennonites, C. Henry Smith lists family names of the Mennonites who left Holland in the 1550's. Included in the list are Ens, Wiebe, and Janzen.<sup>24</sup> People with these family names continued to be neighbours to the Heinrichs family into the twentieth century. However, most convincing is the Dutch heritage that was passed by word of mouth for generations. Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1865) spoke of this Dutch heritage to his children in Saskatchewan almost four centuries after the Heinrichs family left the Netherlands.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the Heinrichs family migrated across Europe and North America with communities of Mennonites who historically traced their origin to the Netherlands. It is worth note that Mennonite settlers in Manitoba in the nineteenth century continued to identify themselves as people of Dutch origin.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the Heinrichs family, and perhaps most Mennonite families who later settled in South West Saskatchewan, trace their oldest roots to the Netherlands and a Dutch culture.

### 3. The Move From the Netherlands to Prussia

It was likely around 1550 that the Heinrichs family moved from the Netherlands to a region around the cities of Gdansk and Warsaw. At the time of the move, the area was known as Danzig. The same area later became Prussia, or more specifically West Prussia. Today it is Poland.

The principal reason for the move to Danzig was to escape the terrible persecution in the Netherlands. This persecution was discussed in Chapter One. The Danzig people were happy to have the Mennonite immigrants because they were skilled in reclaiming land from the sea. They had gained these skills in the Netherlands. Thus the Mennonites were a valuable labour resource to entrepreneurs in Danzig who also wanted to reclaim land. However, as the years went by, the Mennonites were soon recovering land from the sea to establish their own settlements.<sup>27</sup>

These early Prussian settlements were mostly in the Gdansk (Danzig) area along the Wisla (Vistula) river. It appears likely that the Heinrichs family originally settled around one of three villages : Montau, Schönsee or Thorn.<sup>28</sup> The Mennonites in this area were seen as industrious people; they were farmers, merchants and artisans.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Mennonites were relatively free to practice their religion in Prussia, they were not treated completely as equal citizens. It was unlawful for the Mennonites to live in the large cities or to practice their religion outside of their isolated communities. In short, the Mennonites were granted many of the liberties they desired such as exemption from military service and freedom to worship, but they were expected to keep to themselves.<sup>30</sup>

While in Prussia the Mennonites gradually changed their language from Dutch to Low German. That change is explained as follows:

The process of Germanization had commenced slowly in the latter part of the seventeenth and the early decades of the eighteenth century when these settlers, whose forebears had come from the various provinces of the Netherlands to these Polish lands and Danzig from around 1540, and

during the course of the following 100 years they gradually substituted for their Dutch a Low German dialect in their daily life. After about 1765 this process had become accelerated and the substitution of High German in their churches as well as for their literary language had proceeded apace . . . But, whether the Mennonites emigrated to Russia . . . or from the neighboring areas is West Prussia, the mother tongue throughout their sojourn in the empire of the czars was their own form of Low German, a basic Dutch-Low German with a large admixture of French, Polish, Ukrainian and Russian words and expressions. This Mennonite dialect, Mennonite-Platt or Plaut-Dietsch, is still today the basic mother tongue among the surviving Mennonites in Russia, or wherever their descendants have migrated since the 1870's, be this to Canada, the United States, Mexico, Paraguay, Brazil, British Honduras or elsewhere in the Western World.<sup>31</sup>

The transformation from Dutch to German occurred at different rates among the Mennonites in Prussia. The "Old Colony" Mennonites (see later chapters) hung onto their Dutch language longer than others and it was not until around 1783 that the transformation to Low German was complete.<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that some scholars disagree on the evolution of the language of the Dutch Mennonites. In his well-documented book The Story of Low German and Plautdietsch, Reuben Epp asserts that for many Mennonites, there was little change in language after they left the Netherlands. To this day, Nether Saxon Low German is spoken in the Friesland district of the Netherlands.<sup>33</sup>

The Heinrichs family likely moved to West Prussia around 1550. The earliest known records regarding the Heinrichs family are from a census by the Prussian government in 1776, the same year that the American Revolution began. Those records show that Issac Heinrichs (b. 1742) resided in the town of Unterkerbswalde in West Prussia. He lived there with his wife and the census shows one other adult male in his household; this person was likely his father-in-law Martin Janzen (b. 1722). Isaac Heinrichs is listed as a landowning farmer of average wealth. The census contains no other information about Isaac Heinrichs.<sup>34</sup>

However at some time after 1776, Isaac Heinrichs moved from West Prussia to East Prussia somewhere between the city of Königsberg (Kaliningrad) and the city of Klaipeda in the district known as Memel. Records show that Isaac

Heinrichs (b. 1742) was living there in 1793.<sup>35</sup> In 1994 this region extends both into Lithuania and the Russian Federation.

The migration of many Mennonites from West Prussia to East Prussia in the eighteenth century was caused by severe suffering due to "plague, war, and special taxes".<sup>36</sup> In East Prussia, the Mennonites again used their skills of reclaiming land from the sea. Their enterprise is described in these words:

With great industry they converted the land into fertile fields. There were no ditches or dikes. As early as 1718 they protected themselves against floods of the Old Gilge with dikes and drained the lowlands with ditches, all built at their own expense. They were chiefly engaged in cattle raising; they made profitable use of their skills in cheese making in Switzerland and Holland, and built up a thriving business. In 1724 there were 105 Mennonite families in the Tilsit lowlands.<sup>37</sup>

The stay in East Prussia was unsettling for many Mennonites. Forced recruitment into the army caused many to move away.<sup>38</sup> As well, numerous Mennonite settlers were forcibly removed by the King of Prussia. These unhappy Mennonites returned to West Prussia and some even returned to the Netherlands.<sup>39</sup> Whatever the fate of the Heinrichs family, they were still living in East Prussia in 1793. The exact town where they resided is unknown although many Mennonites lived around the towns of Tilsit, Gumbinnen, Plauschwarren, Kukernese, and Ragnit.<sup>40</sup> Of special note is a small town in this district named Heinrichswalde.<sup>41</sup> In English this name means Heinrichs Forest. One might wonder if this town is named after a direct ancestor of the Heinrichs family.

The monarchs and borders of East and West Prussia changed many times from 1551 to 1795. Despite these changes, the Mennonite communities had been successful in securing enough rights and privileges to continue practicing their religion. However, around 1778 laws enacted by the new ruler of Prussia caused many of the Mennonites to consider moving out of that country. Adam Giesinger, a Winnipeg writer, summarized the change of that time in the following words:

Then in 1772, as a result of the first partition of Poland, West Prussia



became part of the kingdom of Prussia. Frederick the Great confirmed the special privileges of the Mennonites, including freedom of worship, control of their own schools, and exemption from military service, but his successor, Frederick William II, who ascended the throne in 1786, was much less tolerant. In 1787 he decreed that the Mennonites must pay for their privilege of military exemption a heavy annual fine in support of the Military Academy of Kulm. Shortly afterwards another decree prohibited the Mennonites from buying more land and required them to pay tithes to the established Lutheran Church on all earlier land purchases from Lutherans. These restrictions caused grave concern among the Mennonites, particularly since they were already troubled by a rapidly growing landless population. They began to examine the possibilities of emigration.<sup>42</sup>

By strange coincidence, the discontent of the Mennonites in Prussia corresponded with certain plans of Catherine II, the Czarina of Russia. In a recent war with Turkey, Russia had acquired the land known as Crimea, north of the Black Sea. Catherine II sought new settlers for this conquered area. The new lands were sparsely populated by nomadic tribes of Nogais who were hostile to Russia and a more stable and reliable tenant was deemed necessary.<sup>43</sup> The Mennonites of Prussia were known by many prominent Russian officials to be good farmers, businessmen, and tradesmen.<sup>44</sup> Thus plans were made to coax the Mennonites to move to Russia.

#### 4. The Move From Prussia to Russia

The intolerant conduct of the Prussian monarch caused many Mennonites, including the Heinrichs family, to move from Prussia to Russia. The Mennonites who made this migration principally settled north of Crimea and the Black Sea. In 1994 this land is within the Ukraine. The first colony of Mennonites in Russia was established in 1789 and was named Chortitza. Since this was the first colony established by these Mennonites, it also became known as the "Old Colony".<sup>45</sup> The second colony was founded in 1804 and it was named Molotschna. In later years, many more colonies were built in this area of Russia. They were named Bergthal, Crimea, Kuban, Memrik, Ignatievo, Schoenfeld, Yazykovo, Fuerstenland, Sagrdowka, and Schlachtin Baratov. Many of these colonies were built as expansions of the first two.<sup>46</sup> Ancestors of the Heinrichs family settled in the Chortitza or Old Colony and so that colony will be examined most closely.

The Mennonites who moved to Russia did so because they were unhappy with the new laws of the Prussian government that restricted their freedom of religion. An advisor to Catherine II named Potemkin was instrumental in guaranteeing a list of freedoms and benefits to the Mennonites if they would move to Russia. This list included: freedom of religion and religious practice; exemption from military service; land for each family; a ten-year tax exemption; and a supply of timber and milling equipment.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the Mennonites who left Prussia for Russia were poor. The Prussian government was not anxious to have wealthy people and their money leaving the country so visas were not granted to landowners.<sup>48</sup> However, from 1789 to 1824 a total of 400 families made the trek from Prussia to the Chortitza colony. The first migrants in 1786 had a difficult voyage over land from Danzig to Russia. Of the 910 individuals who emigrated that year, 9 died en route, 73 deserted and a further 73 entered the military service.<sup>49</sup> Once they arrived in Russia, they established a number of villages in the Chortitza Colony and gave them names from their homeland such as Rosental, Einlage, Kronsweide, Neuenburg,

Source: Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 1 p. 572

Neuendorf, Schönhorst, Blumengart, Schönwiese and Kronsgarten.<sup>50</sup>

The Mennonites who first arrived from Prussia to establish the Chortitza colony had a very difficult time. Promises of supplies and money from the Russian government were slow in being fulfilled. As well, the Mennonites found themselves in a very desolate and remote area. The remoteness they saw in Russia in 1789 was not unlike what would greet them on the vast plains of Manitoba a century later. C. Henry Smith described their arrival in Russia with these words:

Great was the disappointment of the weary colonists, when upon their final arrival at Chortitza, in July of 1789, they first sighted the bare and hilly steppes that were to be their new home, their promised land. What they saw, instead of the flat fertile fields like those in their own Vistula delta, were wide, rocky barren steppes, cut through with deep gullies, filled at that season of the year with patches of dried-up grass. There was no sign of a living thing anywhere . . . Such was the disappointment of these lonely homeseekers that a small group, the most discontented, refused to unpack their goods, hoping that at the last minute the Russian government might relent and offer them a more promising site.<sup>51</sup>

The first colonists arrived to a very harsh new home. The tough environment was exacerbated by the challenge of building a farming community from very little:

Early times were difficult, not helped by the fact that many of the early settlers were poor artisans or from the landless group . . . The land was not nearly as fertile, nor other circumstances as favorable as the area originally chosen . . . Initially the raising of sheep, production of silk and cottage industries such as spinning and weaving involved most settlers. In the 1830's and 1840's the influence of Johann Cornies and the Agricultural Association also reached Chortitza, and soon thereafter agriculture, particularly the growing of grain, predominated. Associated industries were quick to follow. The first flour mills appeared in Chortitza and Rosenthal in 1820, later followed by many others, including steam powered mills, so that by 1908 there were 21 in the colony. The first agricultural machinery factory was founded by Peter Lepp in Chortitza in 1853.<sup>52</sup>

In 1786, when the Chortitza colony was being established, the Heinrichs

family was still living in East Prussia. Isaac Heinrichs (b. 1742) left the Memel district of Lithuania in 1793 for the Chortitza Colony.<sup>53</sup> In 1795 he settled in the town of Kronsweide with his wife Katharina (b. 1751), his son Jacob (age 4), his daughter Maria (age 2) and his father-in-law Martin Janzen (Janzon) (b. 1722).<sup>54</sup> In 1803 Isaac Heinrichs was listed as a landowner in that same town.<sup>55</sup>

What later became of Isaac is unknown. However, his son Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1791) was listed as a resident of Kronsweide in 1814 at the age of 23. He resided there with his wife Helena (b. 1795) and a one-year-old son Jacob. They had 3 cattle, 2 sheep, 2 pigs, a wagon and a spinning wheel.<sup>56</sup>

Their son Jacob (b. 1813) married Margaret Friesen. They had seven children. Their second son Jacob (b. Dec. 15, 1840) later came to Canada with his family; he married Maria Regier (Regör) and they had twelve children, six of whom died in childhood.

Jacob Heinrichs, the father of Abram Heinrichs, (b.1898) was born in the town of Neuhorst in the Chortitza Colony on July 8, 1864. He was the fourth child of Jacob Heinrichs. In Low German Neuhorst was called Niehorscht and in Russian it was called Ternovataia. This village was founded in 1824. Its founders were from other villages in the Chortitza colony so the town was likely built to house the growing population.<sup>57</sup>

While in Russia, the Heinrichs family lived among the Old Colony Mennonites of the Chortitza colony. For good or bad, these individuals were seen by many as the most conservative Mennonites both in Russia and later in Canada. They placed great value on their traditional way of life including their language, dress, education and village pattern. They were non-conformists from the rest of society and practiced a lifestyle of ban and avoidance. Once in Canada these communities had a lack of contact both with the Mennonite culture in Russia as well as other cultures from the outside world.<sup>58</sup>

For almost a hundred years, Russia was the home for the Heinrichs family. However as the decades went by the Russians began to renege on their promises to the Mennonites. Many Russians began to question why the

Mennonites were given the special privileges of exemption from military service. These Russians forgot the promises that had brought the Mennonites to Russia in the first place. New generations of Russians did not appreciate the importance to the Mennonites of maintaining their traditional way of life. In 1870, the Russian government introduced the Russian language into the school system and otherwise reduced the autonomy of Mennonite towns.<sup>59</sup> The last straw came a year later when compulsory military service was introduced in Russia. Many Mennonites saw this as a violation of the promise that had induced them to come to Russia in the eighteenth century. With that change, many Mennonites saw emigration from Russia as the only solution.<sup>60</sup>

## 5. The Move From Russia to Manitoba, Canada

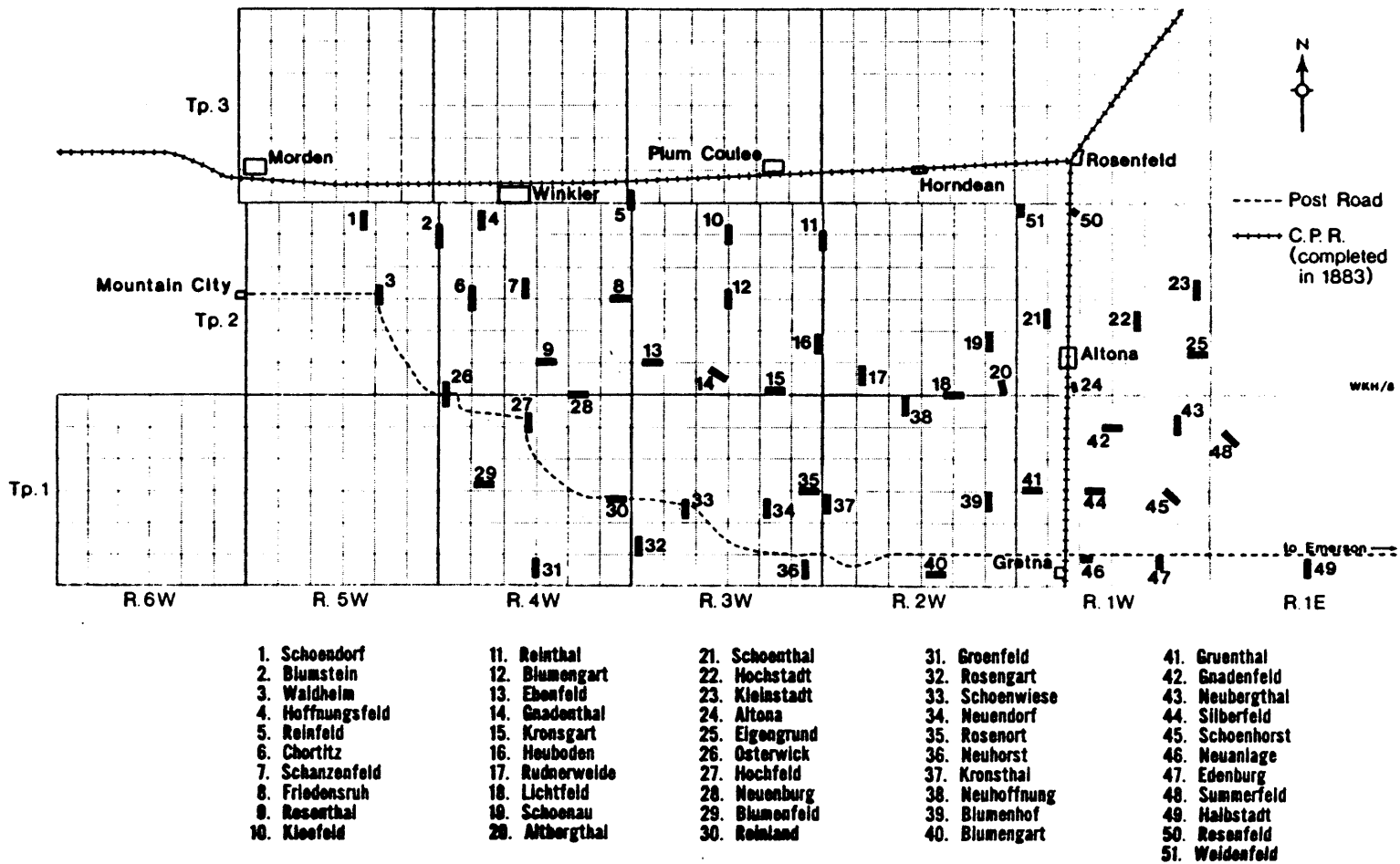
Deciding that they had to leave Russia was easy. Deciding where they should go was a more difficult problem for the Mennonites in the Chortitza Colony. Most of them eventually went to the United States and Canada. However there was much concern about moving to these unknown countries. The Mennonites of Russia in 1872 saw these lands as the home of adventurers and convicts and not an ideal home for stalwart religious people.<sup>61</sup>

Prior to moving, elders from the Russian Mennonite colonies went to North America to survey the settlement lands and speak with government officials. The elders wanted to be sure that if they moved, Mennonite traditions would be respected. The elders left Russia in the Spring of 1873. They looked at various lands in Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. While at Fargo Dakota, the elders were met by an official of the Canadian government who invited them to look at land in the Canadian frontier of Manitoba. There had been much growth and new settlement along the Red River since 1860 - so much that Manitoba became Canada's fifth province in 1870.

All the Mennonite elders left Fargo for Winnipeg (then called Fort Garry) where they surveyed a number of townships of land that the Canadian government was prepared to set aside.<sup>62</sup> C. Henry Smith describes the talks which later occurred with government officials:

After this inspection [of the land], the delegates proceeded to Ottawa, where they received on July 26, 1873, a statement regarding the conditions under which the Canadian government would accept and settle the Mennonites who desired to come to Manitoba. These "privileges" were briefly the following: (1) complete exemption from military service; (2) a free grant of land in Manitoba; (3) the right to conduct their own traditional schools (with German and Bible as the main subjects); (4) the privilege of affirming instead of taking the oath in court; (5) a cash grant for passage from Hamburg to Fort Garry (Winnipeg) of thirty dollars per adult, fifteen dollars per child under eight years and three dollars per infant.<sup>63</sup>

# THE WEST RESERVE



Manitoba West Reserve

Source: Schroeder, William & Huebert, Helmut Mennonite

Historical Atlas p. 62



After these discussions, the elders were generally pleased with what was offered by the Canadian government.

There was considerable debate in Canada about whether special privileges should be given to Mennonite immigrants. One French-speaking member of parliament thought that expatriated French Canadians from the United States should be settled in Manitoba instead of Mennonites.<sup>64</sup> A Scottish member of parliament thought that people from the hills of Scotland and Ireland would make better settlers for Manitoba because they were "hardy people who would help to fight the battles of the country".<sup>65</sup> However, most parliamentarians soundly approved of the Mennonite settlements in Manitoba. Finance Minister Cartwright stated in parliament on February 19, 1875 "the Mennonites of Waterloo County [Ontario] are for the most part a wealthy class and bear the highest reputation for strict honesty and integrity in meeting their pecuniary engagements".<sup>66</sup>

Similar debates occurred in the United States where the Mennonites' demand to be exempt from military service was looked upon far more critically than it was in Canada. However, one U. S. senator stated in the Congress "If there is any portion of the world that can send us a few advocates of peace - in God's name let us bid them welcome."<sup>67</sup>

Two reserves of land were set aside for the Mennonites to settle in Manitoba. The first, called the East Reserve, was around the town of Steinbach and consisted of 8 townships of land, which is equal to 288 square miles or 155,520 acres. The second, or West Reserve, was around the town of Altona and was 17 townships being 612 square miles or 330,480 acres in total.<sup>68</sup>

Back in Russia where the Mennonites prepared to move, numerous actions were taken by the Russians to hinder the emigration. The Russian government was not anxious to lose these valuable citizens but at the same time was not prepared to capitulate to all their demands. To hinder the migration, high fees were imposed on passports; the sale of land was restricted; and mail was censored. Added to this, the overall price of land plummeted as many Mennonites were trying to sell their land at the same time. Russian citizens were critical of the

Mennonites' reaction to what they saw as reasonable concessions by the Russian government. One Russian newspaper alleged that conservative extremists were the cause of the discontent in the Mennonite towns. As the departure of many Mennonites loomed, the Russian government relented somewhat. New conscription rules allowed young men to serve as forest workers instead of soldiers. In all, many Mennonites chose to remain in Russia.<sup>69</sup>

The Mennonites who made the voyage to Canada travelled overland from their homes on the north coast of the Black Sea to the city of Hamburg on the north coast of Europe. From there they went by ship to Liverpool, England and then onto Québec City, Canada.<sup>70</sup> The railway then took them to Manitoba. Much of this transportation was arranged and funded by Mennonite groups in Canada. A contract was made by these groups with the Allen Line for the sea transport from Liverpool to Québec City. A set rate was agreed upon for transporting all the Mennonites to Canada.<sup>71</sup>

One of the largest migrations was in 1874. In that year, the Mennonite families from Russia settled in the following areas:

Dakota	200 families
Minnesota	15 families
Nebraska	80 families
Kansas	600 families
Manitoba	230 families <sup>72</sup>

Until 1883, Mennonites continued the exodus from Russia to North America. During that time 18,000 individuals made the trip, and Manitoba became home for 8,000 of these people.<sup>73</sup>

The Heinrichs family arrived in Canada in the middle of the Russian immigration. Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1840) arrived in 1877. <sup>74</sup> The journey overseas was on a ship named the S.S. Peruvian. With Jacob Heinrichs were his wife Maria (née Regier b. 1841) and his three daughters and three sons including his son Jacob (b.

1865). As well, his father Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1813) his mother Margaretha (née Freisen) and two aunts arrived in the same party.<sup>75</sup>

Primarily, it was Mennonites from the Bergthal and Molotschna colonies who were the first to arrive in Manitoba. They settled in the East Reserve. The Heinrichs Family and most of the Chortitza or Old Colony Mennonites arrived later and settled in the West Reserve. In a few years the West Reserve was dotted with no fewer than 51 individual Mennonite towns. Virtually all these towns had German names, many of which were taken from towns in Russia. These names included Chortitz, Rosenthal, Blumengart, Kronsgart, Altbergthal, Reinland, Neuhorst, Blumenhof, and Rosenfeld. The Heinrichs family settled near Gruenthal.<sup>76</sup> The younger Jacob (b. 1840) settled at SW 20 - 1 - 1 W1.<sup>77</sup> The older Jacob (b. 1813) settled at SW- 17-1-1 W1.<sup>78</sup> The younger Jacob and his wife Maria had twelve children. Maria died on the same day their son Gerhard was born (Sep 19, 1884). Three years later, the younger Jacob remarried. Maria Ens (b. Jan. 3, 1855) was his second wife and they had four children.

Sometime thereafter the younger Jacob's eldest son, Jacob Heinrichs (b. Jul. 8, 1865) moved to his own home on SE 31-3-2 W1. He married Helena Weins on November 3, 1889.<sup>79</sup> Twelve of their children were born in Manitoba. The other three were born in Saskatchewan, where they later moved.

Although the Heinrichs family came to Canada from Russia, they have never considered themselves Russian. Indeed, this was the case for all Mennonites who settled in Manitoba in the 1870's. Even though the Heinrichs family never lived in what is today Germany, they have always considered themselves German or Dutch. A census in Manitoba of the Mennonite communities in 1911 showed that 11,292 people considered themselves of German origin, while 214 were Dutch. However in the census of 1921 these same communities claimed to have 11,785 persons of Dutch origin and only 459 who were German. Undoubtedly the passing of World War I was influential on how the Mennonites viewed themselves.<sup>80</sup>

## 6. THE SETTLEMENT IN SASKATCHEWAN

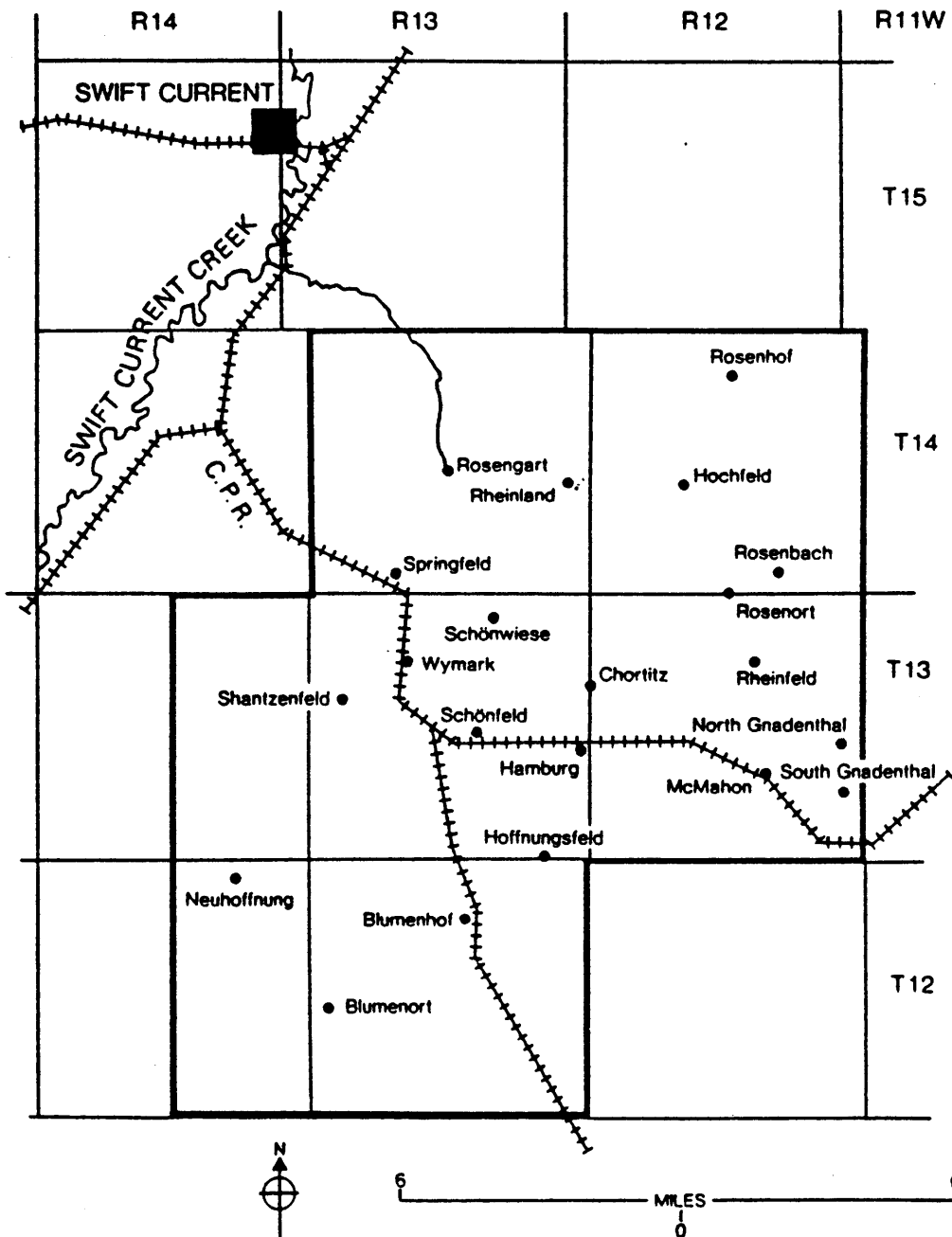
The Mennonites had special reasons for coming to the Canadian West. They wanted to practice their religion free from persecution. However, the Canadian government had its own reasons for wanting to settle the vast empty western frontier. By settling farmers in the West there would be an economic benefit for the East. The pioneer farmer would "initiate an economic take-off by buying lumber, groceries, and agricultural implements, on the one hand, and shipping grain and livestock, on the other".<sup>81</sup>

Interestingly, Canadian security also played a role in western settlement. Throughout the 1800's, Canadians were fearful of an American annexation of the North West Territories. Settlement in the Western United States had occurred at a breakneck speed. Pioneers streamed across the Ohio River into the American North West with little standing in their way until they reached the Rocky Mountains. Meanwhile in Canada, it was a formidable task to move west from Sault Ste. Marie; miles of trees, rocks, and muskeg stood between there and Winnipeg. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1881 made the task much easier but the Canadian government still needed people to occupy the land. When towns and farms were built, American annexationists could not longer doubt Canada's commitment to its territory north of the 49th parallel. Eventually, Mennonites and many other settlers arrived and soon a better means of governing the North West Territories was required. Thus in 1905, acts of the federal parliament created the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Aside from the Mennonites, many other German-speaking people settled in Saskatchewan at the turn of the twentieth century. German-speaking Russians settled in Edenwold, Balgonie, Kronau, Odessa, Vibank, Sedley, Holdfast, and Wilkie.<sup>82</sup> As well, numerous German-speaking people came to Saskatchewan from Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Rumania, and the United States.<sup>83</sup>

The Mennonite immigrants to Saskatchewan settled in large blocks of land where they were able to establish their communities or colonies. The first

# SWIFT CURRENT COLONY



Swift Current Reserve

Source: Anderson, Alan "German Settlements in Saskatchewan" p. 221

colony was established in the Rosthern and Hague-Osler areas around 1892. Later reserves were established at Carrot River, Herbert, and Swift Current.<sup>84</sup> It is the Swift Current Reserve and the town of Chortitz that will be given particular attention because this was where the Heinrichs family settled.

Most of the Mennonites who settled in the Swift Current region were from Manitoba. There had been a large population growth in the Manitoba reserves from 1870 to 1900. This growth was due to a very high birth rate and the further arrival of Mennonites from Russia.<sup>85</sup> More land was needed. The Canadian government feared that if the Mennonite colonies could not expand they would leave Canada for the Dakotas.<sup>86</sup> The Reinland Mennonite Association negotiated with the federal government for land in Saskatchewan to accomodate the growing Mennonite population in Manitoba. Their acquisition of the land around Swift Current is described as follows:

The Manitoba Mennonites, having a considerable communal fund of money, decided to send a delegation of over 100 of their brethren to inspect both the [C.N.R.]-owned and the Dominion lands in the eastern half of the district [between Swift Current and Herbert] in October, 1903. They found the clay-loam plains covered by a heavy growth of grass that year, and the Mennonites were convinced that they could raise grain there. They promptly bought some land north of Herbert and Rush Lake and filed on more to form one settlement block. However, they wanted additional land in blocks and, like everyone else, they preferred to receive most of it 'free' under the homestead land grant system. They asked Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior, to set aside reserves for them where they could homestead under the hamlet system, rather than each homesteader residing on his own quarter-section. Furthermore, when they had received land patents, they wanted the right to purchase the section adjoining their homesteaded land within three years for \$3.00 per acre, payable in ten annual instalments with five per cent interest on the unpaid balance.

The land south-east of Swift Current appeared to Sifton to be ideally suited to the requirements of the Mennonites. In a block comprising six townships there was but one settler, David Ellems, who had built a log house and stable and fenced a quarter-section about ten miles south of Waldeck.<sup>87</sup>

Subsequently, the Swift Current Colony was established in 1904 comprising of six

townships of land south and east of Swift Current. By 1907, two thousand Mennonites had moved into the Swift Current area from Manitoba. They soon outnumbered all other inhabitants in the district and founded the villages of Neuendorf, Reinfeld, Blumenhof, Chortitz, Reinland, Springfield, Schoenfeld, and Blumenort.<sup>88</sup> The 1911 census recorded 4,598 Mennonites in the Herbert-Swift Current area.<sup>89</sup>

The Mennonite immigrants settled both in the Mennonite villages and on surrounding farms. Leo Driedger, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, studied the Hague-Osler colony in 1955. He described a Saskatchewan Mennonite village in the following way:

Each family took up a homestead in addition to the village land which they received. Each villager had a part in the land property of the village. First of all a wide street was established and then the farmers took lots of land on each side of the street on which they built their buildings. Many of the streets are wide, because in Russia many of the houses had straw roofs, so that when a roof caught fire, it would not spread across the street so easily.<sup>90</sup>

Each lot within the town of Chortitz was approximately two acres. Many of the buildings in Chortitz and other Mennonite villages were constructed with the house and barn attached in one unit. There was a community pasture for grazing cattle. Each family in Chortitz was allotted 26 acres in the community pasture which would support three cows. The community pasture at Chortitz was three quarter sections or 420 acres. Most of the original house-barn structures were built when the town was founded around 1905. Only a few remain standing in 1994.<sup>91</sup>

There was a strong sense of community among the Mennonites. Fall hog slaughterings and building bees were common community events. A hog slaughtering was an all-day event. It is described in these words:

Early in the morning at about five or six o'clock the people begin to come. They first eat breakfast at the host's house and then when the dawn of day greets them, they go and kill the hogs. The women take care of the food, dishes, prepare dinner and work with certain segments of meat to be

prepared. Usually in the early afternoon all is done, the lard, sausage, liverwurst, hams, ribs, cracklings, etc., have all been stored away and the men and women spend the rest of the day visiting until lunch time, after which they go home. This is always a very fine time of fellowship and visitation.<sup>92</sup>

In the Mennonite villages there was a simple form of municipal government. Chortitz had two *Schults*. The *Herdshult* looked after the cattle and the common pasture; the *Schult* was the head administrator who looked after many duties such as fence repair and maintaining the windmill for water. Some villages also had a *Brandschult* who was in charge of the fire brigade. Elections of the *Schults* was an annual event at Chortitz.<sup>93</sup>

Obviously, the church was central in Mennonite village life. The minister was chosen from the members of the church in the following way:

[The ministers] are chosen by the members of the congregation for life, by democratic vote. Each member marches past the elder and [prospective] ministers and writes down the name of the person who he thinks should be minister. Later the names are counted and the one who has the greatest number of votes is the one who is the elected minister. After the election the ministers are ordained to the position in the church. Many of the members are not too anxious to be minister at all for this puts an extra burden upon them besides making their living. A minister has to give of his time for Sunday preaching, funerals, weddings, visitations, and other meetings. Usually there aren't too many other activities besides Sunday worship in the morning.<sup>94</sup>

In Chortitz the original Old Colony church was built in the centre of the town around 1905. However, in the 1960's the building that housed the Old Colony Church in Chortitz was moved to Rosenhof where it is still used in 1994. The preacher at the original church was chosen from the congregation. His tenure was for an undefined period of time. The Chortitz congregation suffered a severe loss of members with the exodus of people to Mexico in the 1920's (see next chapter). Many of the residents of Chortitz began attending the Mennonite church in nearby Schoenfeld. In 1994 the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church continues to worship in Schoenfeld, Rosenhof, and Swift Current. Their Sunday services are still in the Low



German language.<sup>95</sup>

Some Mennonite churches, especially the Old Colony ones, had a strict code of conduct. The belief in ban and abstinence from the Old Colony continued into the twentieth century in these Saskatchewan settlements. On some occasions, the church even made its own inquiries into the private lives of the members to ensure they were living up to the church's standards. The "investigation" is described as follows:

Every so often when a member of the church has violated some of the church rules, the ministers call a meeting of the men members of the church and hold what is called a "Donnadach" which is on Thursday. Here the one who has erred is spoken to by the ministers and he has to make adjustments by confession and promises, etc. If the erring member does not comply to the rules, he is excommunicated and shunned. Shunning used to be severe, so much so that relatives were not to see their own next of kin if they were excommunicated.<sup>96</sup>

As they moved into the twentieth century, Mennonite colonies became less isolated from the outside world. The Old Colony practices and beliefs had less influence on the members. In 1955, Leo Dreidger wrote as follows:

It used to be formerly, that the members could not drive cars, tractors, or have any musical instruments in their houses. Now all this is allowed. The church forbids drinking and going to movies and living frivolously, but many do indulge in these practices just the same.<sup>97</sup>

The Heinrichs family were true pioneers when they settled in Saskatchewan. Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1865) was one of the early arrivals to the Swift Current colony. He came to the area in 1905 to inspect the land. In the summer of the following year he moved to the Swift Current colony from the West Reserve in Manitoba. He came with his wife Helena (née) Weins, eleven children, two horses, two cows, a plough, and other essentials. The family remained in Swift Current with a brother-in-law Jacob Weins during the summer of 1906 while Jacob constructed the family home. On November 3, 1906 the home was complete and

the family moved in. A larger home was built the following year. The homestead was established on NE 26-13-13 W3.<sup>98</sup> This land was purchased in 1905. An adjoining quarter section, NW 25 - 13 - 13 W3 was bought the following year.<sup>99</sup> The farmyard sat near a gulley that wound through the home quarter.

Jacob Heinrichs was a grain farmer but there were always farm animals and a garden on the homestead. Most of the children were born in Manitoba but the three youngest children were born in Saskatchewan. Over time, a house, a barn and two sheds were built on the home quarter. As well, a tree grove was planted and the creek that ran through the yard was dammed. The creek was a popular place for travellers. Often people from Ponteix and other towns would stop over for night at the Jacob homestead while on their journey to Swift Current. The creek was an ideal place to rest animals.<sup>100</sup> The village of Chortitz was one mile south east of the Jacob homestead. The smaller village of Schoenweise was one mile west of the homestead. In 1920, Schoenweise had approximately 8 houses while Chortitz was the most important village in the Old Colony Settlement with 26 homes. In 1994, nothing remains of the village of Schoenweise, and a grain field grows on what was once the site of the village.<sup>101</sup>

The Versailles School was established north of Chortitz in 1921. The Old Colony Mennonites were extremely upset by the establishment of a government-run English schools near their towns.<sup>102</sup> Prior to that time, the children in the Jacob Heinrichs home received their schooling at German school in Chortitz. The classes were held at the church and most of the subjects were directly related to Bible instruction. The subjects included fibel, catechism, Old Testament and New Testament. The classes were taught by elders in the village. Eva (b. 1912) was one of the younger Heinrichs children. She and her brother Isaac (b. 1909) attended both the German school and later the English Versailles school.<sup>103</sup> A report by the Inspector of Schools dated April 25, 1928 showed that a private German school had been operating in Chortitz as late as that year. The report states:

"This is one of the few remaining districts in which private German-speaking schools are still in operation." <sup>104</sup>

Generally, formal education was frowned on in the Old Colony communities. The attitude was summarized by the saying "Yi yilehda, yi vikehda" which means the more educated you are the more unnormal you become.<sup>105</sup>

The Jacob Heinrichs family attended church at the Old Colony churches both in Chortitz and Shoenfeld.<sup>106</sup>

Jacob Heinrichs died accidentally on the farm August 4, 1923. He was injured by a horse and lay in bed at the farm for six days before passing away. He is buried at the Chortitz cemetery.<sup>107</sup> Shortly after Jacob passed away, his wife Helena and the youngest daughter Eva moved into a house in the village of Chortitz. By that time the other children were married and living on their own. Helena and Eva lived in the town of Chortitz until 1929, when Helena passed away after a long illness.<sup>108</sup> She is buried at the Chortitz cemetery.

In 1994 only two sheds remain on the Jacob homestead. The house has been moved off the land but the foundation remains.

Abram Heinrichs (b. 1898) was the seventh of fifteen children to Jacob and Helena. One child died in infancy (Jacob b. 1891). In 1917 Abram was baptized into the Old Colony Mennonite Church at Chortitz. He married Gertrude Knelson (b. Aug. 21, 1899) on December 1, 1918.

Abram and Gertrude lived on the homestead of Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1865) for four years after their marriage. Thereafter they moved to their own home on NW 16 - 13 - 12 W3 near the town of McMahon. This homestead was purchased in 1922 from Abram's sister Maria Giesbrecht and her husband, who moved to Mexico in that year.<sup>109</sup> Abram and Gertrude had fourteen children over the course of their marriage; two died in childhood: Susan (b. 1919 d. 1931 of diphtheria) and Abram (b. 1922 d. 1923).

Abram (b. 1898) was one of only four of Jacob's children who remained in Saskatchewan. John, Isaac, and Margaret also remained in the Swift Current area all of their lives. The terrible hardships of the 1930's caused many people to leave Saskatchewan. The Heinrichs family was no exception. <sup>110</sup> Several of Jacob's (b.

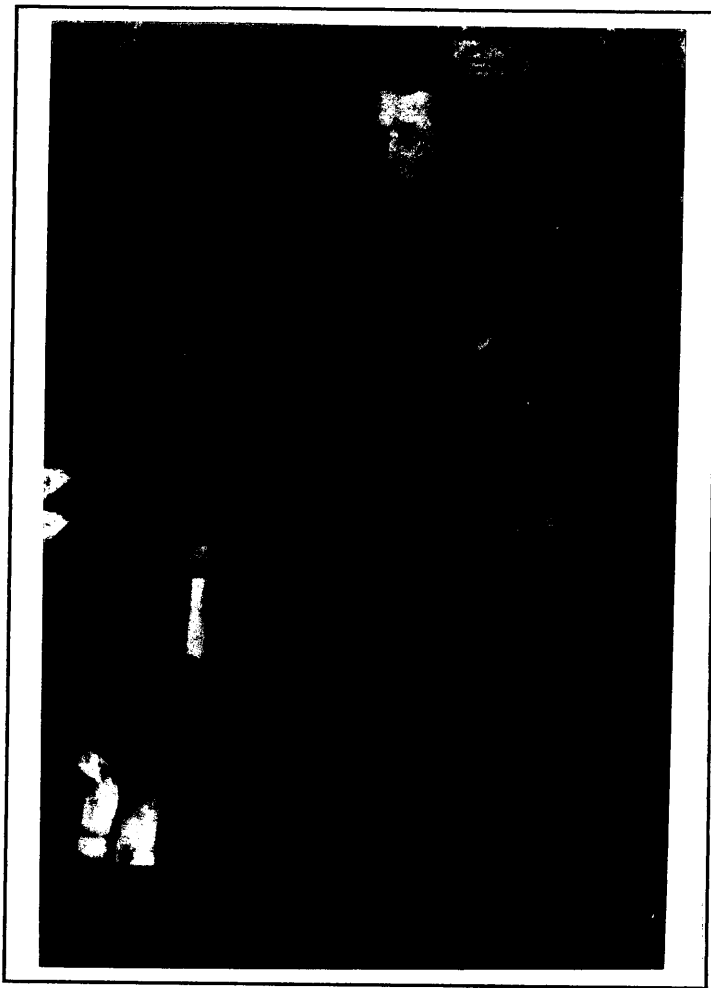
1865) children moved to Latin America<sup>111</sup>; Jacob (b. 1897) and Agnetha moved to Alberta; and Anna, Elizabeth, and Eva moved to British Columbia.

All of Abram's children attended the Falkland School in McMahan. The family occasionally attended the Old Colony Mennonite Church in Chortitz but as the years went by they more frequently attended a nondenominational church in McMahan. Both the Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1865) and the Abram Heinrichs (b. 1898) homesteads were a few miles away from the Mennonite villages. Thus, they were slightly removed from the formal Old Colony lifestyle. They did not strictly adhere to the Old Colony village life. Unlike many people in the Mennonite villages, the Heinrichs family had more interaction with their neighbours of different nationalities including Russian, English, Scottish and Syrian. However, Low German remained the language of conversation in the home.

The train was a central part of life on the Abram homestead. Four times per week the train ran through McMahan en route to Swift Current or Moose Jaw. The roads in the area were in poor shape until 1940 so travel by train was preferred in the summer and the only means of travel in the winter. The family occasionally took the train to Swift Current for supplies but most provisions were picked up from McMahan and Wymark.

The recollections of all the children of Abram are retold in the local history book Patchwork of Memories.<sup>112</sup> Without exception, the family members speak of a fulfilling childhood.

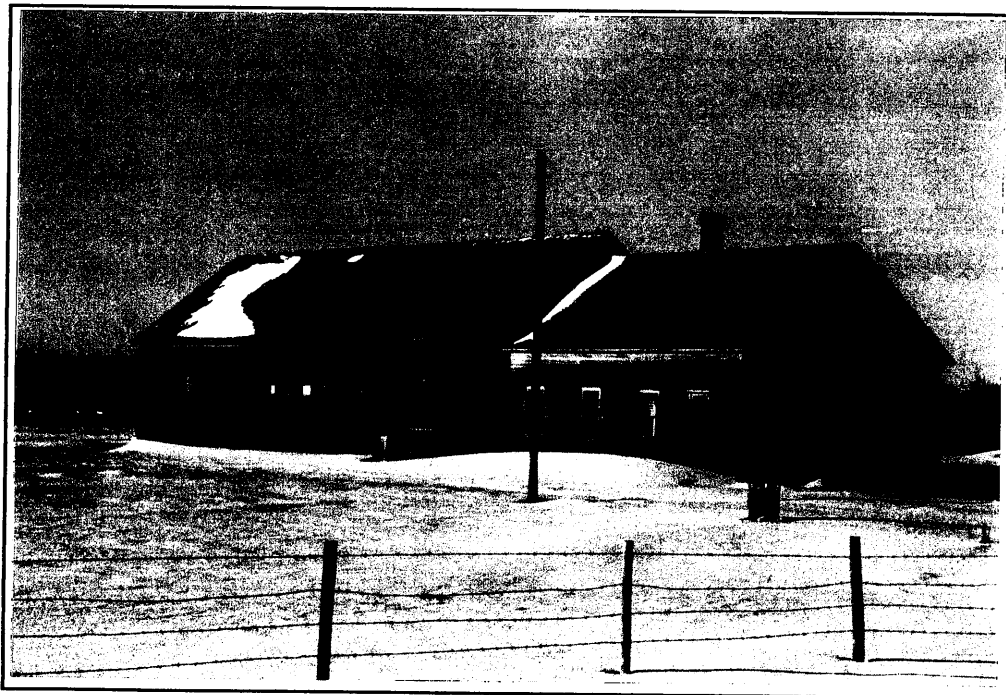
Abram's wife Gertrude died on April 13, 1962. Abram remarried that same year to Elizabeth Knelson (b. Jan. 4, 1912). However Abram passed away only four years later on May 5, 1966.<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth survived him until 1991.<sup>114</sup>



Jacob Heinrichs b. 1865. Date of photo unknown.



Abram Heinrichs b. 1898 and his wife Gertrude. Date of photo c. 1962.



Mennonite farmhouse in Chortitz, Saskatchewan. Date of photo: 1993.

## 7. THE DEPARTURE TO MEXICO

A few final words must be said about the members of the Heinrichs family who left for Mexico in the 1920's. They and many other Mennonites in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba left their homes and families for a life in a new country. Heinz Lehmann describes the reason for their departure in the following words:

The suspension in 1916 of the school privilege granted to them in 1873 . . . and the generally hostile frame of mind towards the Mennonites in the post-war years drove a large segment of the two most conservative groups among them, the so-called Old Colony and the Sommerfelders, to emigrate again and forced them to face all the uncertainties of a new beginning on foreign soil.<sup>115</sup>

The difficult issue of English public schools is illustrated in a letter by W. S. Cram, inspector of schools in 1922. Reporting on the Versailles School at Chortitz, Saskatchewan, he wrote:

The department is aware that with this school as with others on the [Mennonite] Reserve there is considerable difficulty in gaining a good attendance owing to the opposition of Mennonite parents to our public school system. <sup>116</sup>

The Saskatchewan Department of Education contemplated closing the Versailles School in 1923. However, W. S. Cram wrote to the Deputy Minister of Education for Saskatchewan in that year stating:

. . . I beg to advise that this school is situated at the centre of the Old Colony Mennonite Reserve, that several families are opposed to the public school, but claim the privilege of a private school in their own language. I take it that it is not the desire of the Department to leave private schools in foreign languages to work out their destiny, but that it is the desire of the Department to place public schools at the disposal of all. <sup>117</sup>

The public school issue and other matters caused many Mennonites to

look for a more hospitable country. Although most of them eventually settled in Mexico, there was a period of searching for the right place. That search is described as follows:

In 1919 two delegations went to South America, visiting Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Even Alabama and Mississippi were considered as places to settle. In 1920 the Old Colony Mennonites sent a delegation to Mexico. They obtained a *Privilegium* very similar to that which they had once received from the Canadian government.

On March 1, 1922 the first trainload of immigrants left Plum Coulee, Manitoba, followed by three from Haskett. Two more trains left Swift Current, Saskatchewan. All of these settled near Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico. By 1926, of the 4,926 Old Colony Mennonites of Manitoba, 3,340 had moved to Cuauhtemoc; and some one thousand of the Old Colony Mennonites of Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and 946 of Hague, Saskatchewan, had immigrated.<sup>118</sup>

Most of the Mennonites from the Swift Current Reserve in Saskatchewan relocated to one area in Mexico which they interestingly named the Swift Current Mennonite Settlement. It was established in 1926 as an independent ecclesiastical unit with its own civic administration and its own elder.<sup>119</sup>

The following brothers and sisters of Abram Heinrichs (b. 1898) left on this migration to Mexico and other parts of Latin America:

Maria Geisbrecht d. 1975 Cuauhtemoc, Mexico

Peter Heinrichs d. 1967 Cuauhtemoc, Mexico

Justina Hiebert d. 1991 Cuauhtemoc, Mexico

Johann Heinrichs Santa Cruz, Bolivia<sup>120</sup>

All contact was not lost with the relatives who remained behind in Saskatchewan. Abram's wife Gertrude along with her sister Elizabeth went to Mexico in 1945 for a month-long visit.<sup>121</sup> As the years went by, other family members made the long trip to renew acquaintances.<sup>122</sup> In later years other family members moved to Latin America. However, in 1994 Johann is the oldest surviving member of the original migration.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Over the last four centuries, the Heinrichs family has moved across Central Europe and settled in the Western Frontier of Canada. With each move they sought freedom from persecution. The persecution was violent in the Netherlands. In later years the persecution was in the form of intolerant governments and neighbours. The language of the Heinrichs family changed at least twice: first from Dutch to Low German and then to English. The family name was Germanized to Heinrichs from its likely Dutch origin of Hendriks.

The newest generations of the Heinrichs family live very different from their ancestors. No longer do they live in traditional Mennonite communities. In 1994, David Heinrichs (b. 1940) still resides on the Abram Heinrichs homestead. He is still active in farming and to an extent, so too are some of his brothers. However, no longer does anyone live the life of the Old Colony Mennonites. Some of the traditions are remembered. However, the old customs of Mennonite dress, German language, German schools, and avoidance of the outside world are left in the past.

As the generations have gone by, members of the Heinrichs family have gradually chosen lives similar to the broader Canadian community. Some have a university education; many live in large cities; many have married non-Mennonites; many are no longer active in the Mennonite church; few can speak the Low German language; few are farmers.

It is neither good nor bad that the Old Colony Mennonite lifestyle has become part of history. All things change. However, it is invaluable to remember what once was. It is important to remember the lives and the traditions of the past. History explains who we are and why we are here. Having this knowledge makes the present much more fulfilling.



## NOTES

- 1 Dyck, Cornelius An Introduction to Mennonite History (2nd) Herald Press, Scottdale, Penn. p. 99 (hereinafter referred to as "Introduction to Mennonite History").
- 2 C. Henry Smith, Smith's Story of the Mennonites (5th ed.), ed. Cornelius Krahn (Faith and Life Press: Newton Kansas), p. 18 (hereinafter referred to as "Smith").
- 3 Smith, p. 17.
- 4 Introduction to Mennonite History, pp. 113, 114.
- 5 Smith, p. 13.
- 6 Adam Hopkins, Holland (Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1988) p. 62.
- 7 Introduction to Mennonite History, pp. 113, 114.
- 8 A useful summary of Martyrs' Mirror is Mirror of the Martyrs, John S. Oyer and Robert Kreider 1990, Good Books, Intercourse, PA.
- 9 Smith, p. 166.
- 10 Mennonite Encyclopedia, The Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale Pa. (hereinafter referred to as "Mennonite Encyclopedia") Vol. 2 p. 702.
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- 13 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 2 p. 703.
- 14 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 2 p. 703.
- 15 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 2 p. 703.
- 16 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 2 p. 737.
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- 19 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 2 p. 736.
- 20 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 2 p. 736. The Encyclopedia claims the death was the following year.
- 21 Unruh, Benjamin Die Niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderung im 16., 18., und 19. Jahrhundert (Karlsruhe, 1955) (hereinafter referred to as "Unruh") at p 243.
- 22 Letter dated October 1, 1993 from J. G. J. van Booma, Head Researcher at the Centraal Bureau Voor Genealogie Prins Willem-Alexanderyhof 22 The Hague.
- 23 Conversation with Henry Schapansky Feb. 1994.
- 24 Smith p. 166.
- 25 Conversation with Eva Wiebe (Heinrichs) (b. 1912) in February 1994. Mrs. Wiebe specifically recalled her father mentioning the Heinrichs family originating from Holland.
- 26 Becker, Anthony "The Germans from Russia in Saskatchewan and Alberta" German Canadian Yearbook Vol. III (1976) Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada, Toronto p. 106 (hereinafter referred to as "Germans from Russia"). See also Tischler, Kurt "The Efforts of the Germans in Saskatchewan to Retain their Language before 1914" German Canadian Yearbook Vol. VI (1981) Historical Society of Mecklenburg Upper Canada, Toronto p. 42.
- 27 Smith at pp. 166, 167. The author mentions the Danzig banker Loyson who was one such financier of drainage projects. Herman van Bommel and

Tönnis Florisson are two Mennonites who purchased lands for settlement.

28 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol.3 p. 374. The Encyclopedia states that these were the towns from which most Lithuanian immigrants came.

29 Smith pp. 169, 170.

30 Smith pp. 166 to 171.

31 David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919" The Mennonite Quarterly Review , Volume 47 No. 4 p. 259 - 308 (Oct. 1978) and Vol 48, No. 1 (Jan. 1979) pp. 4 - 54 at p. 261 (hereinafter referred to as "Mennonite Commonwealth")

32 Mennonite Encyclopedia, "Old Colony Mennonites" Vol. 4 p. 38.

33 Epp, Reuben The Story of Low German and Plautdietsch, The Reader's Press, 1993.

34 Penner, Dr. Horst Die Ost-Und West Preussischen Mennoniten Nin Ihrem Religiosen und Sozialen Leben In Ihren Kulturellen und Wirtschastlichen Liestungen Teil 1 1526-1772.

35 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 3 p. 374; see also Unrah's book at p. 295 note 57.

36 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 3 p. 374.

37 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 3 p. 611.

38 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 3 p. 611.

39 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 3 p. 374, 375.

40 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 3 pp. 374, 375, 611.

41 54 degrees 55' N 21 degrees 20' E see New Concise Atlas of the Earth Rand McNally and Company, London 1982 at p. 130.

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46 Schroeder, William and Huebert, Helmut Mennonite Historical Atlas Springfield Publishers Winnipeg, Canada 1990 pp. 13,90 (hereinafter referred to as "Mennonite Historical Atlas").

47 Mennonite Commonwealth pp. 283-286.

48 Smith pp. 252, 253.

49 From Danzig to Russia p. 10.

50 Giesinger pp. 31, 32 see also the Mennonite Historical Atlas at pp. 16, 91.

51 Smith pp. 253, 254.

52 Mennonite Historical Atlas p.91.

53 Unrah p. 295.

54 Unrah p. 243.

55 Unrah p. 214.

56 Unrah p. 280.

57 Mennonite Commonwealth p. 299.

58 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, p. 38.

59 Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. 4, p. 38.

60 Leibbrandt, Dr. Georg "The Emigration of the German Mennonites from

- 88 History of Swift Current p. 183.
- 89 The German Canadians p. 203.
- 90 Driedger, Leo A Sect in Modern Society: A Case Study of the Old Colony Mennonites of Saskatchewan M. A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1955 at p.25 (hereinafter referred to as "Driedger").
- 91 Much of this information comes from a conversation in November 1993 with Bill Ginther (b. 1920) who lived in Chortitz all his life.
- 92 Driedger pp. 52, 53.
- 93 Driedger pp. 26, 79 as well, much of this information comes from a conversation in November 1993 with Bill Ginther (b. 1920).
- 94 Driedger p. 77.
- 95 Much of this information comes from a conversation in November 1993 and January 1994 with Bill Ginther (b. 1920). Further information came from David Wiebe of Rosenhof, SK during a conversation in January 1994. He is the minister of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church.
- 96 Driedger p. 77.
- 97 Driedger p. 86.
- 98 Patchwork of Memories p. 398.
- 99 Patchwork of Memories p. 745.
- 100 Conversation with John Reimer (son of Margaret (Heinrichs) Reimer b. 1894) of Neville, SK Oct., 1993. John lived on this homestead for part of his childhood.
- 101 Map by W. S. Cram July 22, 1920 Saskatchewan Archives Board Collection R 177.10/7 Box 826 Versailles School Division #4155.
- 102 See further details in next chapter.
- 103 Conversation with Eva Wiebe (Heinrichs) b. 1912, February, 1994; see also Patchwork of Memories p. 747.
- 104 Report of Inspector of Schools April 25, 1928 Saskatchewan Archives Board Collection R 177.10/7 Box 826 Versailles School Division #4155.
- 105 Driedger p. 89.
- 106 Conversation with John Reimer (son of Margaret (Heinrichs) Reimer b. 1894) of Neville, SK Oct., 1993.
- 107 There is debate as to whether Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1865) is buried at Shoenweise or Chortitz. There are no grave markers so we can only glean information from those who remember. Eva Wiebe (Heinrichs) (b. 1912) claims he is buried at Chortitz. She is his daughter and lived in Chortitz for many years after Jacob's death. Her mother is buried at Chortitz as are three of her infant children. I believe this is the best evidence to establish the burial site of Jacob.
- 108 Conversation with Eva Wiebe (Heinrichs) b. 1912, February, 1994.
- 109 Patchwork of Memories p. 400.
- 110 Patchwork of Memories p. 399.
- 111 See next chapter.
- 112 See Bibliography for citation.
- 113 Patchwork of Memories pp. 399, 400.
- 114 Many of the details in this chapter are from conversations in November 1993 with Jacob Heinrichs (b. 1920), Helen Heinrichs (b. 1923), and Henry Heinrichs (b. 1934).
- 115 The German Canadians pp. 162, 163.

- 116 Letter from W. S. Cram, Inspector of Schools dated Feb. 10, 1922  
Saskatchewan Archives Board Collection R 177.10/7 Box 826 Versailles School  
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- 117 Letter from W. S. Cram, Inspector of Schools dated Sept. 21, 1923  
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- 119 Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 4, p. 669.
- 120 Conversation with John Reimer (son of Margaret (Heinrichs) Reimer b.  
1894) of Neville, SK Oct., 1993; also see Patchwork of Memories p. 398.
- 121 Patchwork of Memories p. 400.
- 122 John Reimer (son of Margaret (Heinrichs) Reimer) made several trips in his  
lifetime.

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 John Reimer, Neville, SK  
 David Wiebe, Rosenhof, SK  
 Eva Wiebe (Heinrichs) b. 1912, Vanderhoof, B.C.

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