

SINGING MENNONITE:  
LOW GERMAN SONGS AMONG THE MENNONITES  
OF SOUTHERN MANITOBA

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Presented to  
The Faculty of Graduate Studies  
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In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts  
Department of Anthropology

by  
Doreen Klassen  
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
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MASTER OF ARTS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These Mennonites...  
When I talk with them  
I hear English with Low German accents  
and sometimes it is still Low German.  
Sometimes  
when I talk to them  
I feel like I am  
talking to myself.

(Suderman, 1974:12)

With grateful appreciation to

These Mennonites, who shared so graciously of their  
time, and their knowledge of Low German folk-  
lore *en Plautdietshe Leeda*

My family and friends, for their prayers and  
encouragement

My advisor, Dr. Louise Sweet, and her dogs and cats,  
who have all learned to 'sing Mennonite' during  
during the past five years

My typist, Leona Hiebert, and her family, for putting  
up with disruptions in their family life in order  
to complete this manuscript

## ABSTRACT

Mennonite folklore researchers assume that the Low German song tradition is a thing of the past. Many southern Manitoba Mennonites think that it has never existed. Likewise, Mennonite historians and novelists have invariably referred to Mennonites as singing in High German, Russian or English.

Contrary to popular belief and traditional historical data, recent field research has shown not only that Low German song does indeed still exist, but that it is presently experiencing a renaissance among certain groups in southern Manitoba. In fact, not only does Low German song exist, it exists in genres other than 'mere' children's songs or rowdy street songs, the only categories in which some Mennonites expect to find Low German songs. Furthermore, interviews and library research have shown that Low German song has been part of Mennonite experience for at least two hundred years, almost half of their four hundred and fifty year history.

These findings raise several questions. Firstly, what are the implications of singing in a language in which people presume they do not sing? Secondly, why is there substantial diversity of Low German song repertoire within a single ethno-religious group? And thirdly, what factors account for changes in lyric content, melodic sources and performance contexts over the past one and a half centuries?



The present study, based on field research among southern Manitoba Mennonites from October 1976 to June 1979, addresses these questions.

The assumption that one does not sing in Low German, is clarified in the light of sociolinguistic research on 'diglossia', where findings on 'low status' languages imply that Low German songs are found primarily within a minority group among the Mennonites themselves.

Secondly, the diversity of Low German song repertoire among Mennonites is understandable when we observe the degree of religious and socio-economic fragmentation among the Mennonites.

Thirdly, the changing Low German song repertoire is representative of patterns of Mennonite resistance and accommodation to their Ukrainian, German, French and English-speaking neighbors in nineteenth century Russia, early twentieth century and post 1970 Manitoba. Even in songs in a low status language, we observe musical borrowing from ethnic groups of higher prestige, while the musical resources of groups considered culturally inferior to the Mennonites are ignored.

This study of Low German songs, therefore, is a study of music as socially symbolic behavior, reflecting the viewpoint of ethnomusicologists like John Blacking who see music as both a sonic and social phenomenon.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One person after another told me that there were no Low German songs and there never had been. Well, I finally did find a few - four of them to be specific - but two of them were remembered with great difficulty.... In at least one place, therefore, the Low German song is a part of a dead tradition (Kliwer, 1961:112).

Mennonite folklore researchers, like Kliwer (1961) and Wiens (1958), assume that the Low German song tradition no longer exists. Many southern Manitoba Mennonites assume that it has never existed.

Mennonite historians and novelists have invariably referred to Mennonites as singing in High German, Russian or English (Epp, 1962; Lohrenz, 1976; Wiebe, 1970). If they make reference at all to singing in Low German, it is always with respect to lullabies sung to children (Kroeker, 1976; Epp, 1974). Even writers of Low German short stories describe people singing in High German (Ens, 1971).

Contrary to popular belief and traditional historical data, recent field research has shown not only that Low German song does indeed still exist, but that it is presently experiencing a renaissance among certain groups of Mennonites in southern Manitoba. Furthermore, interviews and library research have shown that Low German song has been part of Mennonite experience for at least two hundred years, almost half of their four hundred and fifty year history (Firmenich, 1854).

Not only does Low German song exist, it exists in genres other than 'mere' children's songs or rowdy street songs, the only categories in which some Mennonites expect to find Low German songs.

As we shall see, the songs collected for the present study range from love songs to occupational songs to historical ballads.

How did these songs come into being when people claim that no one sings in Low German? What sociological significance can we attribute to the singing of songs in a language which apparently has no songs?

A second group of questions stem from the fact that various groups of Mennonites have traditionally known and sung Low German songs which are substantially different from those known by other groups of Mennonites. How does one explain this diversity of repertoire within a single ethno-religious group?

Other questions arise from changes in lyric content, melodic sources and performance contexts over the past one and a half centuries as the songs migrated from early nineteenth century Russia to mid-twentieth century southern Manitoba. What accounts for these changes? Are explanations to be found within Mennonite society itself, or do we need to look farther afield?

The existence of these songs, their diversity, and their changing character demand an explanation. The present study is designed to provide an explanation by showing how differences in the Low German song tradition, with respect to lyric content, melodic sources, performance context and social function, reflect the changing socio-political conditions of the Mennonites.

The primary assumption underlying this study is that music is socially symbolic behavior and thus can serve as a window through which we can get a closer look at a given society. This assumption contrasts with that of sociologists like Marion Levy who, while

including a "structure of integration and expression" in his system of social analysis, nevertheless relegates it to the position of a "residual category" (Levy, 1952:504).

Instead, this assumption reflects the thinking of anthropologists like Raymond Firth who, writing at much the same time as Levy, concluded that an anthropology of the art had to address two problems:

The first problem is the effects on a society of producing and using the art objects. The second problem is the nature of the values which are expressed by the formal characteristics of the art objects (Firth, 1951: 162).

In other words, Firth asserts the necessity of studying not only an art object, but also the social context which produces and uses that object.

Ethnomusicologist, John Blacking, develops this position when he says

Man makes music as a patterned event in a system of social interaction, as part of a process of conscious decision-making; but there is also a sense in which music makes man, releasing creative energy, expanding consciousness and influencing subsequent decision-making and cultural invention. The anthropological study of music and music-making must therefore be concerned with the products of man as music-maker, and the processes by which feelings and ideas are expressed in patterns of sound, and patterns of sound evoke feelings and ideas (Blacking, 1979:4).

Blacking, therefore, sees music not only as representational, that is, as simply reflecting social conditions (c.f. Fischer, 1971:174), but as causational, or capable of effecting change within whose social conditions.

One further assumption about music as social behavior needs to be made explicit here: that music is symbolic in a limited, rather

than in a general sense. That is, music and music-making are symbolic not of society as a whole (c.f. Lomax, 1962), but reflect "the interests of the particular social group or class that has created it" (Berger, 1972:215), though works of art may transcend these interests and become works with universal appeal.

This assumption is integral to the understanding of yet another level of musical symbolism: the symbolism inherent in the choice of a particular language in sung communication. From this standpoint, the study relies on the field of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguists tell us that "language is symbolic of political and economic boundaries" (Jackson, 1977:65), and that

the language that prevails in an institutional sector... provides a good clue as to the linguistic group that controls that institution (Breton, 1977:91).

Another sociolinguistic finding which figures prominently in the interpretation of Low German songs in this study come from Ferguson's classic study on 'diglossia', which he defines as the use of two or more varieties of a language within a single speech community (Ferguson, 1959). These varieties he calls 'H', for high or prestige form of the language, and 'L' for low or colloquial form of the language. Furthermore, he cites the use of 'H' for politics, literature, poetry and religion, while 'L' is relegated to the domains of informal conversation and domestic contexts. These findings certainly have implications for the way in which Mennonites themselves view Low German songs.

Based on these assumptions of music and language as symbolic behavior, the study of Low German songs should provide insight not



only into Mennonite society itself, but also into Mennonite relations with their host and neighboring societies.

Based on these assumptions as well, the present study seeks to avoid the collector-archivist approach which has characterized much of North American folklore studies and Canadian Folk Culture Centre publications by researchers like Kenneth Peacock (1966/1970). Though this approach has swelled the archives, it has frequently produced totally atheoretical studies. As Carlisle tells us, although

there exist in Canada today impressive archives of tape recordings of the music performed by many Canadian minority groups, the quality of anthropological documentation pertaining to the music, however, varies considerably from good to non-existent (Carlisle, 1974:98).

This study also seeks to avoid the purist approach based on the traditional European approach to folklore in which

reports on immigrant folklore have tended to bemoan the collapse of a given Old World complex in its New World setting and to degrade and ignore those processes and phenomena that in the virorous contact situation so richly exemplified by immigrant folklore, inevitably diverge from the old, established models (Klymasz, 1973:131-132, c.f. Degh, 1966:553).

Instead, this study reflects the orientation of North American folklorists like Carpenter (1979) and Degh (1966), ethnomusicologists like Erdely (1979), Klymasz (1970b) and McCullough (1980), and anthropologists like Graburn (1976a) who have studied the arts of immigrants and native peoples in changing cultural contexts.

It seems obvious that even in the initial study of a neglected area of research such as Low German songs (Martens, 1972:366), one cannot indulge in the luxury of mere collecting of 'authentic folksongs' while ignoring the formulation of explanations for the phenomena one encounters.

The emphasis on the anthropological rather than the strictly musicological aspects of the music (i.e., formal product only), differentiates this study from previous studies of Mennonite music by scholars like Burkhart (1952), Duerksen (1956), Hohmann (1959), and Martens (1968). Moreover, in direct contrast to these and other scholars like Kadelbach (1971) and Yoder (1961), who have focussed on the religious music of the Mennonites, this study is aimed at the predominantly secular songs sung in Low German, providing a unique insight into the life of an ethno-religious group.

As stated earlier, Mennonite historians and novelists rarely mention music and music-making, let alone Low German song. From that standpoint, the present study offers another perspective: the retelling of the folk history, as opposed to the telling of the official history, which is generally told from the standpoint of one of the dominant groups among the Mennonites.

The present study, then, relies on, but also makes contributions to, a range of academic fields of study: North American folklore studies, Canadian ethnic studies, sociolinguistics, ethnomusicology, Mennonite music, and Mennonite history in general.

Obviously we can assume that there would be few library resources with direct bearing on a topic with no preceding academic research. There are, however, a number of relatively useful sources for comparative purposes, especially with respect to attempts to date and trace origins of materials.

Evidence of diversity in the Mennonite folklore tradition as a whole is already found in the work of Firmenich, a German folklorist writing in the mid-nineteenth century. Reporting on his findings

among the Mennonites in the Molotschna Colony in south Russia, he says that Frisian-Flemish folklore predominated at that time, though there were numerous inter-village differences in folklore repertoire which he attributed to differing points of origin in Prussia where the Mennonites had lived before they moved to Russia.

He identifies these people as Prussian Mennonites who speak Low German, but comments that

All of these folkarts in the mother tongue are influenced by the all pervasive written (High) German language through church services, teaching, etc., an ever-increasing influence (Firmenich, 1854:442, my trans.).

None of the materials he collected among the Mennonites are found in the present collection, possibly because very few Mennonites from the Molotschna Colony where Firmenich did his research, have migrated to Manitoba. Nevertheless, his conclusions remain of interest for the present study: the diversity of material, the predominance of Frisian-Flemish materials, and the interference of High German with the perpetuation of the Low German tradition.

Several collections contained many variants of the songs found in this collection. These included Frisian Low German songs found by Meier (1972, reprint of 1868), Prussian collections by Frischbier (1867, 1877), Schleswig-Holstein collections by Meyer (1927 reprint of 1878) and Tardell (1928), and a general collection of Low German songs by Alpers (1924).

With respect to comparative High German materials, Erk and Boehme's three volume Deutscher Liederhort (1893) proved most helpful in tracing materials, particularly those translated from one language to the other. Some recently published collections used were compiled by Schneider (1958) and Diekmann (1975).

A number of recent folklore collections containing Low German folklore have direct bearing on this research. Kenneth Peacock's Twenty Ethnic Songs of Western Canada contains two Low German songs included in this study. Another Low German song can be found on one of Peacock's tapes (PEA-224).

Several Low German parody songs are found in Reuben Epp's Plautdietsche Schrefts teckja (1972). Only one of these, a parody of "Oh Bury me not on the lone Prairie", is reported to have been sung in Manitoba.

Manitoba Mennonites have published a small number of Low German songs. These include songs found in Veleda Unger's De Goldene Shlut (1974), a book of Low German children's rhymes, riddles, etc., and Veertien Plautdietsche Leeda, a book of Low German translations of High German hymns published by the Gospel Light Hour (now Mennonite Brethren Communications) c.1965.

In an unpublished collection entitled "Folk Songs collected among Mennonites in South Russia" (n.d. microfilm in Conference of Mennonites Archives), Heinrich Friesen lists only five or six Low German items among the 170 or so folksongs, proverbs and poems he collected. The remainder appear in High German. The Low German items include two "Heimatlieder," or songs about the homeland, a Christmas poem, a humorous love poem, and a variant of the song "*Aus eck yingk met de Hoak oppe Dehl*," ("When I went to the threshing place with my rake") which is found in the present collection. Friesen provides no details of when or where he collected the materials though the presence of this last song suggests that the collection may stem from the Chortitza Colony in Russia, and have come to Canada in the 1920's,

since the song has not been found among Mennonites of other Mennonite colonies, or of earlier migration periods.

As mentioned earlier, American Mennonite scholars Wiens and Kliever concluded that the Low German song tradition belongs to the past. Wiens, however, wrote

We sang much, but always in High German or Russian. A single Low German song, mixed with Russian, is still in my memory.

*Tjemmt e'Jud jefoare*  
 (A Jew comes riding)  
*Met de blanke Droschtje.*  
 (With a shiny wagon.)  
 "Kuda jedjes ch?" - "Na, basar."  
 ("Where are you going?" - "To market.")  
 "Brinj mi mett Kartoschtje."  
 ("Bring me along potatoes.")

(Wiens, 1958:6, my trans.)

The second verse ends with the request to bring a pot of cracklings. Wiens used the song to tease his brother, a student at a "Zentralschule" or 'central school' in the Molotschna Colony in southern Russia, because his landlady insisted on feeding him only fried potatoes and cracklings, both of which he thoroughly disliked.

Though this song was not found in current research in southern Manitoba, its teasing function certainly bears resemblance to the social usage of many of the Low German songs found in Manitoba.

Newspaper accounts of contemporary events at which Low German songs were sung were of minimal utility. Accounts of musical and dramatic performances in Low German, always focussed on drama, despite the fact that the newspapers carrying them were published in Altona (Red River Valley Echo), Winkler (Winkler Progress, now called Pembina Times) and Steinbach (The Carillon News) which is to say, in predominantly Mennonite communities noted for their musical activities.

In fact, a two-column write-up concerning a Landmark Low German evening at which seven Low German songs were sung, was devoted entirely to the dramas presented. Only a picture and brief caption indicated that any music appeared in that program (Friesen, 1977:1).

Low German discography is a very recent phenomenon. The songs published in *Veertien Plautdiets che Leeda* have been recorded both on record and cassette tape for distribution to radio audiences. "*Sprie*" ("Chaff"), the first commercially produced record of Low German songs by a Mennonite group, "*De Heis chraitje en de Willa Honich*" (Locusts and Wild Honey) was marketed in early 1981, approximately ten years after the production of the first Low German drama and poetry recordings. Privately produced cassettes of Low German songs, such as that recorded by "The Doerksen Sisters" of Steinbach - who have not been included in the present study because their material was discovered too late - are rare. Apart from this, most tapes containing Low German songs are archival records of Low German evenings of entertainment or village reunions.

The material on which this thesis is based was gathered in southern Manitoba between October 1976 and June 1979. Approximately 130 songs, all included in the study, were found. This is a very modest sample by comparison with researchers who have found several thousand Ukrainian and French-Canadian folksongs, and will certainly require an explanation. Yet, the collection is large enough and diverse enough to be able to make some valid generalizations about Low German song.

The research milieu was favorable to the study. Growing public awareness, especially through the media, of the multicultural

aspect of Canada, increased historical awareness through the celebration of Canadian and then Mennonite centennials, and a "Low German renaissance" (Reimer, 1979a:10) within the past decade made this an opportune time to study Low German song.

Songs were located by various means, but were most often taped or transcribed in an informal interview context, even transcribed on grocery bags or paper towelling when necessary!

The hundred or so interviewees were selected by the reputational technique: on the basis of interest in singing, knowledge of Low German, and acquaintance with Mennonite history and especially folklore. Note was also taken of which particular groups of Mennonites claimed they knew no Low German, or said they had sung High German poems, but recited them in Low German.

Interviews were carried out in centres of high Mennonite population and their surrounding villages, including Altona, Steinbach, Winkler and Winnipeg, among persons of both sexes, and varied educational and occupational backgrounds, ranging in age from 5 to 85 years of age. Attempts were made to include persons of all major periods of Mennonite immigration to Manitoba: the 1870's, the 1920's, and the post World War II era, in addition to Mennonites presently immigrating from Latin America. Post 1970 immigrants from Russia were not included in the present study because of time limitations.

A fourth generation immigrant, the researcher is functionally fluent in Low German, and thus dispensed with the need for a translator. Most persons interviewed were bi- or even tri-lingual, speaking English, High German and sometimes Russian, in addition to Low German, but interviews were conducted in Low German whenever possible

to facilitate the recall of material. Since the researcher introduced herself as someone wanting to relearn her mother tongue, which she had not used since childhood, informants seemed tolerant of her occasional halting attempts at expressing herself, though they often commented on her distinctive dialect, which betrays her descentance from the 1870's immigrants who settled west of the Red River, in the Pembina Valley.

In addition to interviews, the author was a participant observer at numerous communal events such as reunions and Low German evenings of entertainment. Presentations on radio, at banquets, at Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society meetings and published articles (Klassen, 1978, 1979, 1981) helped to make the research project known among Mennonites, resulting in further contributions of material.

The ensuing discussion of Low German songs is introduced by three types of historical data which need further explication to define the context of the study: an overview of Mennonite history from 1525 to the present, focussing particularly on the Manitoba Mennonites, a history of Low German usage among Mennonites, and a brief discussion of music among Mennonites.



## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Some immigrants...came because they wanted to preserve a distinctive way of life, and saw the isolation of the rural Canadian frontier as an ideal setting in which to do this... Among the many somewhat strange and separate immigrants who came to Canada there were many Mennonites (Regehr, 1974:15-16).

The migration of thousands of Mennonites to Manitoba in the late nineteenth century was by no means the first relocation for them in their four hundred and fifty year history. Sometimes called 'the step-children of the Reformation', they had already been scattered across northern Europe and into Russia by religious persecution and economic pressures. Amid constant uprootings and migrations, the main themes of their history repeated themselves with almost monotonous consistency; they would be threatened by religious persecution or restriction of religious privileges, whereupon they would look for

the promise of privilege and toleration in another land in exchange for the application of agricultural skills; after a prolonged sojourn the Mennonites once more faced renewed economic and religious pressures often resulting from material overachievement; a search for new settlement areas naturally resulted (Toews, 1970:118).

In their search for freedom they often accepted, in fact chose, both geographical and sociological separation from the peoples around them. They had no country of their own, they borrowed their language and their music, they were often threatened by internal fragmentation, yet they developed an identity of their own. Who were these people? What made them different?

## Mennonite History<sup>1</sup>

Though the history of the Mennonites dates back to the time of the Reformation, the early leaders of the movement did not identify with Luther and Zwingli whose state-supported reforms were not radical enough for them. Instead of a state church, they envisioned a community of believers baptized on confession of faith. This ruled out infant baptism. Their practise of re-baptizing adults earned them the name of Anabaptists, or 'those who re-baptize'. The first of these baptisms was held in Zollikon, Switzerland in January of 1525.

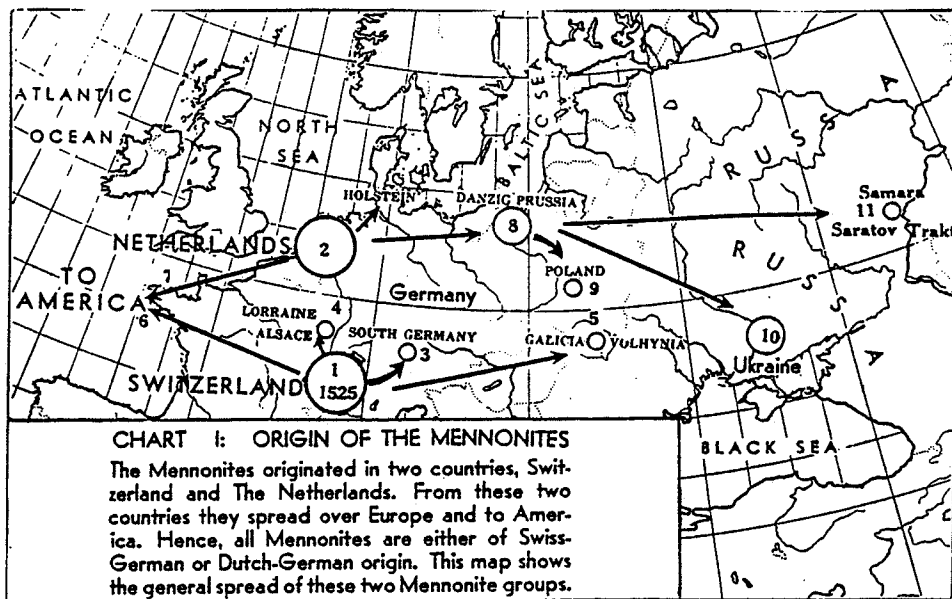
The Anabaptists also distinguished themselves from other Protestant reformers by their emphasis on "die Nachfolge Christi", or 'following Christ' as a way of life. Jesus teaching about loving one's neighbor, they felt, was diametrically opposed to the use of the sword or other force in settling disputes. Consequently, their commitment to "die Nachfolge Christi" had priority over their allegiance to the state, when and where the two ways conflicted.

Because this statement of commitment was seen as a threat by the state, those adhering to it were convicted of treason and often tortured or martyred for their faith. Many others fled to various parts of Europe, including the Netherlands. Here Menno Simons, a young Catholic priest joined the movement and was persuaded to become the leader of the believers there. This group and its descendants became known as Mennonites.

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<sup>1</sup>In addition to the references cited, the discussion of Mennonite history relies on Bender (1973b), Gering (1972), Hamm (1969), Krahn (1959b, 1969b, 1973a), Mannhart (1972), and Rempel (1933).

Religious persecution and economic pressures continued to drive the Mennonites from the Spanish Netherlands across northern Europe where they found a degree of religious tolerance and economic opportunity. Many Mennonites eventually settled under Polish rule, though some went to the free cities of Danzig and Elbing as early as 1530. Others went in response to the need for laborers on the Vistula Delta drainage project begun by Polish noblemen around 1547, while yet others went as a result of continued harassment after 1567, by the Duke of Alba.



(Mennonite Life, 1953:2)

It was during this time that Menno Simons and Dirk Philips went to Prussia to help establish the church there. Flemish/Frisian divisions among the Mennonites originating in the Netherlands were visible in their settlement patterns in Prussia. The Flemish, who were more orthodox in such matters of church discipline as

intermarriage, chose to live in Danzig and the northern coastal area where they continued their artisan professions. The Frisians, farmers by occupation, moved to the Vistula Valley where they soon distinguished themselves for their work in swamp drainage. According to one Mennonite historian

the Frisians acted in a more brotherly fashion to believers in other denominations, demonstrated a more genuine piety and a greater tendency to cultural and church improvement (Friesen, 1978:53).

The beginning of the seventeenth century witnessed several changes: the rural Mennonites gained strength both ecclesiastically and economically, the Mennonites in the Danzig area received exemption from military service by a cash payment, and one of the first Mennonite cooperative services, a fire insurance company, was organized.

Problems continued to plague the Mennonites. Their pacifism rendered them defenseless to a government which exploited them by demanding huge sums of money, until 1642, when they were granted a charter. Although it is estimated that as many as eighty percent of the Mennonite population died of marsh fever during the years it took to drain the swamp, the population continued to increase, placing a strain on available land resources. Pressures from militaristic Polish leaders confined the non-resistant Mennonites to a small area of West Prussia. Some of this pressure was relieved by the availability of scattered farms and meadows belonging to the former Teutonic Knights.

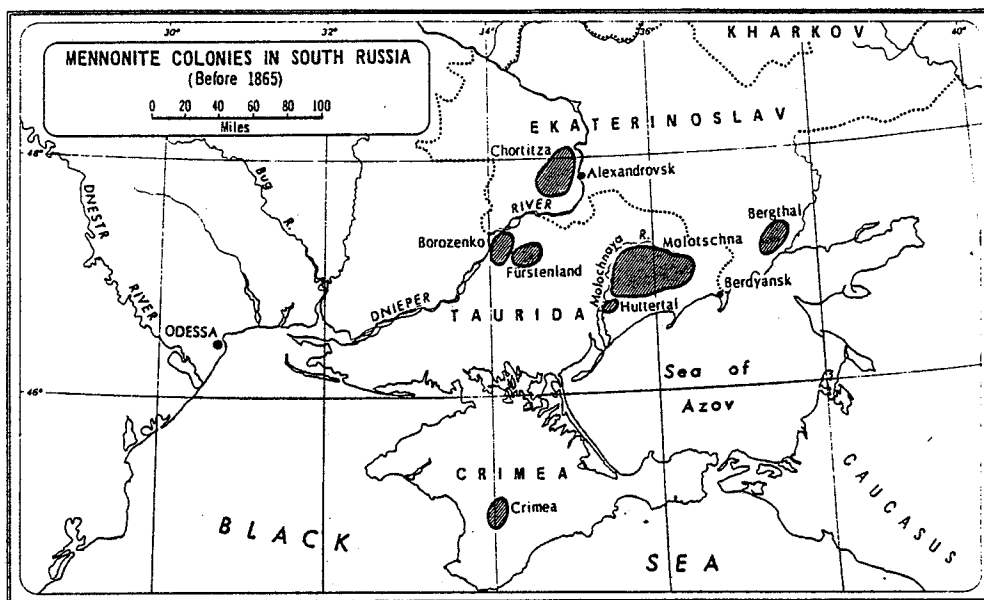
With the partition of Poland in 1772, things began to change. Initially Frederick the Great, because he favored farmers, continued

to allow the Mennonites to purchase land, despite the obligation of military service which accompanied land ownership, by allowing them to substitute cash contributions for actual service.

With the death of Frederick the Great, and the ascension of Frederick William II, "generosity" to the Mennonites came to an end. This change in policy was announced in 1789 as the "Edict Concerning the Future of Mennonitism." This document guaranteed freedom of conscience in military matters, but also restricted Mennonite opportunity to purchase land, while imposing a regular church tax on Mennonite landowners.

One of the options chosen by many Mennonites at this time was emigration to South Russia. However, even during the years of heaviest emigration, 1787-1866, the Mennonite population in Prussia remained static at about 13,000. Those remaining in Prussia experienced more pressures, particularly during the time of the Napoleonic Wars of 1806-1814, but continued to contribute money, horses and linen to the government, while refusing to do military service.

Those emigrating to the Ukraine region of Russia were responding to immigration incentives promoted by Catherine II. Her 1763 Manifesto offered settlers privileges such as permanent exemption from military service, temporary exemption from taxes, religious and economic autonomy and self-governing rights for agricultural communities. Though the Mennonites were at first reluctant to accept this offer, they and other Germans eventually did so. Between 1787 and 1788, a total of 228 families moved to the province of Ekaterinoslav (Rempel, 1974:35), establishing the Chortitza Colony, frequently called the Old Colony because of its seniority.



(Epp, 1974:162)

Problems in Prussia stimulated a new wave of immigration between 1803 and 1806. The first families to leave Prussia at this time settled in the Chortitza Colony. After 1804, a new colony was begun in the province of Taurida, on the Molotchnaya River, giving the settlement the name Molotschna. Immigration to the Molotschna Colony continued through 1835, by which time there were about sixty villages. The size of this settlement was estimated at 1,200 families, or about 6,000 people.

The early years of settlement were difficult. The new environment was vastly different from the Vistula Delta, and the settlers were ill-prepared for the agricultural way of life. Many of the first settlers in Chortitza were

poorer laborers, primarily because it was harder for the well-to-do class to obtain permission to leave the country. The Molotschna and Samara settlements, having numerous prosperous and experienced farmers, and better

land, made more rapid progress economically and culturally than did Chortitza (Krahn, 1959c:384).

At first the Mennonites raised cattle, sheep and horses. Under the influence of leaders like Johann Cornies, they gradually shifted to grain, particularly after 1860 when western European demand for Russian wheat increased. Crude agricultural implements were replaced by modern machinery produced in Mennonite factories.

Prosperity favored some and bypassed others. Alongside a conservative landowning class called "Vollwirte" (full landowner), existed a large landless class or "Anwohner" (living beside) with no economic or civic rights. Although the landless were able to rent small parcels of land from the landowners, most of them preferred to work as farmhands and domestic or industrial workers. Because the Mennonite "political and religious structure found itself on the side of wealth and oppression" (Toews, 1970:127), the needs of the landless were not officially recognized until the formation of the "Landlosen Kommission" (Commission of the Landless) in 1863. The work of this commission resulted in the division of the surplus landholdings of the Molotschna Colony among the landless.

It appears that in the Chortitza Colony, on the other hand, no formal action had to be taken because there were fewer problems for the landless. The farmers in this colony were not as prosperous as their brothers in the Molotschna Colony, nor was the disparity between the rich and the poor as great. Firstly, there was more opportunity for resettlement in this colony. Secondly, being landless was not as serious an economic disadvantage in the Chortitza as in the Molotschna Colony. The Chortitza Colony had been settled to a

large extent by Flemish artisans. Consequently, the trades were more developed, providing the landless with more options.

Alongside economic prosperity, particularly in the Molotschna Colony, came other cultural achievements: the founding of secondary schools, hospitals and other social service institutions.

Religious life appears to have lacked vitality during the early years of pioneering. The lack of leaders during the first years of settlement, the identification of later leaders with the establishment (Toews, 1979, 138-140) and the limiting role of the community on the intellectual contributions of the teacher (ibid., 141-147) prepared the way for change to move in via outside forces. Religious revivals through non-Mennonite German pietistic influences in the nineteenth century resulted in the formation of several new churches which broke away from the "Grosse" (big) or "Kirchliche Gemeinde" (church fellowship), the Mennonite 'state' church in the Molotschna Colony: the "Kleine-gemeinde" or "Little Church" in 1812, the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860, and the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church in 1869. These revivals were evidenced by a renewed emphasis on Bible study, sacred song festivals, evangelistic meetings and religious publications.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the Mennonites once again faced a dilemma. An increased emphasis on Russification of all foreigners in Russia, possibly in response to Bismark's German imperial ambitions, as well as universal military conscription threatened the privileges promised by Catherine the Great. About one third of the Mennonites in Russia decided to emigrate to North America

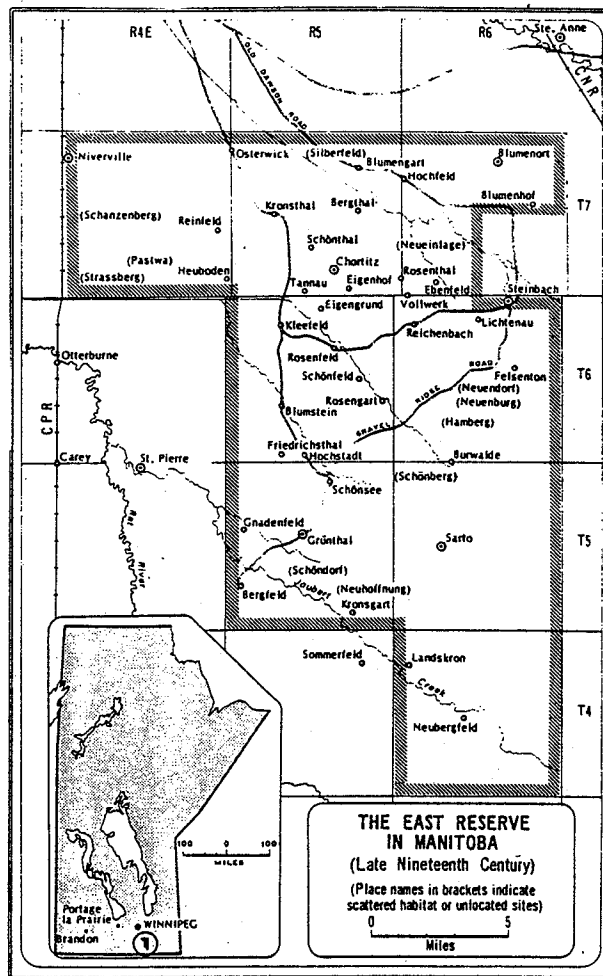


at this time. The remainder were temporarily persuaded to remain in Russia by the promise of alternative government service in forestry.

Of the 18,000 Mennonites who migrated to North America at this time, the majority settled in either Kansas or Manitoba. Those who settled in Manitoba were often called the Old Colony settlers because they had come from the Chortitza or Old Colony and two of its daughter colonies, Fuerstenland and the moderately progressive Bergthal Colonies in Russia. Later they were called "Kanadier" (Canadians) or "hiesigen" (those who were here) to distinguish them from later immigrants. "Kleingemeinde" immigrants, presently known as the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, who left the Molotschna Colony and settled in the Province of Ekaterinoslav after 1812, were also included in this immigration.

The choice of Canada as opposed to the United States was deliberate. Coming to Canada promised to safeguard the freedoms they valued: exemption from military service, religious liberty especially in the matter of educating their children, the privilege of affirming rather than taking the oath, and the possibility of block settlement in reserves which would foster group solidarity, in addition to free land and subsidized passage.

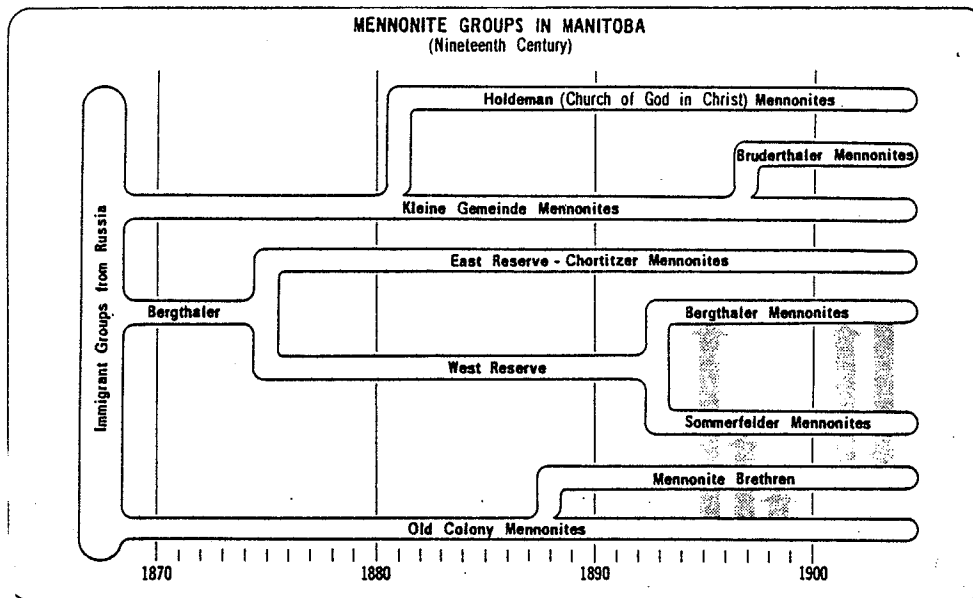
From the standpoint of the Department of Agriculture, which at this time had jurisdiction over Canadian emigration, this migration fulfilled the need for settlers in the Canadian mid-west to "domesticate the lands in the face of Indian and Metis rebellion" (Epp, 1974: 209), and to minimize the danger of American annexation of the West.



(Epp, 1974:213)

The Bergthal and Kleingemeinde Mennonites settled in the East Reserve, East of the Red River, in an area coinciding with the present day municipality of Hanover.

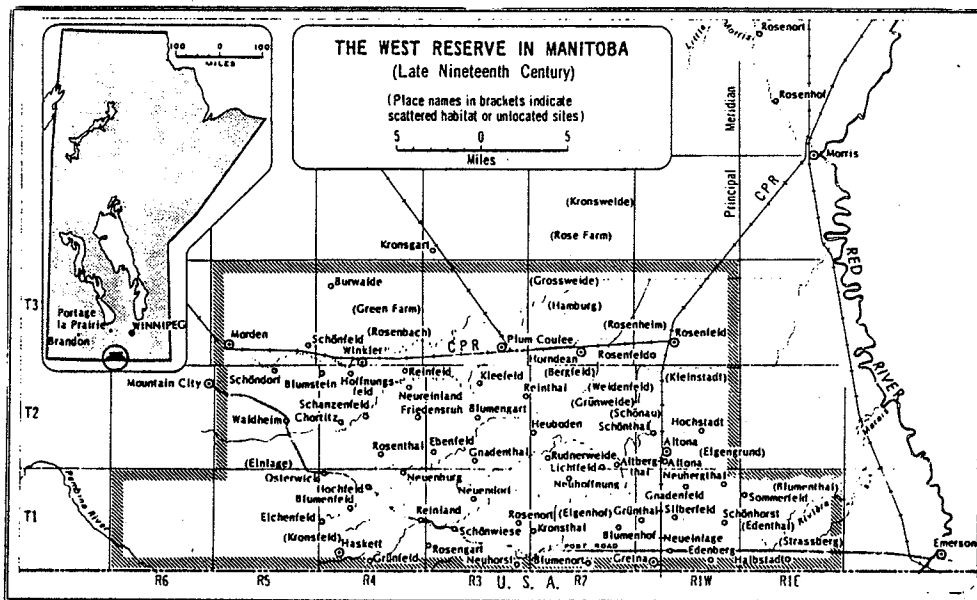
In 1875, after a year of pioneer hardships, many of the Bergthal colonists moved to the West Reserve. Here they formed the Bergthaler Church, while those remaining in the East Reserve became known as the Chortitzer Church. The West Reserve Bergthaler, a 'progressive' group, worked for the establishment of schools of higher



(Epp, 1974:293)

education and for more vitality in church work. Resisting this 'progressive' spirit, a group, calling themselves the Sommerfelder, left the Bergthaler in 1890 and formed their own church and villages.

Meanwhile, Mennonites migrating from the Chortitza and Fuerstenland Colonies settled in the West Reserve between the Red River and the Pembina Hills in an area presently known as Rhineland and Stanley Municipalities. The West Reserve church was given the name Old Colony, based on the Russian colony background of its members. Missionary activity among these people by American Mennonite Brthren, resulted in the founding of a new denomination, the Canadian Mennonite Brthren, who were joined by Russian Mennonite Brethren in the 1920's.



(Epp, 1974:221)

Within a decade, some 110 villages had been established on the East and West Reserves. Many of these "Gewanddoerfer" (open field villages) or "Strassendoerfer" (street villages) set amidst open fields resembled the villages the Mennonites had left on the Steppes of Russia.

Initially, the village settlement pattern proved adaptive, particularly on the wide open prairie found on the West Reserve. With a shortage of wood, herding cattle in a common pasture overcame the need for wood, both for fences and for fuel. The availability of communal labor for pioneering efforts was another advantage.

But soon forces from within and without the Mennonite community threatened its solidarity. Firstly, the availability of barbed wire for fencing after 1877 gave the farmer the option of moving from

the confines of the village to his own homestead. Secondly, the appearance of trading centres established by non-Mennonite entrepreneurs along railway lines "ultimately served as the bridgehead for the assimilation of the Mennonite into prairie society" (Warkentin, 1960: 147). And thirdly, the institution of municipal government councils after 1883 transferred some of the powers such as social services from the Mennonite church leaders to the provincial government.

Mennonite response to these threats varied. West Reserve Bergthaler easily accepted new ideas such as substituting individual farms for the traditional village settlement pattern, and Canadian civic government forms for the Mennonite self-government tradition. Electing their own members to office assured them a measure of self-government. West Reserve Old Colony leaders, on the other hand, saw these incursions into their traditional way of life as a threat to their identity, and worked as their Flemish forefathers had to preserve their faith and their traditions.

Very early in their Canadian experience, East and West Reserve Mennonites developed differing economic histories. The two reserves had inherited vastly different types of land. Consequently, the West Reserve was soon dominated by wheat farmers who were quick to abandon strip farming for the more efficient quarter system. The East Reserve with its marshes and wooded areas, was better suited to diversified farming. Because markets were slower to develop there, East Reserve economy lagged behind that of the West Reserve.

Basic differences in trading centres in the two reserves resulted in differing rates of assimilation into mainstream society. In the East Reserve, a trading centre founded by Mennonites came to

dominate the area. An agricultural village until 1910, Steinbach was not relocated by its merchants when the railway passed within a few miles of the village.

Trading centres on the West Reserve, by comparison, had been established by non-Mennonites along railway lines. At first, Morden dominated this area, but it was soon replaced by Winkler "because Anglo-Saxon Morden merchants drove away much Mennonite and German trade during the war" (Warkentin, 1960:277). This is in direct contrast to reports of amiable relations between Mennonites and Anglo-Saxons on the East Reserve.

When one compares the two reserves, one observes that East Reserve Mennonites, who dominated their territory economically, had a slower rate of assimilation than West Reserve Mennonites who had considerably more political and economic interaction with non-Mennonites.

Yet, despite social change among the Mennonites, and differential adaptation patterns between the two reserves, one sociologist generalizes that at this time "the core of common culture was preserved and continued to differ from that of the larger society" (Francis, 1955:109).

A crisis, however, occurred with the institution of the School Attendance Act in 1916. Concerned about the seeming autonomy of ethnic enclaves in Manitoba, the Liberal Government and Anglo-Saxon public supported a platform of educational reform which would serve to homogenize the society, or, more accurately stated, cause assimilation in the direction of the Anglo-Saxon majority. The policy included "national schools, obligatory teaching of English in all public schools and compulsory school attendance" (Francis, 1955:179).

"Conservative" Mennonites had already been moving to Saskatchewan and the North West Territories since 1890, but this new threat resulted in a mass migration of Old Colony Mennonites from the West Reserve to Mexico, and Bergthaler Mennonites from the East Reserve to Paraguay in the early 1920's.

What those who left for Mexico and many teachers knew but most of the villagers did not recognize was the hostility of the government and the dominant society to a bicultural identity. They regarded the preservation of a second language as a passing phase, at best a case of arrested cultural development, at worst they treated it as sedition or treason.... The insistence on a monoculture through subject content and the exclusion of the target culture (the one to be destroyed) was so successful that school beginners at the end of the first year would already resent the culture of their parents, and this in many cases despite teachers sympathetic to that culture. Politically Canada and the United States were democracies; culturally they were much more bigoted and intolerant than the despotism of Russia (Peters, 1977b:14).

Meanwhile, the Mennonites who had remained in Russia faced unprecedented changes as a result of civil political upheavals. With

the overthrow of the Czarist government, the Civil War, and the ultimate establishment of the Communist regime starting in 1917...came (sic)...confiscation and nationalization of property, starvation and general confusion (Krahn, 1959c:390).

After the Revolution, religious organizations were forbidden to organize any religious or social meetings, or to extend any social services such as medical aid or financial assistance to their members. Land re-allocation based on the New Economic Policy of 1921 broke the settlement pattern through which the Mennonites had maintained religious and ethnic solidarity. Though social and economic stability returned, many felt a "loss of freedom of conscience" (Toews, 1970: 139). This threat to their way of life again caused many Mennonites to consider emigration as an alternative.

Immigration to Canada was impossible at this time since post World War I Canadian immigration policies had a strong anti-German bias. Mennonites, with their pacifist stand and German cultural ties were not considered to be desirable immigrants. But, modification of federal immigration policies was effected by the reputation of the Mennonites as good farmers and the need for more agriculturalists in the Canadian mid-West.

As a result, some 20,000 Mennonites came to the Americas with 2,000 families moving to Manitoba between 1922 and 1927. Coming from both the Molotschna and Old Colonies, these immigrants had more formal education than the "Kanadier" who had preceded them. Some of these new immigrants, called "Russlaender" (Russians), settled in the rural areas vacated by Mennonites moving to Mexico and Paraguay, but about one-fifth of them chose to settle in the city of Winnipeg.

The coming of the "Russlaender" made an impact on the Mennonite population in Manitoba. Those who settled in Winkler, for example, made it a cultural centre by organizing a Bible School and introducing musical training, choirs and a festival (Warkentin, 1960: 278). At Gruenthal, on the East Reserve, "Russlaender" introduced a new agricultural product - potatoes. In Winnipeg, they established themselves in business and instituted such social services as the Concordia Hospital.

The Depression of the 1930's made its strongest impact on the Mennonites of the West Reserve. Eager to adopt new implements, but resistant to new ways of land use introduced by government agents, they had depleted the soil of their farmlands. Both the Rhineland Agricultural Society, founded in Altona in 1931, and the cooperative



movement were attempts to deal with this problem. By introducing diversified farming, they hoped to cater to a variety of markets, increase the labor force, and improve the land. Equally as significant as their agricultural achievements, was the role of these societies in fostering cooperation across Mennonite denominational barriers. East Reserve farmers who already had a history of diversified farming, on the other hand, founded trucking firms to bring their produce to urban markets.

A third major wave of immigration from Russia coincided with the Second World War. The Russo-German confrontation, beginning in 1941, gave many Mennonites the opportunity of identifying with the German front. About 12,000, or one-third of these Mennonites retreated westward with the German front. The remainder were repatriated by the Russian army. Those moving with the German army, immigrated to Canada as well as to Paraguay, where they founded two new colonies: Vollendam in East Paraguay, and Neuland in the Paraguayan Chaco. Many who initially moved to Paraguay, moved to Canada within a few years, usually locating in predominantly urban areas. These post World War II immigrants are known today as "Neueingewanderte" (the newly immigrated).

At the same time, several thousand Manitoba Mennonites moved to Paraguay. Fearing the assimilation of their young people, church leaders persuaded 1700 East Reserve Bergthalers (Warkentin, 1960:442) and 1000 West Reserve Sommerfelders (ibid.:461) to migrate to East Paraguay in 1948, in order to "escape the world."

During the past few decades, many "Kanadier" who migrated south both in the 1920's and in 1948 have returned to Canada.

Emigrés from Mexico have generally settled in Winkler and the villages to the south, while emigrés from Paraguay have relocated around Niverville or in the city of Winnipeg where they have found employment in factories and the like. These emigrés are usually known as "Auswanderer" (emigrés).

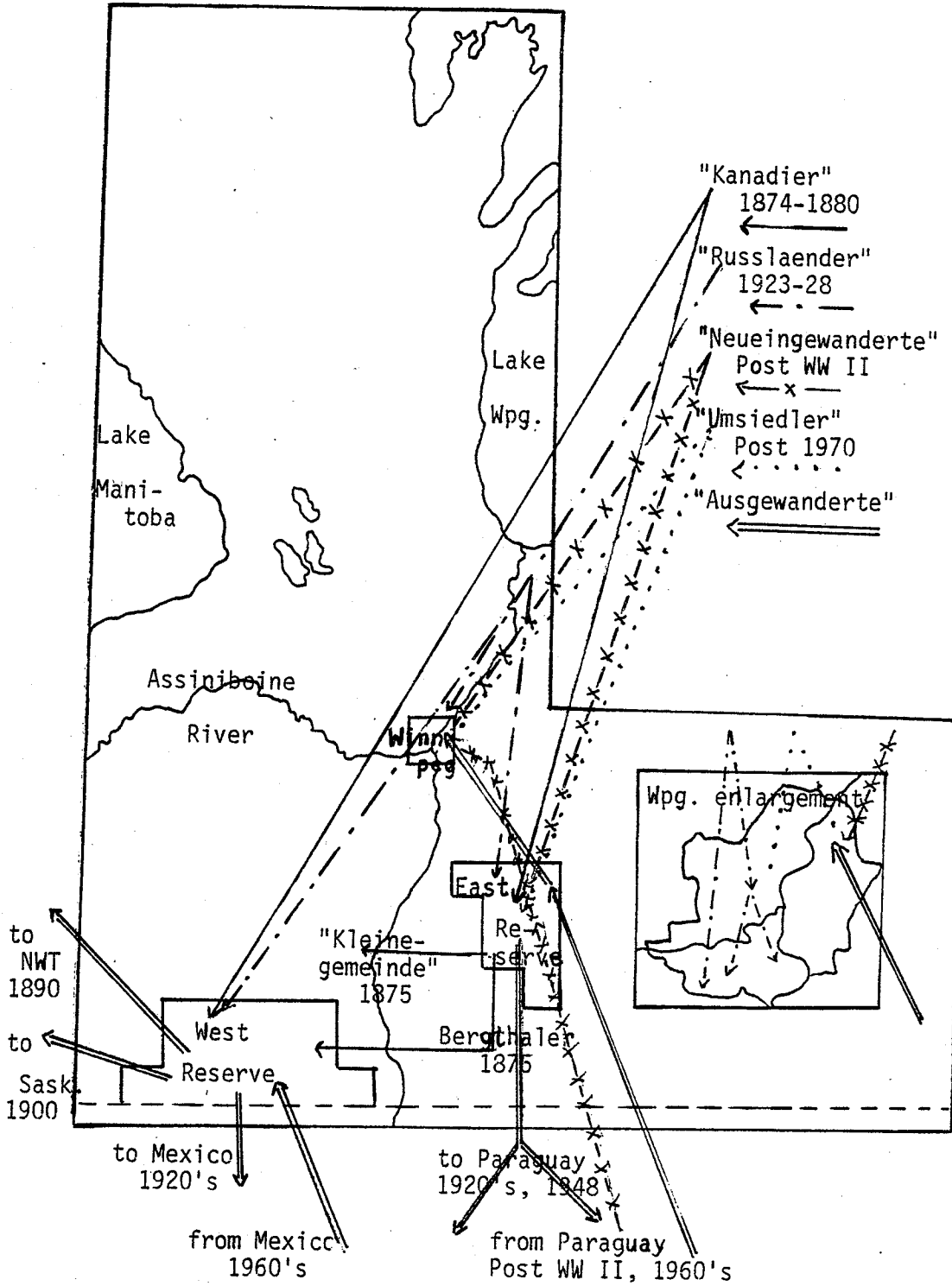
A fourth major migration from Russia has been occurring over the past decade. Known as the "Umsiedler" (resettled), many of these Mennonites have moved to resettlement camps in Germany, though some have moved to Canada, settling in cities like Winnipeg. "Umsiedler" have not been included in the present study.

In the past few decades, Mennonites have become increasingly more urbanized. Post War immigrants with more urban background have favored relocating in the city, but the proximity of Mennonite settlements to a large centre with economic and educational opportunities has contributed to this increasing urbanization (Friesen, 1968:153).

For some Mennonites, the past few decades have provided the opportunity for voluntary assimilation into the larger society (Sawatzky, 1970:157). For others, it has provided the necessity of redefining Mennonite identity as internal change and external forces have reshaped them as a people (Epp, 1978).

Although we have referred to various forces which have shaped Mennonite history in general, we have not referred specifically to influences on their music. A brief history of Mennonite music follows.

MENNONITE MIGRATION TO/FROM  
EAST AND WEST RESERVES IN MANITOBA



MENNONITE MIGRATION TO/FROM MANITOBA

	1870's	1880	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970
fr. Russia to East Reserve		Bergthaler Kleingemeinde				Molotschna		Mol. Cho.			
fr. Russia to West Reserve	KAVADIER	E. Res. Berg Fuerstenland Chortitza				Chortitza					
fr. Russia to Winnipeg								NEUEINGEWANDERTE			UMSIEDLER
fr. West Reserve	TE		to N.W.T.	to Sask.		to Mexico		1000 Sommerfelder to Par.			
fr. East Reserve	DER					to Paraguay		1700 Berg. to Paraguay			
return to W. Reserve	GE - WAN									fr. Mexico	fr. Mexico
return to E. Reserve	AUS									from Paraguay	

## Musical Background<sup>1</sup>

Music has always been a vital part of Mennonite community life. From the earliest beginnings of Anabaptism, congregational singing in the language of the people was an integral part of the movement. In fact, these songs became an effective way of recruiting new members for their faith. Using popular tunes, the early Anabaptists sang martyr ballads speaking of a readiness to die for their faith, and songs about the new faith and its lifestyle.

With the establishment of local churches, congregational singing became an important part of regular worship services. At first unison singing prevailed, but by the end of the nineteenth century, many Mennonites in Europe, Russia and North America had begun to sing in four-part choral style. Instruments such as organs and pianos, and groups such as mixed choirs found their way into many of these services. Regional song festivals for village choirs and their song leaders served an educational and inspirational function in the early twentieth century in Russia and southern Manitoba.

In Russian and Manitoban Mennonite churches not using musical instruments, the "Vorsaenger" (cantor) has traditionally led the congregational singing. In some churches, several "Vorsaenger," chosen for their musical ability and upright character, would sit at the front of the church sanctuary facing the congregation, and would lead the congregation by intoning the songs. Singing in these churches is still done in unison from hymnbooks without notes. This

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<sup>1</sup>In addition to the references cited, the discussion of Mennonite music relies on Bender (1973a), and Krahn (1973b).

hymnbook, called a "Gesangbuch" (songbook), was first printed by the Mennonites in 1752, and is still being used by Old Colony and Sommerfelder Mennonites in Manitoba and Mexico (Krahn, 1972b:876-7).

The use of a single hymnbook stands in stark contrast with the succession of hymnbooks in other Mennonite traditions. The present day hymnbooks of these congregations reflect the spectrum of theological influences on these people: Psalms from the reformed tradition, chorales from the Lutheran tradition, gospel songs from the revivalist traditions, and hymns from the Wesleyan and American fundamentalist traditions.

The language used for hymn singing has followed the spoken language patterns. Dutch was used in Holland and in Prussia until the mid-eighteenth century when it was replaced by High German. High German was maintained in Russia up to the early twentieth century, when it gave way to Russian. Most North American Mennonites have made the transition from High German to English, though most Latin American Mennonites of Prusso-Russian background still use High German in their worship services.

Nevertheless, Low German has never been used for congregational song except for a brief period in Brazil during World War II, when the Mennonites translated their High German songs into Low German, which they claimed had Dutch roots, because of strong anti-German feelings at this time.

In school, the other formal context in which Mennonites sing, they have used High German, Russian and English to sing folk and religious songs, but again, no Low German.

Furthermore, from sources such as biographies, fiction, memoires, pictorial records (Quiring and Bartel, 1974) and interviews, one can piece together a sketchy outline of informal music-making among Mennonites. Even this bare outline indicates that there was much singing in homes and in other informal village contexts.

In memoires of pioneer days in the prairies, one reads about winter evenings when

mother knitted or sewed. Sometimes father played his violin and we children sang hymns or songs we learned in school (Klippenstein, 1977:224).

or

I suppose we suffered from cultural deprivation.... There were no radios, TV's, telephones, record players.... My father had taken some lessons on the guitar in Russia, and we enjoyed hearing his entire repertoire during the winter evenings.... Our parents sang hymns and Gospel songs in German, as well as a number of Russian ballads or folk-songs, when they got together with their friends and relatives at birthday celebrations. The men also sang male choir selections in minor keys. And practically all of it was done from memory (Klassen, 1974:33-34).

Other glimpses into the past reveal mother singing songs about the homeland to herself (Epp, 1974:153), father singing songs to the children as they rode to town on a wagon, boys singing in the village streets, or girls singing as they babysat younger siblings.

However, regardless of whether it is young boys singing as they ride a wagon (Lohrenz, n.d.:5), boys rehearsing a song for a Paraguayan engagement party (Wiebe, 1970:103) or, an entire community singing a hymn of praise as another group of immigrants arrives safely in Canada (Epp, 1962:145), Mennonites invariably sing in High German, Russian or English, and not in Low German. Why do Mennonites not sing

in Low German? Even in Low German stories, Mennonites sing, pray and read the Bible in High German (Ens, 1977:281-283). Why?

In order to understand why Mennonites apparently do not sing in a language they have spoken for over 200 years, we need to take a historical look at Low German usage.

### Low German Language

The following legend is told about the origins of Low German:

...It wasn't long after Noah's flood, and the ground was still pretty slick and sloppy...it was only quiet for a minute, then pandemonium broke loose. Everybody started talking at once. And, you know, nobody could understand anybody else.

Old Janzen with his boots from Pordenau, the one who lives up at the corner by the highway intersection...he says to me..."This is the confusion of tongues. The Tower of Babel, see?...it's enough to give a man a belly ache, to hear the crazy talk of all these people. That one...talks through his nose. That one...talks through his teeth...That one...doesn't even talk, just rattles his teeth with his tongues so he sounds like a castenet factory. And the others sound even crazier."

"I'm the only one who's got a decent language out of this whole boondoggle. I got the best: Low German. But then, I was the one that dragged up the heaviest rocks to the top of that darned hill. Everytime there was a boulder to be moved, everybody said, 'Leave that one for old Janzen.' And I hustled. If I were going to do anything, I might as well do it right. If all these clod-hoppers would've humped like I did, who knows, we might have finished that hill. Not that it makes any difference now; at least I've got the most elegant language, the only one in which a good idea ever felt at home in. Now let's get along home."

"How come you got such a good language so quickly?" I asked him.

"How come? I'll tell you. When the man came with his sack of languages and dumped them out in the mud where we could see them, everybody ran over and started grabbing. 'No, you don't,' the man said, 'you just hold your horses. When you guys came to a big rock, you just said, "Let



Janzen do it," and old Janzen was kind hearted enough to do it without griping. So he ought to have first pick of the languages. Which one do you want, Janzen?"

"So I said: 'That one, the Low German, if I may.'"

"It's yours,' he said, 'take it.' I took it and the man grinned a little."

(Suderman, 1969:6-7)

According to Mennonite writer Arnold Dyck, this is the origin of Low German among the Mennonites. Historians insist, however, that Mennonites learned Low German during their sojourn in West Prussia.

Mennonites moving from the Netherlands to Prussia in the sixteenth century took with them a distinctive culture which included the Dutch language. They continued to use Dutch well into the eighteenth century before they began to adopt "Plattdeutsch", a Low German<sup>1</sup> language of Old Saxon<sup>2</sup> derivation spoken in the lowlands of northern continental Europe.

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<sup>1</sup>Like Dutch, Frisian and English, Low German, as "Plattdeutsch" is commonly called, did not undergo the consonantal shift which distinguishes High German from these languages. In the consonantal shift, voiceless stops (p, t, k) became labial (pf) and dental (tz) affricates and velar fricatives (ch), as can be seen from the following examples:

English	Low German	High German
pound	<i>punt</i>	pfund
sitting	<i>zetten</i>	sitzen
make	<i>moak</i>	mache

<sup>2</sup>Thiessen, while acknowledging that the Low German dialect spoken by Mennonites is a "Lower Saxonian vernacular," says it is more accurately described as "a Lower Prussian dialect with Dutch remnants (and) occasional Frisian sprinklings," which has in the course of history accumulated Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, old Prussian and English loanwords. "In a geographic sense, the dialect is West Prussian" (Thiessen, 1967:110).

A literary language til the mid-seventeenth century, Low German had already become a colloquial language by the time the Mennonites adopted it. At the same time, High German had become the predominant literary language of northern Germany except for parts of East Frisia, Schleswig-Holstein and certain of the Hanseatic League cities.

The gradual replacement of Low German by High German in the literary sphere is reflected in the theatre of that time. Here "Plattdeutsch" became "the principal language of the 'Zwischenspiele', between act farces featuring the coarse antics of a clownish peasant" in otherwise High German dramas (Waterman, 1966:133-134).

The pace of language change varied among the Mennonites. Business ties, education contacts and continuing intermarriage between wealthier members of the Mennonite church in Danzig and Holland influenced these people to retain their Dutch language for a longer period of time. Their country cousins in the Vistula Delta who could not afford the continued contact, were quicker to adopt "Werderplatt," the West Prussian Low German dialect spoken by the peasants amongst whom they settled (Thiessen, 1963:19). The Vistula Delta Mennonites, who were of Frisian background, also introduced High German into their churches several decades earlier than the city churches, though this shift occurred only after they had made the transition to Low German as their everyday vernacular.

Some of the Mennonites moving to Russia in the late eighteenth century were still using Dutch,

However, the first migrants to Russia, coming from the poorer classes of the Danzig and Elbing area and settling at Chortitza, primarily spoke Low German (Krahn, 1959a:187).

These first settlers used Low German as the language of instruction during the early years in Russia but later made the transition to High German (Smith, 1941:415; Rempel, 1974:3). Initially, preachers in these churches read their sermons in High German rather than speaking extemporaneously. These facts are quite understandable in light of the fact that High German was a relatively new language for these immigrants, and secondly, that there were no well-educated people acquainted with the literary language in this first group of settlers.

For the Mennonites who remained in Danzig and the Vistula Delta longer, High German became the language of worship, literature and formal social discourse. There is evidence that among some of these Mennonites, who later moved to the Molotschna Colony, sermons were preached in Low German as late as 1872 (Friesen, 1978:395, 469, 538). However, the majority of these Mennonites expressed a definite preference for High German over Low German. This preference was influenced by the higher incidence of formal education among these Mennonites and paved the way for the emergence of an educated elite distinguishable by their language (Peters, 1968:67ff). The Low German which they spoke, usually to the children and servants, was substantially influenced by High German<sup>1</sup> (Krahn, 1959g:187).

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<sup>1</sup>This is consistent with findings of sociolinguists who claim that when two languages of unequal prestige are spoken side by side, linguistic influence always moves from the High or literary form of the language, to the Low or colloquial form. (See Ferguson (1959) for discussion of this phenomenon which he calls the 'high' or prestige form and the 'low' or colloquial form of a language.

Linguistic differences between Chortitza and Molotschna Low German are still discernible in the speech of Manitoban descendents of these colonies. The Low German one hears even today in the villages of southern Manitoba's West Reserve betrays its Chortitza ancestry. Similarly, much of the East Reserve Low German, influenced by Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites originating in the pro-High German Molotschna Colony, reflects its background.

During the past few decades, some standardization of Low German has occurred. This can be attributed to increased migration between the two reserves, as well as increased intermarriage between Mennonites from the two reserves and/or Mennonites of different immigration periods. Change has always moved in the direction of the Molotschna dialect, i.e., in the pro-High German direction.

In addition to phonological differences,<sup>1</sup> linguists who have studied Chortitza and Molotschna Low German have found differences

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<sup>1</sup>Phonological differences in the two dialects can be charted as follows:

Chortitza	Molotschna
-fronted ü (due)	-'uh' ('duh')
-word final velar fricative 'ch' ( <i>lach</i> )	-word final voiced velar stop 'g' ( <i>lag</i> )
-word initial palatalization of velar stop 'y' in consonant cluster (' <i>ygreiv</i> '/grey)	-word initial velar stop 'g' (' <i>greiv</i> '/grey)
-word initial 's' (' <i>sukka</i> '/sugar)	-word initial 'ts' (' <i>tsukka</i> '/sugar)

in morphology,<sup>1</sup> gender, and the source of loan-words (Dyck, 1967: 210; Thiessen, 1967:111).

The Low German of Chortitza Mennonites who live in Manitoba and Mexico, has been studied by scholars like Quiring (1929), Lehn (1957), and Thiessen (1963), while Goerzen (1963) and Mierau (1965) have done research on the Low German of Molotschna Colony descendants.

Scholars studying Low German have focussed on its phonology or morphology, or even the mapping of 'isoglosses' (Thiessen, 1963). Sociolinguistic differences, such as differences in register have not been systematically investigated, though they are often referred to by speakers of the language in comments like "That isn't the kind of Low German he learned from his mother," or "Molotschna Low German is more High German."

Of special relevance to the discussion of Low German songs, is the sociolinguistic differentiation which continues to exist between Low German and High German usage among Mennonites.

An anecdote serves to illustrate the point. A "Neueingewanderte" educator of Chortitza background reports that even in the mid-twentieth century, when Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonite educators gathered for a teacher's conference in the Molotschna Colony,

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<sup>1</sup>Morphological differences between the two dialects:

	Chortitza	Molotschna
- plural noun and verb ending	'n'	---
- root final	'eiv' ('greiv')	'au' ('grau')
- past participle	'yevast'	'yevahse'



all Chortitza teachers, including those who customarily spoke High German with their families, would speak Low German intentionally to perpetuate the myth of their 'cultural inferiority.'

The myth of the 'cultural inferiority' of Low German to High German has existed among Mennonites for several hundred years. The myth may have gained credibility because Low German has traditionally been the language of the less-educated peasants, while High German has been more prominently used by the educated. The 'elite' have always considered Low German to be 'coarse', 'crude' or 'vulgar'. Even today, it is popularly regarded as the language of the uneducated peasant, the recent immigrant, children and hired help, or nursery rhymes and bawdy songs.

This image has persisted despite the existence of Low German literature by German writers like Fritz Reuter and Klaus Groth, and Mennonite authors like J. H. Janzen and Arnold Dyck. Low German, the language of humor and the past (Kliwer, 1972:34) has been seen as unsuitable, in fact, inadequate for the discussion of serious topics like religion and history. Even *Bua*, a peasant farmer found in the writings of Arnold Dyck, lapses into High German when he discusses religion. Neither has the recent publication of two Low German dictionaries (Rempel, 1979; Thiessen, 1978) been able to accord the language literary status.

Both Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonites have traditionally favored retaining High German, but for varying reasons: the Chortitza because it was the language of religion, and the Molotschna because it would give them access to a vast literary tradition through education, as well as provide opportunity for social mobility.

High German was a means to power and in many circles was associated with correctness of expression, with 'Kultur' and learning while Low German became associated with coarseness and occupations of little social value (Urry, 1975:459).

Many "Russlaender" Mennonites also favored High German for various political reasons: their identification with German political ideologies such as national socialism, or their gratitude for the protection the German fronts afforded them during the world wars.

This pro-High German bias is consistent with the findings of sociolinguists like Ferguson whose research has shown that when two languages of unequal prestige are spoken by the same speech community, there is an assumption that "H (the high or prestige form of the language is somehow more beautiful, more logical, better able to express important thoughts, and the like" than L, the low or colloquial form of the language (Ferguson, 1959:330). With respect to poetry, Ferguson says that "only the poetry in H...is felt to be 'real' poetry" (ibid.:329). In view of these findings, one would expect Mennonites either to deny that they know Low German songs, or at least to be reluctant to admit knowledge of these songs.

Present day fluency in Low German among Mennonites parallels second language fluency among other ethnic minority groups: immigrants of the first generation are fully fluent in the language, second generation immigrants have limited fluency, and third generation immigrants frequently understand though they do not speak the language.

Low German retention and revival has been influenced by such factors as public school education, the Mennonite media, voluntary assimilation, and Canadian social policy.

In the school, where English was the primary language and High German the 'foreign language', there was no traditionally recognized place for Low German except out on the playground. And, in an effort to help children learn English quickly, speaking Low German in school, even on the playground, was forbidden. Any infraction of the rules was punished (Penner, 1973:11; Toews, 1977:19). This was merely a continuation of a pattern already established in Russia: the practice of using the literary language, initially High German, and in the twentieth century, Russian, as the language of education, and forbidding the use of the colloquial language in school (Dyck, 1974:91).

The Mennonite media have given Low German only minimal exposure. Of numerous Mennonite periodicals circulated in Manitoba, only Die Post, Menno Blatt, The Mennonite Mirror, and formerly the Mennonitische Volkswarte, have printed any Low German poetry or prose. CFAM, a radio station which supposedly represents the Mennonite people of southern Manitoba, offers only 1 1/4 hours weekly of Low German broadcasting. Of this, 3/4 hour is devoted to religious broadcasting, and 1/2 hour to a program of a more general cultural historical nature.

Low German discography is a recent phenomenon. Within the past two decades, several Low German records, generally consisting of poetry and prose, have appeared. Only two record albums of Low German song, available in cassette as well, have appeared: "Plattdeutsche Lieder," an album of religious songs produced by Mennonite Brethren Communications in the 1960's, and "Sprae" (Chaff) an album



of contemporary Low German songs produced by "*Heis chraitje en Willa Honich*" (Locusts and Wild Honey) in the spring of 1981.

"Sprae" is only one sign of the Low German renaissance which has been occurring over the past decade. Canadian Centennial celebrations in 1967, and federal bi- and Multi-cultural Policies helped to create an atmosphere in which it has not only been acceptable, but desirable to display almost forgotten cultural remnants such as language.

Low German, it was felt, was one of the best ways of displaying the Mennonite past. Its adequacy for this task is seen in the fact that it is the only language ever spoken by Mennonites to receive the honorific title 'speaking Mennonite' (Pokrant, 1978:4). As one historian expressed it, Low German, unlike the many official languages the Mennonite have borrowed in their 450 year history, is the one language which has been "capable of expressing the Mennonite 'soul' experience" (Toews, 1979b:157).

We will see just how adequately Low German is able to express the "Mennonite soul experience" as we look at the Low German songs in this collection.

### CHAPTER III

#### LYRIC CONTENT

Because the Low German songs Mennonites brought with them from Russia were for the most part street songs or children's songs, Mennonites have always regarded them as crude, humorous, and without any social meaning, especially for adults. Secondly, because these songs are sung in Low German, the language of lower social status, Mennonites assume that these songs are 'incapable' of expressing ideas of any social significance.

Are these songs really inconsequential, or is the fact that people regard them as such also significant? Are these just nonsense songs, or do they in any way reflect the context from which they originate?

In order to answer these questions, we need to take a closer look at these songs, especially at their lyrics. Since Mennonites expect to find children's songs or street songs, and possibly religious songs, we look first at these categories of song, and then at other songs such as "Schluesselbund" *Leeda* and songs written for performance, which is to say, the kinds of songs Mennonites would expect to find only in High German or English. Though there appear to be a number of themes running through these songs, we will look at these songs chronologically via a functional classification, looking at categories of song such as children's songs, ballads, love songs, and so forth. In other words, we are looking at these songs in the way in which Mennonites themselves would classify them

Chingaleeda (Children's Songs)

a) Vieyenleeda (Lullabies)

Low German *Vieyenleeda* or lullabies are very similar to their counterparts in other languages. The suggestion that it is evening, the promise of a reward, and the threat of punishment are all means by which the singer tries to persuade the little child to sleep (Daiken, 1959).

The fact that it is evening, and therefore time to go to sleep, is expressed in various ways in these songs. The singer may, for example, refer to the stars, as in "*Chemt dee Nacht met eare Sittierches*" ("When the night comes with its stars"), or make indirect reference to the optical illusion that Pommerland is burning, created by the setting sun ("*Shlohp Chindche Shlohp*" / "Sleep baby sleep"). Another euphemism for evening is found in the lullaby "*Lietche Racka*" ("Little Worker"). The singer tries to persuade the child that because his stockings and shoes are already resting, he too should rest. Though this song, calling the child a little worker, refers to the Mennonite work ethic, the song is virtually unknown among Mennonites.

The promise of father herding the sheep ("*Shlohp Chindche Shlohp*") or of angels watching over the child ("*Aus eck yis tern Oh-vent*" / "Last night as I was sleeping") is intended to assure the child that all is well with the world, so he can fall asleep without any fear. Other promises made to entice the little child to sleep offer him a reward such as food ("*Vie, vie, vie, vie Ventche*" / "Rock, rock, rock, rock my little one"; "*Haviezhu Poppe*" / "Shush my little doll"; and "*Hotemaunche*" / "Little Man") or perhaps a new pair of shoes ("*Hotemaunche*").

Whereas the promises deal with the familiar, the threats always deal with the stranger or the unknown. The child is threatened by some personification of evil: the black sheep ("*Shlohp Chindche Shlohp*"), the beggar woman with her long knife (ibid.), or the beggar with his sack ("*Hazha Popche Zueza*"/"Shush my little doll"). Since beggars were a familiar sight in Russian and southern Manitoba Mennonite villages, older children did not regard these as idle threats.

Some of the lullabies are translations of High German and English songs. Mennonite parents and grandparents of all immigration periods translated them for their children and grandchildren. These lullabies, treated almost like family heirlooms, include songs like "*Chemt dee Nacht*" and "*Kulla felengs t*" ("Sail on"). Both of these songs were translated in Canada by grandparents because they considered Low German to be the language of the cradle.

Several other lullabies, brought by Mennonites from Russia, were familiar to most Mennonites of all immigration periods. Included in this group are "*Zues a Petruetzha*" ("Susie little Susie"), "*Shokkel, Shokkel Sheiya*" ("Rock, rock my little one"), "*Shlohp Chindche Shlohp*" and "*Hotemaunche*". Even when parents knew High German counterparts to these songs, they sang them in Low German 'because they were just for the children.' This appears to have been the case even in "Russlaender" homes where the parents spoke predominantly High German. The assumption was always that songs had been translated from High German to Low German, and never the converse, although collections of songs in both languages date back to much the same period. These facts are not at all surprising when one

recalls that the 'real poetry' is thought to exist in the High form of a language in a diglossic situation.

There appear to be two original Mennonite lullabies: "*Vie, vie, vie Ventche*" and "*Shokkel, Shokkel, Sheiya*". Neither of these appears in any form in any collections of High or Low German folklore. "*Vie, vie, vie...*" is familiar only to "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte", while "*Shokkel, Shokkel Sheiya*" is one of the most widely known lullabies among all groups of Mennonites. Content is seemingly subservient to the rhyming and rhythmic aspects of these two lullabies, yet, in both songs the promise of food is used to persuade the child to sleep.

This promise of food is one indication that these songs originate in a peasant economy where for some families, such as the landless, there may not be an overabundance of food. Another fact which indicates their peasant origin is the occupations mentioned in these songs: shepherding ("*Shlohp Chindche*") and shoe-making ("*Zueza Petruetza*").

Though all of these songs are designated specifically as lullabies, it is a well known fact that when a parent/sibling/baby-sitter exhausted his or her repertoire of lullabies without any signs of success, he would resort to whatever songs would come to mind. For some people this meant singing other children's songs, and for others it meant singing favorite High German hymns to the children.

Parodies of lullabies like "*Shlohp Chindche Shlohp*" in which puns are used to call the father a sheep instead of a shepherd, and the child a rascal instead of an angel, were not used as lullabies, but as songs with which older children teased each other.

b) Chants and Shpelches (Games)

Among children's chants and games, we find some songs which were used by children as they played ("*Ohtboa Langknehz*"/"Stork Long-Nose" and "*Seet en Maaks che*"/"A little girl was sitting"). Others, like "*Trippe, Trappe, Trohnche*" ("Trip, trip, trip"), "*Foutche Beshlohne*" ("Tapping the Feet") and "*Holt Zoage*" ("Sawing Wood") were chanted by parents as they bounced little children on their knees.

In *Shpelches* like "*Backe, Backe Kuake*" ("Bake, bake cookies"), an adult would hold a child's hands, clapping them as they chanted. In "*Ria Gretché*" ("Stir Porridge"), a finger game, one would 'stir the porridge' in the palm of one hand, with the index finger of the other. These rhymes were recited rather than chanted in many homes, but were always accompanied by these actions.

Only one group game for children was found. This was "*Runde, runde Rouze*", the Low German version of "Ring-a-round-a-Rosy".

No doubt there are many more games and chants, but most of these were collected from adults, usually grandparents who had not used this repertoire in many decades. Moreover, many of these chants and games were collected from "Kanadier" and "Neueingewanderte" men. Since one particular individual, a "Kanadier" man of Molotschna Colony background<sup>1</sup> contributed the majority of these chants, one can conclude that chanting was uncommon in Mennonite homes.

No chants were found among "Russlaender" who frequently said they had recited these poems in Low German but always sung them in

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<sup>1</sup>His Molotschna background is evidenced by the dialectical differences between his songs and those of individuals of Chortitza background.

High German. This is in keeping with what one would expect in a diglossic situation: that the high language would be preferred for artistic expression.

One would, however, expect to find Low German chants and games among children who still speak Low German, namely the "Auswanderer". However, no games and chants were found among these children. Firstly, many of these children were very timid about sharing any songs with an adult whom they did not know. Secondly, too few children were interviewed, and thirdly, there was no opportunity to observe these children at play.

c) Other Chingaleeda

Although children's songs were sung by adults to children ("Eene kleene Fiddle"/"One little Fiddle") or by children as they played together ("M'rieche haud en chlienet Laumb"/"Mary had a little Lamb"), they appear to have significance beyond their entertainment value. Through their expression of traditional values, they become a means of socializing the young child.

Among the older, more widely known children's songs brought from Russia, we find a number of animal tales like "Shopche yingk ent Voulche" ("A little sheep went into the woods") and "Tiep Heenaches" ("Little Chickens") which could be used for didactic purposes.

In the first song, a little sheep wanders into the woods, that is, into unknown territory, gets hurt, and begins to cry. In the second song, the little chickens go into the garden, that is, into forbidden territory, are scolded by the mother and punished by the father, and feel very sad. Both of these songs, shared with the

larger world of German folklore, are widely known among Mennonites of all immigration periods. Through them, the listener, hopefully the child, learns that disobedience is always accompanied by retributive action.

According to one informant, "Kanadier" children of "Kleingemeinde" background growing up on the East Reserve in the 1940's entertained themselves with songs like "*Miene Mame en Pappé zent Plautdietsch*" ("My mother and father are Low German") or "*Doa vier emohl en Maun*" ("There once was a man"), a Low German version of "The Farmer in the Dell". However, most "Kanadier" used that particular tune for another set of lyrics: "*Eck yingk emohl em Voult*" ("I once went into the woods"), a nonsense song in which an individual is ridiculed for his ludicrous behavior. For some "Auswanderer", the song took on a different meaning, however. In this version, sung by a little girl who had recently emigrated from Paraguay, a non-conformist is punished by his society with ostracism, a much more severe measure than the corporal punishment administered for misdemeanors in the familial context. The misdemeanor in this instance is pride, enacted in the song by wearing new shoes to church. Pride, according to "Auswanderer" philosophy is one of the gravest social wrongs and therefore needs to be dealt with severely "in a Mennonite community in which 'Demutigkeit' or humility is emphasized" (Klassen, 1978:23). Through these songs then, the child is socialized to both familial and communal expectations.

In several children's songs, mothers or grandmothers are praised for the culinary skills which they lavish on their children and grandchildren ("*Miene Mame es mie gout*" / "My Mother loves me";



"*Shnetche, Shnetche*"/"Tea Biscuits, Tea Biscuits"). These songs of 'praise' may also have been a means of bribing an indulgent grandmother to give the children extra cookies or candies.

Mother's place in the kitchen is implied through references to her domestic skills. Male roles, in contrast, are referred to directly, as for example the reference to father as the farmer in "*Ungrim Dack*" ("Under the Roof").

That these songs come from an agrarian peasant society is evident in the references to the chickens ("*Tiep Heenaches*") and the sheep ("*Shlohp Chindche Shlohp*"). And yet, a children's song about becoming a farmer was sung by only two grandmothers whose families had spent a longer period of time in Prussia than most other Mennonites had. Commonly found in collections of Prussian folksongs (Frischbier, 1877:47), the song appears in two 'Mennonite versions': "*Aus eck mohl en Bua vull voare*" ("Once when I wanted to become a farmer") and "*Aus eck mohl bi'em Buare via*" ("Once when I was at the farmer's (place)"). In both versions, the singer talks about acquiring a hen, a rooster, and a goose called 'Long-throat', in addition to other animals.

However, there is a significant difference between the two versions. In the first version, the singer aspires to become a farmer and have a servant. In the second version, sung by an estate owner's daughter, the singer merely visits the peasant farmer. Obviously, an estate owner's daughter would not aspire to a lower social position!

One of the most unusual Low German songs, "*Hups Meryalche*" ("Jump little girl"), which like the British nursery rhyme refers to

specific political events, is a song protesting French oppression during the Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth century. Used by Prussian and German children as a song for dancing with their dolls (Erk and Boehme, 1893(III):589), it was adopted by a wealthy "Russ-laender" Mennonite family as a song to entertain little children as they were bounced on mother's knee.

Many Mennonites dismissed these songs as 'mere children's songs' sung for entertainment, but the repeated references to familial and communal expectations rescue these songs from their 'mere entertainment' reputation. Instead, they provided an avenue for the socialization of children into Mennonite society.

#### *Yeis tliche Leeda* (Spiritual Songs)

There was no apparent consensus concerning the name of this category of songs. Among "Kanadier", religious songs were called *Yeis tliche Leeda* or *Choikeleeda* (church songs), while some "Russ-laender" called religious songs *Christliche Leeda* (Christian songs).

Low German religious songs include a variety of songs such as choruses and Christmas songs translated or paraphrased from English or High German. These songs have been found only among "Auswanderer", usually members of the Chortitzer Church on the East Reserve, or the Old Colony Church on the West Reserve, returning to Canada from Latin America.

Translated songs of this type are sung only by children at church and family Christmas celebrations, or in children's worship services such as Sunday School or Daily Vacation Bible School. The intent of the translators is that of facilitating the communication

of religious truth by the use of the children's 'native tongue', rather than by using the traditional religious language, High German, which is considered to be a 'foreign' or 'adult' language, in some ways similar to the use of Latin in the Catholic Church. The songs are sung only in children's worship services, or as part of children's performances in services attended by adults as well, despite the fact that the occasional Low German sermon is preached in some of these churches to accommodate young people who cannot understand High German. Here again we see that the 'low' language is considered to be a children's language, incapable of communicating significant truth to adults, and representative of a sharp hierarchical difference between adults and children.

Another group of translated songs are the *Veertien Platdietsche Leeda* (Fourteen Low German Songs). These songs were translated by Mennonites of Mennonite Brethren background for radio broadcasts geared at Low German speaking people of Old Colony and Sommerfelder background, particularly those living in Latin America. In content, these songs range from evangelistic songs encouraging the listener to put his faith in God, to gospel songs encouraging the believer, to songs which like the Negro spiritual, anticipate a heavenly home.

People of various Mennonite church backgrounds and immigration periods referred to these songs. Attitudes toward the songs varied. Among the people who appreciated and identified with them was a "Kanadier" man living in a senior citizen's home. He has memorized a number of these songs which he sings to while away his time, or for

the encouragement of other believers. Other people said they wished there were more Low German hymns.

On the other hand, many people were very critical of these songs. They felt that since both singing and religion are domains for which the 'high' language, or High German has customarily been used, singing religious songs in Low German is in poor taste. Others felt that the availability of a large body of 'beautiful' High German hymns, dispenses with the necessity of translating songs into Low German. Still others were critical of the literalism of the translations. They felt that the formal linguistic register of the High German versions ought not to be retained in translation. Instead, they said, a paraphrase would have been more poetic and in keeping with traditional Low German usage.

There are, however, two religious songs which may originally have been sung in Low German: "*Dee Gouda Hoad*" ("The Good Shepherd") and "*Zingt am Lieflich*" ("Sing to Him lovingly"). The first, a children's song using pastoral imagery - a shepherd leading his flock - was familiar to only one grandmother who in turn had learned the song from her 'Polish Mennonite grandmother', as she called her.

The second, is a praise song, also on the topic of God's leading. Reminiscent of a Hebrew psalm of thanksgiving, this song expresses the experience of a community with a sense of peoplehood. They are a people who have suffered together and now want to praise God together.

This song was relatively familiar to Mennonites of "Kanadier", "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" background. Some had learned it at "Saengerfests", the regional song festival tradition Mennonites

brought to Manitoba from Russia, while others recalled singing the song in their post World War II camps in Germany.

Though the song had been learned in various contexts, many people identified with it as a song about their own experiences. The fact that this song was so easily accepted by Mennonites, can be attributed to the consistency of its poetic tone and imagery with other Low German materials. In fact, phrases like "*Dee ons druach fon Yoa toh Yoa, es nich verklich vundaboa*" ("Who carried us from year to year, isn't it truly wonderful"), sound as though they could have been lifted out of an ordinary Low German conversation about religious matters.

A number of the Mennonites who were interviewed speculated as to why there is no body of Low German hymns. Some claimed that they had never learned Low German hymns because they were not written in books. However, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite experience invalidate this argument. Among Hutterites (Martens, 1968) and Doukhobors (Peacock, 1970) rich hymnic traditions have been transmitted solely by oral tradition. Mennonites themselves talked about hearing their parents sing High German hymns with many verses from memory. Youngsters learned these songs through repeated hearings and not by seeing them in books. Yet, they assumed that because singing was associated with the 'high' or literary language, that is High German, it also had to be associated with books.

Others concluded that there is no body of Low German hymnody because High German has traditionally been the language of the church. This explanation comes as no surprise to sociolinguists who have studied the phenomenon of diglossia. In fact, they would have

predicted that there would be no songs in the low language in a linguistic domain customarily reserved for the high language.

Gauss eleeda (Street Songs)

A domain in which one could anticipate finding at least a few *Plautdietshe Leeda* is that of *Gauss eleeda* or street songs. *Gauss eleeda* probably inherited their name from their association with *Gauss eshlinyels*, as the male teenaged village street rascals were called. According to oral tradition, the name *Gauss eshlinyels* was a well-deserved label.

One grandfather, reminiscing about the origin of some of these songs, said

We didn't have motorcycles in those days, so the boys in the village would get together evenings on the streets and make up songs.

In *Gauss eleeda* one hears comment about some aspect of village life, usually about individuals who fail to live up to the expectations of their society. This is the case in the song "*En Lanche haud en Kubbelche*" ("A Mr. Lemke had a little mare"). Familiar to Mennonites of all immigration periods, the song exists in two versions, partially distinguished from each other by the age of the singers of the song.

Older singers sang about a Mr. Lemke whose horse became lame and died. After his horse died, Lemke used the leather for mocassins, the horse's head for a fiddle, the tail for a fiddle bow, and the teeth for screws. Inserted into this story about the horse, are two verses which recount Lemke's efforts at courting. He goes to visit an estate owner, but is rejected by him and his daughters, who say they

are too busy to marry him. A humorous story on the surface, the song contains several levels of social comment.

Firstly, it comments on the individual who is a born loser in society. After all, having a lame horse which dies, in a society in which a good horse is a prestige symbol, indicates that one cannot possibly be a good farmer. Furthermore, being unable to find a wife, is indicative of one's ineptness in social relationships. His failure to attain any of the symbols of prestige in his society is ridiculed by comments about his frugal disposal of the remains of his horse.

Secondly, the song may be a social comment on the individual who fails to establish himself in a respected profession such as farming and thus has to resort to making a living as a craftsman, making mocassins or fiddles, or perhaps even being a musician.

Thirdly, the marriage refusal reflects a society with fairly rigid social distinctions, whose boundaries are not easily crossed. The excuse of the daughters, that they are too busy to marry Lemke, may be another way of saying that the rich are busy working, but the poor are idle, and therefore poor. This rationalization is similar to that found in the Fritz Senn poem "*Darp enn'e FreaJ*" ("Village in the Twilight"). Here we are told that the herdsman, bringing home the cattle from the village pasture, blows his horn

*"Besonda lued bie de Aunwohnaohnte,  
Wiels doa de Uere langs ma gohne"*

("Especially loud beside landless people's hovels,  
because there the clocks go more slowly").

(Senn, 1974:62)

The daughters, therefore, are telling Lemke that the busy and idle, that is, the rich and the poor, do not intermarry.

And lastly, the name Lemke itself requires comment. According to ship passenger lists, the name Lemke was relatively common in the Bergthal Colony, a daughter colony of Chortitza in Russia (Hiebert, 1974). "According to oral tradition, many of the Bergthaler people were simple peasant folk" (Klassen, 1981:17). There were also many landless people in this colony, so it may have referred to them specifically, or to all people of Bergthaler origin.

In the second version of this song, the name Lemke disappears. Sung by a generation who are not familiar with the name, and for whom the horse is a recreational rather than a domestic vehicle, the owner of the horse becomes a little boy, possibly riding a hobby horse. The courting incident is omitted, and the song simply becomes a nonsense song.

Ridicule for unacceptable social behavior is used in another *Gausseleet* which again appears in two versions. The same melody is used by "Kanadier" for "*Aus dee Yued em Borem foll*" ("When the Jew fell into the well"), and by "Russlaender" of both Chortitza and Molotschna background for "*Aus dee Sheepa malke yingh*" ("When the sheed herd went milking").

In the song "*Aus dee Yued...*", a Jewish man falls into a well, much to the delight of the kingbirds who have lost a competitor in the struggle for dominance over the universe. The focus shifts in the second verse. A woman asks her husband "What has happened to the Jew's nose?" While this could be a comment on the Jew's physical features, it more likely reflects the suspicion with which many Mennonite farmers and villagers often viewed the Jewish pedlars who visited their homes.



Many "Kanadier" who knew this song were embarrassed to admit it because they reacted to the racism inherent in the lyrics. But according to oral tradition, Mennonite attitudes to the Jewish pedlars who visited them, both in Russia and in Manitoba, have ranged from implicit distrust to genuine friendship.

In "*Aus dee Sheepa malke yingk*"...we are told about a sheep herd who goes milking and comes home sucking his thumb. Why does he suck his thumb? Because, like a child, he has transgressed the social norms: sheep were not milked in Russia, and, it was the women, not men who did the milking (Klassen, 1981:17).

So the individual who does not abide by the norms of his society is ridiculed in Low German song.

Unlike the previous *Gauss eleeda*, "*Uns Nohba Klohs e haud ne Koa*" ("Our neighbor Klassen had a car"), originated in southern Manitoba, probably in the early twentieth century. Next to lullabies like "*Zueza Petruetzha*" and "*Shokkel, shokkel Sheiya*", it is the most widely known Low German song among "Kanadier" of both reserves. The thirty odd verses it has accumulated recount the story of a peasant farmer whose car has been pieced together from an assortment of farm products such as turkey skin, gunny sacks, and watermelon rind; in other words, the garbage on his farm.

Like the ethnic joke, this song satirizes the peasant farmer's inability to cope with the demands of a technological society. He repairs his car with materials familiar to him: garden produce and animal products. He 'obviously' has no idea of the extent to which industrialization has 'simplified' his life. At another level, the song may also be commenting on Mennonite frugality.

Though most of the verses of this song are general in nature, a few refer specifically to Mennonite history. Several verses originating in Saskatchewan, in which crude or promiscuous behavior in certain Mennonite towns is ridiculed, suggest a continuation of village rivalry patterns established already in Russia.<sup>1</sup>

In another verse sung by an East Reserve group known as "*De Heis chraitje & Willa Honich*" (Locusts and Wild Honey), we are told that the car has a barbed-wire aerial which picks up only *Knacks oht* (sunflower seeds), an abbreviation for *Knacks oht frey te aule Mennonite* (sunflower seeds are devoured by all Mennonites). This abbreviation for the acrostic on the call letters of CFAM, a radio station begun by Mennonites in southern Manitoba, is indicative of the critical attitude with which many southern Manitoba Mennonites view their own radio station.

Although some people considered all Low German songs to be crude, virtually everyone agreed that *Gauss eleeda* were the crudest of the lot. *Gauss eleeda* probably attained their reputation through the use of colorful language and incidents such as a youth accidentally kissing the mother of the girl he thought he had in his arms ("*Dee Rousefeldshe Yunges*" / "The boys of Rosenfeld"). In a variant of this song, a "*Bloumenuatsha Yung*" ("Boy from Blumenort"), the kissing incident is left out, but the boy is chased by (the girl's) mother with a broomstick for stealing sausage from the *Ruakhues* (smokehouse). Known only to "Kanadier" of Chortitzer and Old Colony Church

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<sup>1</sup>Village rivalry has been documented by folklorists with evidence such as village nicknames (Wiens, 1970).

background, the song was probably composed in southern Manitoba. Both versions of the song contain a strange mixture of High German and Low German. The specifics of the story are told in the Low German verses of the song. The response of the singer or balladeer is heard in the High German refrain which follows each verse. Most likely, the song was originally a High German song which some *Gauss eshlinyel* decided to dress up with some local color. No counterpart was found in other German folklore collections.

There are probably still many more *Gauss eleeda* or even fragments of them in the subconscious of the now grownup *Gauss eshlinyels*. However, "*Duh bes mien Sonneshien*" ("You are my Sunshine"), parodied from the English by the "*Heis chraitje en Willa Honich*" in about 1976, is proof that the *Gauss eleet* is not only a thing of the past. In this song, the "*Heis chraitje*," the grownup *Gauss eshlinyels* of Landmark, use colorful language and the occasional 'bleep' to tell the story of a young man who goes courting, only to be attacked by a huge mongrel who tries to make mincemeat out of him. The only reason he dares to return for another visit is his fear of a worse fate: remaining a bachelor! There are people who would like to relegate all "*Heis chraitje*" songs to the category of *Gauss eleeda*, probably because their songs are sung in Low German.

On the one hand, *Gauss eleeda*, with their use of satire, ridicule and colorful language have certainly helped to contribute to the oft repeated generalization that Low German is a crude language, or that Low German songs are crude. On the other hand, one would expect to hear this type of generalizations about singing in the low language regardless of whether or not it had any validity. Of special

interest was the fact that people rarely admitted that they themselves sang *Gausseleeda*. They were always songs sung by 'some naughty boys in our village' etc. This response too is predictable. One would not expect people in a community to admit knowing songs which are not generally endorsed by their society.

### Village Songs

#### a) Occupational Songs

Mennonites have historically been associated with a variety of occupations like business, textile weaving and education, but the most persistent image in Low German songs is that of the Mennonite as a farmer. This reflects not only the long history of Mennonites as farmers, but also the association of Low German with peasant agrarian pursuits.

The songs vary, however, in the way in which they relate to their agrarian background. Some songs express attitudes toward work ("*Aule leeve Morjen*"/"Every dear morning"). One song was used to accompany communal labor ("*Biem Drashen*"/"While threshing"), and some songs use the agrarian context as a backdrop for the discussion of social issues ("*Aus eck yingk met de Hoak oppe Dehl*"/"When I went to the threshing place with a rake").

This last occupational song, "*Aus eck yingk...*" was brought to Canada from Russia by "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" Mennonites. Frequently sung while young people rode to and from the fields at threshing time, the song describes several young girls going to the mill for flour. One of the girls, who has a malformed heel, is called the master baker. All variants of the song agree about

these details, but there are several discrepancies between two particular versions of this song.

Version 1 comes from several villages in the Chortitza Colony, including the village of Schoenhorst in the province of Ekaterinoslav. According to this version, the girls are called 'Schoenhorst' girls, that is, from the village of Schoenhorst, and bake 'bøbbat', a traditional Mennonite dish prepared as stuffing or cake to be eaten with fowl (Dick, 1958:26).

In and of themselves, these appear to be very innocent comments. However, when one couples this data with information about village nicknames among Mennonites in Russia, one sees quite a different picture. Inhabitants of the village of Schoenhorst were known as "*Bobbats charshhta met Fias teena*" or 'bubbat crusts with flinstones'. According to one former resident of the village, the nickname meant that villagers ate so much 'bobbat' that when one pressed a villager's stomach, fire would come shotting out of his ears!

This village rivalry, often expressed by the *Gauss eshlinyels*, arose from competition for one of the village's most valued economic resources: marriageable girls with domestic skills. In fact, as the singer says, perhaps tongue in cheek, the girl who can bake the best gets to marry one of the blonde Janzen boys!

In addition to the expression of village rivalry, the song contains another social comment worth noting. According to one variant, one of the girls has a crooked heel, and bakes the 'bobbat' too high, that is, too full of air. This implies that she is dishonest.

These ideas are expressed more forcefully in Version 1. In this version, originating in a Mennonite colony in the province of Kharkov, the local references to Schoenhorst have been changed. There are three girls instead of 'Schoenhorst' girls, and they bake bread instead of 'bobbat'. Not only are the girls accused of being dishonest, they are also accused of being miserly - so miserly that 'he' (father or suitor?) cannot afford a new plow and harrow. Unlike other Low German songs in which women are praised for the domestic skills they lavish on their families, this song speaks of the economic power women derive from participation in the market system. No other documentation has been found to show how widespread this phenomenon was, but it appears that the song was quite well known among "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte".

This song is the only one in which the wealthy are blamed for the lack of prosperity of others, though it is a well-known fact that there have always been poor and wealthy farmers, as well as landless people among the Mennonites. By comparison, other German folklore of the same period has considerably more references to the rich/poor dichotomy (Firmenich, 1842:130, 245; 1846:814). As one peasant near Innsbruck expressed it

Oh how I have to torture myself,  
...the one who is rich  
Can live with more grace/ease.

(Firmenich, 1842:245, my trans.)

The dearth of references to the rich/poor dichotomy in traditional Low German song can be explained in several ways. Firstly, political means such as the Commission of the Landless in the Molotschna Colony in 1863 were available for the resolution of

conflicts. Secondly, as mentioned in the discussion of Mennonite history (p. 19 ), there was less of a difference between the rich and the poor in the Chortitza Colony where most of these songs originated. Thirdly, there might have been other means of expressing this tension. One would have to study the entire corpus of Low German folklore to see whether this tension was expressed in other ways such as proverbs or jokes. Also, because a number of the rich/poor references occur with reference to marriage, which would involve a transfer of wealth, one would have to look at other ways in which the Mennonites influenced their youth to marry within certain confines.

References to one's relative prosperity are found in several "Kanadier" ballads. According to "*Relieftiet*" ("Relief/Depression Time"), one's prosperity is at the mercy of vicissitudes like economic recession. But, one's poverty could also be blamed on the sun which is so hot that one simply cannot work ("*Mien Fohda zehd een sheen Morjen*"/"My Father siad one fine morning"):

Another Low German song, "*Aule leeve Morjen*" ("Every 'dear' day") voices a reaction against the work ethic, but according to "Tell me why baby why", a parody of a 1950's popular song, farm work can be used as a cure for broken hearts.

From the farmer himself, we turn to the hired help. Their crude table manners may be ridiculed by the landowner's children, as in the "*Ballad of the Chnachts*" ("Ballad of the male servants"), or they may use song to ridicule each other's inefficiency ("*Biem Dras hen*").

In the earlier part of the twentieth century, hired hands would get together on Saturday nights or Sunday afternoons, improvising songs to entertain themselves. Strangely enough, nobody seems to remember the songs they sang about 'their women', but one of their ballads of heroic exploits has survived: an agrarian version of the old cowboy song "Chisholm Trail". In this Low German version, the cowboy with his horse becomes a hired hand racing through a muddy town in a one-horse wagon. Like many other Low German songs, the song is quite humorous. Much of the humor arises from the use of malapropisms like the term *haulß ferackt* (literally, half stretched out), usually reserved for the discussion of animal deaths, but used here for the near fate of the reckless hired hand. The crude humor and the register of the song place it in the "Kanadier" *Gauss eleeda* tradition.

Certain terms in these songs make them a historical record of the technology of the past. A reference to taking one's rake and going to the *Dehl* or threshing place ("*Aus eck yingh met de Hoak oppe Dehl*") refers to threshing practices among Mennonites in nineteenth century Russia, since this method of harvesting was discontinued shortly after the "Kanadier" arrived in Canada.

By comparison, terms like *Engine Maun* (engine man) and *Kaus ten Maun* (machine man) in "*Biem Drashen*", refer to the practice of threshing communally with steam engines in southern Manitoba, a practice which I observed as late as the early 1950's. The machine man had the responsibility of loading and oiling the threshing machine, while the engine man had to maintain an adequate water supply.



Other terms like *Feebashtang* (forked tree used as hitching apparatus on a one-horse wagon), *Diestel* (tongue of a two-horse wagon) and references to a hayrack place these songs in the pre-industrial agrarian context.

One can assume that many other songs were improvised on the spot and promptly forgotten, or that still others were conveniently forgotten because they were considered to be somewhat crude, but the songs which have remained do provide significant insight into Mennonite society: social tensions such as those between the rich and the poor, the dissenting voice reacting against norms such as the work ethic, and details about changing technology.

#### b) Ballads

Low German ballads, or narrative songs, cover a wide range of topics. They vary from a description of the hardships of the Depression, to the migration of "Auswanderer" to Mexico, to praise songs for heroes in the community.

Despite their differing stories, the ballads contain a significant common element. Each ballad is a form of social comment or criticism, and each balladeer has used humor to communicate his main point. For example, an unacceptable socializing pattern such as going visiting on a hayrack instead of in a buggy, is ridiculed by endless repetition of lyrics in "*Mame en Pappe fuaren opp'm Heireck*" ("Mother and Father drove with the hayrack").

Humor in "*Loht mie yuent fetahle*" ("Let me tell you") arises from a misunderstanding of the term welfare. The Low German speaking immigrant understands welfare to be "*Vell Fea*" or William Fehr,

giving rise to a legend about a kind old gentleman in southern Manitoba who sends monthly checks to the unemployed. Composed recently by a "Kanadier" high school student, the song criticizes the "Auswanderer", using the derogatory term *Mexicauna* (Mexican) for the Mennonite labor migrants returning to southern Manitoba because they sometimes take advantage of governmental financial assistance. The songwriter's peers were greatly amused to hear their friend sing a Low German ballad, but adult listeners were often critical of the derogatory criticisms expressed in the song.

Mennonite audiences were much quicker to identify with the lyrics of "*Mien Fohda zehd een sheen Moryen*" ("My father said one fine morning"). In this song, the listener heard a universal theme. They would often respond to the song with a story about a similar individual in their own community.

The balladeer says that contrary to his father's expectations, he has found a good wife. He himself cannot work because the sun is too hot. And, he drinks a little - just for medicinal purposes. His children are barefoot and hungry because they are poor, but unfortunately he cannot work because the sun is too hot! Audience reaction to this song reveals that they have heard this anti-work pro-drinking rationalization before. Humor comes in part from the melodramatic way in which the poet phrases his ideas, and partially from the singing style.

Some ballads such as the praise song for the Mitchell, Manitoba hockey team will not remain in the repertoire because they refer to specific historical events of limited interest. Other ballads, like "*Ons Noh ka es mie doll yevorden*" ("My neighbor has

gotten angry with me") discuss universal themes, such as irresponsible neighbors, and therefore have the potential to survive for a longer time.

Sung almost exclusively by "Kanadier" of both reserves, a number of ballads have already been passed down through several generations, and survived a number of migrations. One of these ballads, "*Relieftiet*", originated in Saskatchewan, travelled to the Peace River district in northern Alberta, and settled down in Manitoba recently. Like the story of Job in the Bible, this ballad describes the loss of possessions during hard times, and increased prosperity when times get better after the depression.

There is, however, a note of irony in the way in which prosperity comes. The balladeer tells us that during the Depression, the father advises the son not to marry for financial reasons. When the Depression ends and the son marries, the father gives him an old Rumley, one of the earliest gasoline tractors, and an old cow, showing reluctant support of the son's new venture. There is a reason for the father's reluctance. Customarily, a father gave his son a good horse or his daughter a good cow when they married. These 'old' gifts, from the 'old' man, as he is called, indicate that he is miserly.

As stated earlier, the girl in "*Aus eck yingk met de Hoak oppe Dehl*" was also criticized for being miserly. Yet, in view of the number of English jokes about Mennonite frugality<sup>1</sup> in current

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<sup>1</sup>One of the more common of these jokes is:

Question: "How can you tell if a Mennonite is dead?"

Answer: "If you wave a dollar bill over his face and he doesn't grab for it."

circulation, it is reasonable to assume that the joke or folktale has traditionally been a more common way of criticizing this attribute.<sup>1</sup>

Two other ballads, "*De Bua enn de Pohp*" ("The peasant and the priest") and "*Ohm Banyamien*" ("Mr. Benjamin") require further comment because they are atypical of the "Kanadier" ballads we have discussed thus far.

Kenneth Peacock, of the National Museum, who first collected "*De Bua enn de Pohp*" from Andrew Hamm of Neuberghthal, Manitoba, calls the song "an anti-clerical a-legory with a domestic setting" (Peacock, 1966:49). He interprets the song as an attempt by the Roman Catholic church to persuade dissenting Mennonites to return to the fold, concluding that "This is a typically Mennonite song in the 'Low German' dialect. No other culture could have produced it" (ibid.).

Peacock's explanation does not stand up under further investigation. Firstly, he is obviously not aware that another culture has, in fact, produced this song. Mr. Hamm's version of this song is similar to at least two Prussian Low German songs describing tensions between the clergy and peasants: "*De Bu'r oen e Kerch*" ("The peasant and the church") (Frischbier, 1877:36-38), and "*De Bicht verhoere*" ("The ? interrogation") (Frischbier, 1877:30-32).

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<sup>1</sup>As Klymasz has pointed out, the popularity of the ethnic joke can be attributed to the fact that it is

"compact and epigrammatic in nature, a product of an urbanized society whose tight work schedule allows little or no time for the flexible elaboration of detail which characterizes a traditional story-telling session in a peasant culture" (Klymasz, 1970:73).

Also, the ethnic joke is expressed in English because of the "impotency of the Mother Tongue in the New World" (ibid.:71).

Secondly, it is highly unlikely that a Low German song which probably dates back to the early eighteenth century would refer to a social conflict in the sixteenth century, because Low German social comment songs usually arise from the immediate situation. Because the singer, Mr. Hamm, spent considerably more time in Germany than many other Manitoba Mennonites who migrated in the nineteenth century, it is likely that he learned this song while he lived in Danzig, and that the song refers to tension between Catholic priests and peasants.

Though this particular song cannot be placed in the Mennonite tradition, as Peacock claims, it is almost surprising that there are no Low German anti-clergy songs. The fact that in Russia "the Mennonite elder of 1850, with some exceptions, was a man of the establishment" (Toews, 1979a:5), and that in Manitoba excommunication was a common practice in the matter of church discipline, would lead one to expect to hear some dissenting voices.

Why does one not hear these dissenting voices? Firstly, some of these tensions may have been eased by the availability of other options, such as migration, or the formation of splinter church groups. Secondly, criticism of the clergy may have taken another form, such the joke. And lastly, because those excommunicated from the Mennonite church in southern Russia faced the possibility of social and economic ostracism, and those excommunicated in southern Manitoba had the option of joining other groups, singing Low German protest songs was either risky or unnecessary.

The other anomaly among the ballads, "*Ohm Benjamin*" is one of the few songs in this collection which has come only from the

Molotschna Colony.<sup>1</sup> Composed by several male secondary school students, the song pays tribute to Mennonite education Benjamin Unruh (1849-1910), who was principal and teacher in the Ohrloff "Zentralschule" (central school) in the Molotschna Colony for 32 years (Krahn, 1959d:785).

One informant said that Mr. Unruh knew about the song and seemed pleased about it. However, one wonders if the statements about his rigid discipline, and his narrow school curriculum, based on the Bible, the hymnbook and the catechism are to be taken literally or tongue-in-cheek.

The latter interpretation is suggested by the fact that the song is written in Low German. It does seem strange that a praise song, coming from the Molotschna Colony, on an educational topic, both of which would indicate the use of the high language, would be written in the low language, or Low German. The only factors which would favor the use of Low German would be an informal performance context, or the interpretation that the song is really a form of subtle criticism.

We have looked at ballads discussing a variety of topics, but, as noted earlier, these songs are tied together by a single thread: each ballad is a form of social comment or criticism, and each balladeer has employed humor to reinforce the seriousness of his complaint.

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<sup>1</sup>The other songs to come exclusively from the Molotschna Colony are those sung by Mr. D. D. Klassen: "*Ungrim Dack*" ("Under the roof") and "*Fritz ran shvind*" ("Fred, run quickly").

Liebes Leeda (Love Songs)

The most widely known Low German love song is really a song fragment: some Low German verses added to a High German "Schluesselbund" *Leeda* (literally 'bunch of keys' songs), sung by "Russlaender" youth in both Russian and southern Manitoba villages til about the mid-twentieth century. Recent attempts to revive "Schluesselbund" *Leeda* which always accompanied singing circle games have met with minimal success in both urban and rural contexts.

Til the early 1940's, these games were an integral part of Saturday or Sunday night entertainment for the single youth of the community. They were also an indispensable part of entertainment at wedding receptions.

Weekends, the games would be played at a village home, preferably one where the parents had conveniently gone visiting. One of the youth would begin singing a song and walking in a circle, usually choosing a partner, with everyone else following suit. In other games, an individual would stand inside a circle, choosing a partner at a point appropriate to the lyrics. Boys and girls might choose partners alternately in successive rounds of the game. The choosing of partners was sometimes signalled by the rattling of keys. Hence, the name "Schluesselbund" came to designate this group of songs.

These games gave the youth a community sanctioned outlet for socializing together, and provided the stage for the initiation of many a romance in a society which frowned on open and free relationships.

Since most of the repertoire for these games was sung in High German, it does not appear in this collection. The occasional Low German verse which was added to these High German songs, was added with the intent of teasing a young couple or ridiculing someone whose behavior was beyond the bounds of social decorum.

The most widely known of these songs was "Allema! kann ich nicht lustig sein" ("I can never be joyful again"). In the first two verses, sung in High German, a young lover bemoans his rejection by his "Madel" (girl), but consoles himself with the thought that two or three other girls like him. In the third verse, sung in Low German, the girl replies, stating her reason for rejecting him. He has been dating *aundre* or other girls. In some variants of the song, the term *aundre* is made more specific: it is replaced with the term *Russhe* or Russian girls.

This third verse raises several questions. Firstly, why does the girl reply in Low German? And secondly, what is the implication of the terms *Russhe* and *aundre*?

In response to the language-choice question, one must pay attention to the fact that Low German verses were added to High German "Schluesselbund" *Leeda* to tease or ridicule individuals. The use of Low German in this song, however, goes beyond this obvious explanation. One notes that the boy is singing in High German - the borrowed literary language. The girl, on the other hand, replies in Low German - the everyday language of the Mennonites. Her choice of language in this case is a statement that she supports the values and mores of her society.



Some of these values can be seen in a closer look at the terms *aundre* and *Russhe* girls. Informants suggested that the girl was simply chastising the boy for flirtatious behavior. There is no doubt that the song was used in that way, but even the general term *aundre* did not usually refer simply to other Mennonite girls in the girlfriend's peer group. Instead, it might refer to Russian servant girls in the Russian context, or to *Englenda* (Anglo-Saxons), the cover term used for all non-Mennonites other than Jews and native people in southern Manitoba's West Reserve. Though there were Mennonite churches which discouraged marriage with Mennonites of other denominations, it is not known whether *aundre* ever referred to crossing these particular boundaries.

Inter-marriage with persons of other ethnic backgrounds, many Mennonites felt, had serious implications. In southern Russia, where Mennonites lived in the proximity of illiterate peasants who were frequently servants in the wealthier Mennonite homes, marriage to a 'Russian' was regarded as social disgrace. In southern Manitoba, inter-marriage with non-Mennonites who did not subscribe to the idea of a believer's church or pacifism, was tantamount to losing one's faith. In both Russia and southern Manitoba, "Kanadier" and "Russlaender" used this song to encourage endogamy, or marriage within the prescribed group of Mennonites.

That the preferred group of Mennonites did not refer to 'just any' Mennonite is suggested in several songs. We noted in the discussion of *Gaussleeda* that an estate owner's daughter refused to marry a poor farmer ("En Lamche haud en Kubbelche"). In the ballad "Ohm Banyamien", a "Russlaender" song from the Moltoschna Colony, we

are told that 'he did not marry into wealth.' According to another "Russlaender" love song, "*Et via emohl en Frieya*" ("There once was a suitor"), one does not marry someone below one's own social standing unless one is desperate. These examples illustrate the importance of socio-economic factors in determining marriage patterns. It should also be noted that these ideas are expressed more frequently in "Russlaender" than in "Kanadier" songs.

"Schluesselbund" *Leeda* were not universally sung among Mennonites. Mennonites of more pietistic persuasion, such as the Mennonite Brethren, frowned on these songs and games because of their similarity to dancing. They were at times critical of their "Kirchliche" neighbors who had the audacity to participate in and enjoy these games.

Speaking of the Old Colony Church by comparison, Melvin Gingerich, Mennonite historian tells us that

In some very conservative Mennonite groups in America, where young people customarily joined the church at about the age of marriage or in their late teens, strict prohibitions as to amusements were not imposed before baptism (Gingerich, 1969:112).

Among some of these people, folk or square dancing was common at much the same occasions when "Schluesselbund" *Leeda* were used among the "Kirchliche" "Russlaender", but these dances were often held in the hay loft of a barn, rather than in a house. The music of these songs tended to be livelier, and the words more colorful than their "Schluesselbund" counterparts.

One of these songs, a parody of the mid-1950's pop tune "Tell me why Baby Why" migrated to Manitoba with Mennonites coming from the Peace River District in northern Alberta. In this song, the singer

criticizes his girl who has returned from the city for her sophisticated manner and flirtatious actions. His criticisms of her high heels and wide skirt imply that she has rejected her upbringing. He says 'good-bye' to her, telling her he will stay home and feed the horse, rather than visiting her again. He is affirming the traditional values, and although he does not say so, one of these traditional values is that of fidelity and commitment in relationships.

In contrast to these love songs, there are several referring to promiscuous relationships: "*Daut fesh tiade Randevue*" ("The disturbed rendezvous"), "*Daut duh mien Leefts ta best*" ("That you are my dearest one"), and "*Marie, Marei, Marushkaka*" ("Marie, Mari, my dearest Marie"), all of them referring to night visits.

The lady who sang "*Daut fesh tiade Randevue*" was not familiar with the night visit verses commonly found in European collections of this song (Frischbier, 1877:14), so that the song took on the character of a teasing song between two lovers. "*Daut duh mien Leefts ta best*", a commonly known European Low German folksong (Meyer, 1927:33-34; Tardell, 1928:6-7; Schneider, 1958:40), was sung by Mennonite college students who had encountered the song during travels in northern Europe. The third song, "*Marie, Marei...*" was translated by an East Reserve teacher for his elementary school children. The lilting rhythm and catchy tune appealed to him and his students and it appears that they were unaware that they were singing anything other than a simple fun song.

Though all of these songs were widely known in Europe, it appears that they were relatively unknown among Mennonites. However, indirect references to hired hands or *Gauss eshlinyels* songs imply

that "*Dee Roussefeldsche Yunges*" and "*Ons Nohba Klohs e*" are not the only ones referring to promiscuous relationships.

One of the more common contemporary genres of Low German love songs was the lament. This would include "Tell me why baby why", "*Acht Meyalles*" ("Eight Girls"), and "*Duh bes mien Zonneschien*" ("You are my sunshine"), all composed by "Kanadier" since 1950. In none of these songs does one find the pathos which characterizes traditional laments such as "Barbara Allen". Instead, Low German singers use humor to camouflage their grief.

Eight domestically skilled young women bemoan their single fate in "*Acht Meyalles*". They exhibit all the traditional ideals expected of marriageable young women in a rural community, yet they have found no husbands. The lyrics are fairly straightforward, in fact, almost naive at times, but the humor derives from the fact that these women have the courage to sing publicly about a topic which would not be discussed publicly.

A few of the more recently composed love songs refer to specific events. The late Andrew Hamm tells how he was initially rejected, *chriach de Chiep* (literally, got the basket)<sup>1</sup>, but was later accepted by the girl he wanted to marry, in the song "*Onze goude oule Tiet*" ("In our good old days"). The suitor's friends tell his story in "*Aune 1951*" ("In 1951"), a wedding song written by the "*Heis chraitje*" for one of their members.

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<sup>1</sup>This expression was used when a fellow/girl decided to sever a relationship with a girl/boyfriend. According to legend, the expression originated when a certain girl tied a wicker basket to the bottom of her boyfriend's buggy to indicate that she wanted to break her relationship with him.

Another wedding song "*Een maunchet Poa*" ("Many a pair"), parodies the hymn "Ich und mein Haus" ("I and my household"), which was customarily sung at weddings held in General Conference churches til the mid-twentieth century. The hymn describes the ideal of Christian marriage: a relationship in which two individuals live in harmony through mutual submission to God and each other.

The Low German version, by comparison, reveals the realities of domestic tensions between husband and wife. Jealous of all the attention his bride gets at the wedding, the husband plots how he will reverse the situation after marriage: he will turn her into a domestic servant. She too imagines how she will dominate him. Their selfishness is chastised in the last verse. The song was brought to Manitoba by a descendent of the Molotschna Colony who emigrated to Canada from the central United States in the early part of the twentieth century, in response to anti-German, anti-pacifist feelings in the States.

Among these love songs, "*Allema! kann ich nicht lustig sein*" is by far the most commonly known. Several other songs, however, are still in the active repertoire: "*Acht Meyalles*", "*Duh bes mien Zonnes hien*" and "*Et via emohl en Frieja*" have all been sung at community fund raising events in southern Manitoba Mennonite communities and Winnipeg, within the past five years. Audiences respond enthusiastically to these humorous songs.

That these songs are by and large humorous is to be expected. It is presumed that the individual who wants to express his love 'seriously' would sing in a high language such as High German or English.

### Contemporary Songs

Southern Manitoba Mennonites have made sporadic attempts to use Low German song for public entertainment since the early 1950's, but it was not until the mid-1960's that this practice became generally acceptable. The changing context will be discussed later, but we will look here at the repertoire used at a new event, called a "*Plautdietshe Ohvent*" or Low German evening.

Generally held in a school auditorium, the one to two hour program consisted of dramas, skits, readings and songs. Initially, the songs were used as fillers, because the program was considered to be too short otherwise. That the songs were considered to be a non-essential part of the entertainment, can be seen from numerous newspaper reviews of these evenings in which almost the entire article is devoted to a discussion of the dramas presented, but the songs are only mentioned in passing (Friesen, 1977:1; Pembina Times, 1971:4).

For one group, the "*Heishraitje en de Willa Honich*" ("Locusts and Wild Honey"), the musical filler has expanded into several full-fledged Low German operettas, including *Koop en Bua foare noh Dietshe-laund* ("Koop and Buhr travel to Germany"), *Daut shtraume Shalduak* (literally, "The lovely Apron"), a Low German Mennonite counterpart to Gilbert and Sullivan's "H.M.S. Pinafore", and *Valoare oppe Steppe* ("Lost on the Steppes").

Apart from the operettas, the songs sung at "*Plautdietshe Ohvende*" have no thematic unity, but they do have a unity of purpose: to entertain, and to raise funds. Low German evenings have been

staged with causes ranging from agricultural fairs to high school tours.

For purposes of clarity, songs sung at Low German evenings will be discussed in two discrete categories: first the more general "Plautdietscha Ohvent" Leeda and second, the "Heishraitje" Leeda.

a) "Plautdietscha Ohvent" Leeda

As stated earlier, one of the primary purposes of "Plautdietscha Ohvent" Leeda is to entertain their audience. This purpose is accomplished through the use of various types of humor.

One type of humor which is effectively employed is the use of extremely literal translations for parodies such as "Old Black Joe". For example the translation of the mono-syllabic "Old Black Joe" to the bi-syllabic "*Oula Shvoata Youseff*" creates an ungainly syncopated rhythm in otherwise smoothly flowing poetry. This awkwardness supports the oft-spoken generalization that the low language is crude and incapable of refined poetic expression.

Another type of humor in these songs is the use of malapropisms, frequently expressing hyperbole. Terms usually reserved for the discussion of animal behavior, would be applied to human behavior, making it appear gross and crude. This type of humor is used in parodies of North American folksongs like "*O Begrowt mie nich oppe wiede Stapp*" ("O bury me not on the lone prairie/wide open fields"). The translations of the word 'bury' in this parody get progressively more crude: from 'don't cover me (with dirt)', to 'don't claw dirt over me', to 'don't heave lumps of dirt over me', hardly respectable terms for discussing one's burial! The humor lies in the

inappropriateness of these terms, again signifying the 'crudeness' of the low language.

Farce or buffoonery are found in another song, "*Fedreihde Velt*" ("Upside-down-world"), a nonsense song about a farmyard in which a cow sits in a crow's nest with her young goats. In contrast to other "*Plautdietshe Onvent*" Leeda, it is an older song of Prussian background brought to the village of Neubergthal on the West Reserve by a "Kanadier" farmer who spent considerably more time in Germany than other Mennonites did. Though the man died several years ago, young teenagers from his village still sing the song at the annual village picnic which marks the end of the school year.

Other types of humor gave expression to tensions between various groups of Mennonites. One of these types of humor was punning on dialectical differences between the two reserves, East and West, as an expression of rivalry between them. When an East Reserve male quartet of Molotschna Colony background sang their parody of "Old Black Joe" on the West Reserve, they would be certain to add the 'n' ending to nouns and past participles, to ridicule one of the dialectical distinctives of West Reserve Low German of Chortitiza Colony origin.

Another group ridiculed the recent German-speaking immigrant's attempt to speak English by singing an English song, "Polly Wolly Doodle all the Day" with a Low German accent. With flattened vowels, the song sounded like "*Pully Vully Duedel ull de Vehch*". The ridicule may have been addressed at their grandparents' generation, or perhaps at the residents of nearby villages or recent Mennonite



immigrants from Latin America, who speak English with this type of an accent.

At times "*Plautdietshe Ohvende*" performances contain unintended humor as well. One of these unintended types of humor was mispronunciations of Low German words by young "Russlaender" girls of the West Reserve who no longer spoke Low German, but were trying to sing songs in the language for entertainment.

All of these *Plautdietshe Leeda* are parodies of early twentieth century American folksongs or cowboy songs. This is indicative of the extent to which one borrowed musical idiom - the High German folksongs sung in Russia - have been replaced by another - North American folksong. The influence in both cases has moved from the 'high' language to the 'low' language; the tunes of the 'high' language have been borrowed for songs in the 'low' language, and not the reverse. This phenomenon will be analyzed in greater depth in the following chapter.

As stated earlier, one of the common elements in these songs is their ability to entertain their audiences through the effective use of humor. By accomplishing this goal, the songs attain their primary objective, of drawing large crowds to raise funds for various community projects.

Since the "*Heischraitje*" *Leeda* arose not only from the "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" *Leeda*, but also from another type of Low German song known as "Reunion Songs", we need to look first of all at these songs before moving into the discussion of the "*Heischraitje*" *Leeda*.

b) Reunion Songs

1974, the centennial of Mennonite migration to the East Reserve, provided the occasion for considerable reflection about the Mennonite heritage. In this year and the succeeding years, it became increasingly more popular to plan weekend village centennial celebrations or reunions. Along with skits, poems and informal speeches, songs were often used as a way of recalling the past.

Invariably, these songs were sung in Low German. The use of Low German for recalling history at these events did not signify its ascendance over High German or even English, the languages considered appropriate for song, drama and history. Rather, the use of the 'low' language indicated its historic position as mother tongue of the "Kanadier" who organized most of these events, and secondly, its status as an archival tool. Since one does not archive cultural items in current usage, the use of Low German for reunion songs was indicative of the extent to which English has replaced it as the colloquial mode of communication.

Though a centennial celebration or reunion was sometimes called a "*Traffen*" or 'meeting', songs composed for the event were always referred to in English, simply as reunion songs. This label might be prefixed with the village of origin, as for example, Reinland Reunion Songs, but always referred specifically to the songs composed especially for the event, and never to hymns or folksongs from the past sung alongside these reunion songs.

Mennonites, who throughout their history have described themselves as "heimatlos"<sup>1</sup> or 'homeless', suddenly burst out singing Low German verses of "This Land is Your Land!" as though they owned the entire continent, or regarded their village as the extent of the country. No, they did not suddenly own a country, but their enthusiasm does reflect their comfortable minority group status in the country of their choice.

In addition to several parodies of "This Land is your Land!", the Reunion Songs consist of numerous ballads. By comparison with other Low German ballads, they are less given to social criticism and more to a nostalgic recreation of the past. This can be seen, for example, in the chorus of "*Mien Darp - Bloumenfelt*" ("My Village - Blumenfeld"), sung to the tune, "Something to Sing About":

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<sup>1</sup>The term "heimatlos" or 'homeless' refers to the fact that the Mennonites have never had a country they could call their own. This fact has found expression in a Low German poem, possibly written by Klaus Klaussen in Russia. The poem, dated 4.4.46, is found in the Heinrich Friesen collection of Mennonite folklore (microfilm in CMC Archives). The poem begins

*Daut woot aul wada farjoa,  
Daut woot aul wada green,  
Blos z wie hawn keenen farjoa,  
Send emma opp de Been.*

and can be translated as follows:

Once again its springtime,  
Once more its turning green,  
Just we will have no springtime,  
Are always on our feet.

From the vale to the crossroads,  
 From the wide fields to the cemetery,  
 Not far from the brook  
 Where the spring waters flow,  
 Where the grass looks so much greener,  
 And the water tastes much better,  
 Right here in Blumenfeld,  
 I feel at home.

(Peter G. Elias, my trans.)

And yet, when one hears, in the fourth verse of this song, that in Blumenfeld "the inhabitants are friendly...the *Faspa* (afternoon lunch)<sup>1</sup> tastes so much better...neighbor knows his neighbour," one realizes that this is not simply a memory of an idyllic past. It is also a statement about the present. The villager who has moved to town or to a city feels that he no longer lives in a place where "neighbor knows his neighbor" or where the water tastes good. He now lives in a socially and physically alien environment.

Sometimes the threat of the outside world was given visual representation. By enclosing his property with a barbed wire fence ("This Land is Your Land!" - "*Heis chraitje*" version), the villager not only kept his cattle in, he also kept the stranger out.

The classifications do not end with the differentiation between villagers and strangers. Villagers themselves are classified according to such criteria as suitable or unsuitable playmates ("*Zou*

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<sup>1</sup>*Faspa* is an early afternoon luch generall consisting of "Zwieback", a sweet double bun, jam, cheese, possibly some cold sliced meats, and coffee. During the week, especially in the summertime, it provided a convenient afternoon break for farmers who wanted to work as late as possible before eating supper. Sunday *faspa*, by comparison, was a time of socializing with friends and relatives. (Dick, 1958:9)

*via daut*"/"That's how it was") or membership within voluntary organizations such as the male village street gangs ("Legend of the *Gauss es hlinjels*").

Since villages were often inhabited by several extended families, and kinship played a significant role in Mennonite socio-economic relationships, one could expect some mention of geneological ties in Reunion songs.

In traditional village folklore, kinship and social standing would have been discussed in one of three ways: firstly, by tracing an individual's family tree, secondly, by reciting a poem listing the inhabitants of the village in the order in which their dwellings appeared along the main street of the village, or thirdly, by reciting a humorous poem using rhyming puns on each family name.

In the song "*De Horndiena*" ("The Horndeaners"), however, we are given an alphabetical listing of the village's inhabitants. Why has the custom changed? One of the foremost reasons for the change may be that school roll calls and contemporary official ways of organizing lists of people use this convention. In other words, a literary convention has been imposed on an oral tradition. Another reason for the change is the changing settlement patterns of villagers: in many villages there now are several streets rather than only one main one, so listing inhabitants in the order of their dwelling places would be difficult and awkward.

Many other aspects of the behavior of village youths are revealed in these songs. One finds that entertainment for village boys, depending on their age, included playing in the sandbox,

catching gophers, playing baseball ("Ballad of Peter Harms"), cracking sunflower seeds - probably a euphemism for crude behavior ("*Dee Horndienshe Meyalles*" / "The Horndean Girls"; "The Legend of the *Gauss eshlinyels*"), and driving around weekends in one of the few cars owned by village youths ("Legend of the *Gauss eshlinyels*"). One hears that "*Dee Horndienshe Meyalles*" ran away from the boys, probably because they were shy, but apart from that, the only other information one gleans about village girls is that they were courted by boys from other villages ("Ballad of Peter Harms"), a practice already found among Mennonites in Russia. The absence of references to girls in these songs lends support to the generalization that songs in the 'low' language were considered to be crude, and therefore, incongruous with the refined behavior expected of village girls.

That the memory of the past in these songs is selective, is seen in the dearth of references to work. There is one brief reference to boys feeding the pigs ("*Dee Horndienshe Meyalles*"), and one song about a man raising pigeons ("The Ballad of the *Duevenmeista*" / "The Ballad of the 'master' of Pigeons"). The Reinland village store is described as the social centre of the *Gauss eshlinyels*, but the storeowner's chief source of revenue seems to be the 10¢ he gets from each village boy to whom he gives a return trip to Haskett, where there is a bigger store, and probably girls! Consequently, the picture of the past which emerges is one in which one was carefree ("*Zou via daut*"), enjoyed *Faspa* with one's neighbors ("*Mien Darp - Bloumenfelt*") and drove to neighboring villages to socialize.

For the most part, "Kanadier" and historically conscious "Russlaender" of Chortitza background have been involved in planning reunions and writing songs for them. Of six reunions studied between 1974 and 1978, only one, the Sommerfeld Centennial on the West Reserve, did not include any Low German songs. Organizers of the event had no explanation for this omission.

c) "Heis chraitje" Leeda

"De Heis chraitje en de Willa Honich" ("The Locusts and Wild Honey"), or the "Heis chraitje" ("Locusts") as they are commonly called, are a unique phenomenon in the history of Low German song. Though they have sung together informally since they were young boys, the group as such was formed in 1974. Throughout the years of their existence, the group has consisted of five or six young men, presently in their mid-twenties, accompanied on the piano by the 'Wild Honey', the wife of one of the organizers of the group.<sup>1</sup>

Making their initial appearance as the "Heis chraitje" at a Talent Night held in Landmark in June of 1974, the group sang "This Land ain't your Land", a satirical parody of the North American popular song, "This Land is your Land". To this parody, they added two verses about the coming of the Mennonites to the East Reserve.

East Reserve Mennonite identity is described by means of a curious image, symbolizing their exclusiveness: the barbed wire fence, which not only keeps the cattle in, but the stranger out of

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<sup>1</sup>Because we are focussing on the lyrics in this chapter, the structure of the group will be discussed in greater detail in the succeeding chapter.

one's territory. This exclusiveness is made more explicit. The "*Heis chraitje*" sing about Mennonites settling from Prairie Rose to Rosenort, the geographical boundaries of Mennonites of "Kleine-gemeinde" (lit. 'Little Church', presently known as 'Evangelical Mennonite Church) church district. In this first song they are already indicating that they speak for only a portion of "Kanadier" immigrants, and thus show their membership in a relatively closed group of Mennonites with a parochial bias.

Since 1974, the "*Heis chraitje*" have performed at numerous community events on the East Reserve, writing new Low German songs for each occasion.

The first of these was a "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" in March 1975, staged by the Landmark Alumni Drama Club, of which the "*Heis chraitje*" are active members. The Drama Club decided to use Low German rather than English so that their performance would not be seen as competition with the annual high school drama. The evening of Low German skits, readings, and jokes was an effort to raise money for scholarships for high school students.

Because the evening's entertainment was too short, the "*Heis chraitje*" were asked to sing several songs. Once again, they sang "This Land ain't your Land". Along with the familiar "Kanadier" ballad "*Ons Noh ba Klohs e haud ne Koa*", they sang several of their own compositions: "*Vie zent hia fõndoaag toup yekohme*"<sup>1</sup> ("We have

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<sup>1</sup>Note the Molotschna Low German dialect (c.f. page ).



gathered together here today"), "*En Muhs darp vohn vie aula zaumpt*" ("In Mouse Village we all live together") and "*Duh bes mien Zonneschien*" ("You are my Sunshine").

As in their first song, the "*Heis chraitje*" emphasize group solidarity in their 1975 songs. In "*Vie, zent hia...*", a secular Low German counterpart to the opening hymn of a church service, the singers say they have gathered with the audience to review the history of their community - that is, their common past. In "*En Muhs darp...*", a parody of "Old MacDonald had a Farm", we are told that "we are all well acquainted with each other." They assume that no strangers are present, possibly because they are singing at a locally advertised event, and possibly because they think their neighbors in other villages will not attend. People in the French-speaking community of St. Lorette would be excluded by the language factor, and people in Blumenort, for example, would exclude themselves because, according to inhabitants of Landmark, 'they are much more conservative than we are,' and would consider an evening of Low German entertainment too frivolous. It is also assumed that townspeople, like the people in Steinbach, would not attend a village event, because they are too *huachnehzich* (lit. 'high-nosed' or snobbish) to associate with village folk. The "*Heis chraitje*" assumption that it is 'just us village folk' in the audience is most likely correct.

Like other "*Plautdietshe Ohvent*" Leeda, these "*Heis chraitje*" Leeda employ humor to entertain their audiences. One of the types of humor used is that of puns on the names of villagers, such as *Panna*, *Panna*, *Becks etranna* (Penner, Penner, Pants-ripper). Situational humor is used in "*Duh bes mien Zonneschien*". In this song, a suitor, hitching

his horse to a fence, is attacked by an angry dog who tries to make mincemeat of him. Substituting a 'bleep' for his intended response provides two levels of humor. On the one hand, it is a socially acceptable way of expressing frustration in a society which frowned on the use of expletives, especially in public or in mixed company. On the other hand, it is a way of satirizing Canadian television stations which had recently substituted a 'bleep' for an 'unprintable' expression by Prime Minister Trudeau. Other types of humor include surprise paraphrases such as "you are my sunshine... you make me happy in the moonshine" and the juxtaposition of polite and 'crude' language as in "please don't take off from me so that the dust goes flying," which obviously loses its humor in translation.

In "*Vie zent hia...*", unlike other "*Plautdietshe Ohvent*" Leeda, the economic objective of the evening is spelled out:

"We now have from you what we want,  
For this is no cheap entertainment."

Audience criticism of this song, however, is not directed at the explicit statement of intent in the lyrics, but at the use of a traditionally religious musical idiom for a 'secular' song. This reaction will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

For their second "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*", the Landmark Drama Club presented a Low German operetta based on Mennonite writer Arnold Dyck's novel *Koop en Bua foare noh Dietschland* (Koop and Buhr travel to Germany).<sup>1</sup> Koop and Buhr, fictional characters through whom

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<sup>1</sup>Dyck, a writer and publisher who lived in Steinbach for many years prior to his death in 1969, published this book in two volumes in 1961 and 1962 as one in a series in which his mythical characters, Koop and Buhr expressed Mennonite attitudes to many social issues.

Dyck viewed Mennonite village life, were 'bush farmers' living in *Muhs darp* (Mouse Village), which probably derived its name from the fact that it was a miniature representation of Mennonite life. Their visit to Germany provides the framework for the discussion of issues of special interest to Mennonites: non-resistance, language and ethnicity, and drinking.

Lyrics for the operetta were written by the "*Heis chraitje*" and by the "*Willa Honich's*" ("Wild Honey's") mother, Mrs. Kay Friesen of Mitchell. Among the songs are some which refer specifically to Koop and Buhr's vacation in Germany, and others of a more general nature referring to various aspects of Mennonite village life.

The 'Koop and Buhr' songs included "*En Muhs darp bie Yrientohl*", in which we are told about the decision and preparation for the voyage, "*Shepfoara*" ("Sailors"), "*Eins, Zwei, Suffau*" ("One, Two, ?"), "*Bees ickle*" ("Bicycle"), a parody of "Bicycle built for Two" describing Buhr's abortive attempts at dating German girls, "*Mien Mehdel*", written by the "*Heis chraitje*" present two differing pictures of the sailor: the tough sailor who can weather any storm, and the homesick lover who can hardly wait to get home.

In the 'Koop and Buhr' songs written by Mrs. Friesen, we get a closer look at Koop and Buhr themselves. We are reminded that they are 'crude' farmers. After all, the idea of going to Germany occurs to them while they are shovelling manure, and not while they are leafing through travel brochures. The naivete of the peasant's understanding of history is seen in their assumption that a ship took Mennonites directly from Germany to *Muhs darp*. Although Manitoba Mennonites did not have their origin in Germany, Arnold Dyck, who

wrote this book in the mid-1940's, could be using this 'confusion' to react either against Canadian anti-German sentiment expressed during the war, or against the strongly pro-German feelings which had existed among Mennonites during the 1930's. The differences Koop and Buhr see between themselves and the Germans they meet are obviously intended to disprove cultural affinity between them and Mennonites.

The naivete of the peasant as world traveller is further satirized by comments about his preparation for the trip. The two farmers take gunny sacks instead of luggage, and wear new caps and overalls for their travels abroad.

In Germany, they spend time visiting their cousins and visiting points of historic interest. Their lack of cultural affinity with the Germans they have visited is revealed in their conversation upon return to *Muhs darp*. They are critical of people who drink, of people who show their elitism by speaking High German rather than Low German, and of those who go vacationing at the lake when they ought to be home harvesting their crops. They conclude that anyone who lives differently than they do must surely be pagan. Through their comments, Koop and Buhr expose the ethnocentrism and critical attitude of some Mennonites to non-Mennonites, as well as to Mennonites who live by a different ethical standard.

The songs of a more general nature performed in the operetta included three "*Heischraitje*" compositions: "*En Muhs darp vohn vie aula zaumpt*" composed a year earlier, and two new compositions, "*Faspa*" ("Lunchtime") and "*Vie Vohne hia en Muhs darp*" ("We live here in Mouse Village").

A parody of "Keligrew's Soiree", an East Coast Canadian folksong (Fowke, 1973:202), "*Faspa*" presents a generous taste of traditional Mennonite foods. The "*Heis chraitje*" ridicule the tendency to overindulge in one's favorite foods, all the while talking about dieting. Though this tendency is not uniquely Mennonite, it is certainly present among Mennonites.

The expression of Mennonite group solidarity is once again found in "*Vie vohne hia en Muhs darp*". Group solidarity, we are told, is created by conformity to a strict moral code, and by an active pacifism directed at reducing conflict in a community like *Muhs darp*. That the assertion "we all believe in unity, we all work together" is an ideal far from the actual state of affairs in *Muhs darp*, is seen in audience reaction to the ironical statement that "here and there, there is someone" who does not abide by the norms of the community. This statement is always greeted by spontaneous laughter, or at least, knowing smiles.

By the time of the next "*Plautdiets cha Ohvent*" in October 1977, the "*Heis chraitje*" *Leeda* were no longer considered as a filler, but as an essential part of the program. At this particular program, they repeated the general interest songs from the Koop and Buhr drama, and their earlier composition, "*Duh bes mien Zonneshien*". These songs were heard alongside four new compositions: "*Sheene Greet*" ("Lovely Greta"), a parody of 'K-K-K-Katie', "*Ons Goade*" ("Our Garden"), "*Shvoatuag*" ("Black/Ebony Eyes"), and "*Blingyul Lament*" ("Blind/Bilingual Lament").

In "*Sheene Greet*", a confident young man claims he can surmount any difficulties he may encounter in the pursuit of Greta who bakes such delicious *tveeback* (double buns). Her father, 'potato Peters' is stubborn but one can get around him by arranging a secretive relationship. A rival suitor is really no competition. He is so simple that he goes courting on a tractor! Unfortunately, Greta has inherited some of the old man's stubbornness, so there may be a real obstacle after all.

One can safely conclude that a song praising a young woman for her domestic skills was composed by a group of men with very traditional expectations of the women they plan to marry, or at least with the ability to articulate the traditional expectations of the community. Through this song, too, we are introduced to the Mennonite custom of nicknames based on occupational background, used to differentiate between villagers with the same or similar names. As in Low German songs coming from Russia, the simple peasant who does not know the rules of social decorum, that is, that one does not go courting on a tractor, is ridiculed.

"*Ons Goade*" ("Our garden") provides an example of the way in which many Mennonite children were taught the work ethic; whenever they had free time, they were sent into the garden to hoe it. The song also contains a wealth of information about the vegetables and weeds which used to spend the summers vacationing in Mennonite farmer's gardens.

'Extraneous noise' on a tape of the first performance of "*Shvoatuag*" provides significant information about audience reaction to this song. Nervous laughter, followed by unnatural silence,

gradually gives way to very persistent cracking of sunflower seeds. The audience reaction reveals their confusion; they do not know whether this is a serious or funny song. The "*Heis chraitje*" say they wrote this parody of the Everly Brothers' song to ridicule the heart-breaking tear-jerker lyrics of most country and western music, popular in their home community.

The "*Heis chraitje*" frequently sing "*Blinyul Lament*" at the close of a "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" or similar event. This ballad narrates the story of language change among Mennonites in southern Manitoba. Various factors, they say, have contributed to the decline of Low German: public school education in English and High German, the media - even CFAM which claims to serve the Mennonites, but has little Low German programming, the proximity of other ethnic groups and consequent intermarriage, eg., with French-speaking girls on the East Reserve, or perhaps the ease with which many Mennonites have assimilated to the dominant culture (Klassen, 1978:26).

'Mispronunciation' of the word 'bilingual' in the title of this song leaves it open to interpretation. *Blinyul* may refer to the Canadian bilingualism issue, with its recognition of one minority group's language rights, possibly at the expense of other minority rights. The ambiguous term may also refer to Mennonites whose eagerness to assimilate to the dominant society leaves them blind to the loss of their own heritage, or it may be a pun on immigrant English. The "*Heis chraitje*" intentionally created this ambiguity.

When the "*Heis chraitje*" voice their criticism of the Canadian bilingual policy because of its implications for other ethnic

minorities, they are reacting to another more immediate threat: The 'danger' of greeting each other with "Bonjour, Monsieur" (Good-day Sir), instead of "*Goun Dach, mien Frint*" (Good day, my friend) arises from the proximity of Landmark to the settlements of French-speaking Manitobans. The change from the familiar 'my friend' to the impersonal 'sir' signifies the loss of group solidarity and familiarity envisaged by, for example, intermarriage with other cultural groups such as their French neighbors with whom they have had few dealings in the past.

A "*Heis chraitje*" performance at the 1978 Mennonite Festival of Art and Music, a fund-raising event in aid of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate held annually at Polo Park Shopping Centre in Winnipeg, featured much of the standard "*Heis chraitje*" repertoire, along with "*Hackshtacka*" ("Chopsticks"), a satire of a child's aversion to taking piano lessons. Mennonites too have begun to prove the truth of Jaques Barzun's assertion that

the piano is the social instrument par excellence. It is drawing-room furniture, a sign of bourgeois prosperity, the most massive of the devices by which the young are tortured in the name of education and the grown-up in the name of entertainment.  
(Barzun, 1954:viii).

In comparison with other Mennonite folk groups performing at the Festival, the "*Heis chraitje*" drew a large enthusiastic audience.

Since that time, the "*Heis chraitje*" have performed two more Low German operettas. Though these do not fall within the research period of this particular study, I will mention them briefly in order to complete the picture of "*Heis chraitje*" Leeda.



In "*Daut Shtraume Shalduak*", presented in spring of 1979, *Muhs darp*, at threshing time, becomes the setting for another look at Mennonite village life. The sailor gang of the "H.M.S. Pinafore", on which the operetta is based, becomes a *drasha geng* (threshing crew), played, of course, by the "*Heis chraitje*". And the sea captain becomes *Herr Panna* (Mr. Penner), a rich "Russlaender" businessman from North Kildonan, a suburb of Winnipeg with a traditionally high percentage of Mennonite population. *Herr Panna* comes to *Muhs darp* in search of a wife. He decides that the *Shult's* (village mayor's) daughter will make the ideal wife because she is of the right social standing for a man of his pedigree:

Dramatic tension in the operetta arises from the proverbial romantic triangle: the mayor's daughter, whom *Herr Panna* wants to marry, is in love with a poor man in the threshing crew. The conflict is resolved when the nurse 'conveniently' remembers that she exchanged the mayor and the poor thresher in their cradles. Since the mayor's daughter is now, in effect, a poor thresher's daughter, *Herr Panna* can no longer marry her, but she is free to marry the man she loves, who is now elevated to the status of village mayor!<sup>1</sup>

Like traditional Low German songs, the songs in this operetta expose the fact that one's position in the Mennonite socio-economic hierarchy is an overriding consideration in choosing a marriage partner. This operetta too contains the first Low German song which

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<sup>1</sup>It may not have occurred to Gilbert and Sullivan, when they wrote "H.M.S. Pinafore", that the girl was marrying a man of her father's generation. Though this is not a Mennonite custom, it was left unaltered in the Low German version.

speaks of the socio-economic differences between various denominations of Mennonites. Unfortunately, a detailed look at the themes in this operetta must await a future study.

"*Valoare oppe Steppe*" ("Lost on the steppes"), based on Arnold Dyck's autobiographical "Lost on the Steppes"<sup>1</sup> provided the storyline for the Landmark drama group's production in 1980. "Hans" (John) Toews, as Dyck calls himself, is a little Mennonite boy who wants to become an artist rather than a farmer. Because the novel is a psychological drama with little outward action, the drama club created dramatic tension in the operetta by emphasizing the inequalities between the poor *drasha geng* and the rich landowner for whom they work, and between the German-speaking Mennonites and their 'Russian' neighbors, whom they considered to be culturally inferior.

Of interest is the fact that this story, set in early twentieth century Russia, is a "Russlaender" story presented by a "Kanadier" drama group. "Russlaender" involved in drama usually affiliate with the Mennonite German Theatre Society which presents High German dramas with little apparent effort to express their Mennonite heritage through them. In other words, the rural "Kanadier" drama group critiques the inequalities in Mennonite society, while the urban "Russlaender" drama group identifies with the elite of another society, namely Germans from Germany.

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<sup>1</sup>Arnold Dyck, a Mennonite writer and publisher, wrote, illustrated, and published his autobiography in a five-volume series entitled, "Verloren in der Steppe" in the 1940's, while living in Steinbach. These books have now been translated from High German into English, and compiled into a single volume - "Lost on the Steppes" (Dyck, 1974).

Though the songs of this drama will not be analyzed in detail in the present study, they best achieved a balance between earthy humor and true pathos, probably to the surprise of those for whom Low German is a vulgar peasant language in which one does not become sentimental or express hurt. In the sense in which it expressed the total range of human feeling, the operetta continued Arnold Dyck's Low German literary tradition, which made the Mennonite reader feel "at ease with his own identity" (Toews, 1979:28). Because Dyck wrote in Low German rather than in High German,

The narratives were stripped of moral artificialities and unattainable religious ideals and so allowed the Mennonite to view his strengths and weaknesses without any sense of guilt or judgement (ibid.).

This brief look at Low German operettas presented by the "*Heis chraitje*" in Manitoba, shows that they are moving beyond the confines of the 'barbed-wire fence' mentality of their first song. From the expression of East Reserve "Kanadier", or specifically "Kleinegemeinde" distinctives, they have moved into a broader expression of Mennonite identity. Their statements about Mennonite village life have become less local, less self-conscious, and less topical. They are no longer trying to prove that one can say something socially significant in Low German song; they are doing it. The development of popular rural ethnic theatre at this point in Canadian history will be discussed in more detail in one of the following chapters.

Many of the more popular "*Heis chraitje*" Leeda performed during the past several years have been included on their recording "*Sprie*" ("Chaff"), released in early 1981. To my knowledge, this is

the first recording to feature 'secular' Low German songs. Previous Low German recordings have featured religious songs, or 'secular' dramas and readings. Public support for this venture can be seen in the fact that during its first three weeks on the market, the record reportedly sold 5,000 copies.

The record will make the songs of the "*Heischraitje*" accesible to Mennonites in Ontario, Nebraska, California, and British Columbia who have expressed interest in them. The recording, also available in cassette form, is being given air time on ZP-30, a Mennonite radio station in the Paraguayan Chaco, and has already found its way to Mennonite settlements in other Latin American countries such as Mexico.

#### Summary and Conclusions

The Low German songs in this collection cover a span of some 200 years and 3 distinct historical eras in the history of the Mennonites: the Russian Mennonite, early Manitoba Mennonite, and contemporary Mennonite experience.

This broad historical background has nevertheless given birth to a corpus of materials with remarkable similarities. Though sung in the low language, in which one supposedly does not say anything of social significance, Low German songs have historically been a method of inculcating the values of a society, whether through didactic animal tales for the young, through indirect references to ideal behavior, or through ridicule of socially unacceptable behavior.

Alongside the expression of group solidarity, Low German song has traditionally provided a mechanism for the expression of social

tension: intergenerational conflict, tensions of social hierarchy, village/reserve rivalry, Mennonite denominational differences and inter-ethnic distance.

Significant differences among Manitoba Mennonites are revealed through their knowledge or lack of knowledge about Low German song. As has been shown in the foregoing discussion, Mennonites of different immigration periods know substantially different Low German songs. Though "Russlaender" have brought some of their own Low German songs from Russia, it appears that "Kanadier" have always dominated the Low German song tradition, particularly the Low German renaissance of the 1970's. "Auswanderer" for whom Low German is still very much a 'lingua franca', and "Neueingewanderte" whose Canadian history has been too brief for them to become involved in reunions or centennials, have by comparison been relatively uninvolved in the present day Low German renaissance, and have contributed proportionately less traditional Low German song material.

Differences among Mennonites become even more apparent when one looks at the sources from which they have borrowed melodies for their Low German songs.

## CHAPTER IV

### MUSICAL ASPECTS

The melodies are folklike, serving primarily as a vehicle for the texts and have little merit in themselves (Martens, 1962:366).

Martens' comment voices the assumption commonly held by Mennonites concerning the melodies of Low German songs. Because the melodies are 'just borrowed' or 'just folksong', it is assumed that they are insignificant and therefore do not merit further investigation.

Mennonites, however, tend to forget that other aspects of their culture which they regard as 'uniquely Mennonite' are also borrowed. 'Traditional' Mennonite culture includes such things as the "Hollaenderdorf" (Dutch village) borrowed from the Dutch (Krahn, 1959e:821), certain architectural features borrowed from the Prussians (Krah, 1969a:149), and foods and sunflower seeds borrowed from their neighbors in the Ukraine. And yet, Mennonites regard these items as their own distinctives and not as 'just borrowed'.

The distinction which Mennonites make between 'traditional' and 'just borrowed' cultural items reflects the corresponding values they assign to them. Borrowed items with a high status value and no negative connotations are regarded as 'traditional', while borrowed items with a low status value are considered to be 'just borrowed'. Because Low German has traditionally been the low language, with a low social value, the melodies of Low German songs, even when they

are identical with melodies used for High German songs sung by Mennonites, are regarded as 'just borrowed'. Though both words and music of most High German hymns are borrowed, the older generation of Mennonites invariably speaks of these songs as 'our lovely old songs'. When the label 'just borrowed' is applied to the melodies of Low German songs, it shows not only that these melodies are borrowed, but also the value Mennonites place on them because of their relation to the low language. For some 'conservative' Mennonites, the fact that Low German songs are primarily secular would also be just cause for assigning them a low social value, such as 'just borrowed'.

Anthropologists, like Adamson Hoebel, however, tell us that "An inventory of traits in any culture shows more borrowed items than independently invented elements" (Hoebel, 1966:83). The task of the anthropologist or ethnomusicologist, therefore, is to examine these traits in order to determine what criteria have influenced the selection of some and rejection of other traits from the available pool of resources, and to determine what modifications have occurred in the borrowing process.

For this reason, an examination of Mennonite musical borrowing practices should provide insight not only into social relations among Mennonites, but also into inter-ethnic relations between Mennonites and their neighbors. For example, the fact that Mennonites have used only a handful of Russian folk tunes alongside dozens of High German folk and religious tunes certainly requires explanation.

Furthermore, because Mennonites have had varying immigration histories and at times been almost as separated from each other as

from their non-Mennonite neighbors, one would expect these differences to be reflected in their musical borrowing practices as well. One finds, for example, that "Kanadier" and "Russlaender" sing the song "*Zueza Petruetzha*" to two different melodies, or that most North American folksong melodies, borrowed for Low German songs, are used by "Kanadier". This too requires an explanation.

### Musical Sources

We begin our discussion of borrowed melodies with a look at the sources from which they are taken. A survey of these sources reveals several distinctive categories: chant, High German folksongs, Russian folksongs, High German religious songs, English religious songs and choruses, and traditional North American folksong. In order to understand the significance of using a particular type of melody, we need to look at each of these categories in more detail.

Folklorists tell us that the use of chant for children's rhymes is universal. Like chants in other languages, Low German chants have a rhythmic pattern of four beats per line, and use the melodic interval of a falling minor third, with the exception of one informant who used a falling perfect fourth.

With the exception of the *Gausseleet* "*Dee Bloumeuatshe Yunges*" ("The Boys of Blumenort"), chant is used only for children's songs. Nevertheless, chant seems appropriate for this song because, like many chanted nursery rhymes, its purpose is that of teasing the listener.

Chanted children's songs were found only among "Kanadier" and "Neueingewanderte". "Russlaender" said they had recited these poems



in Low German, but sang their counterparts in High German. This response is predictable. We would not expect the "Russlaender", who frequently favored the high language, to sing in the low language 'unnecessarily'.

Turning to High German folksong melodies, we see that they are used mainly for children's songs brought to Canada from Russia by "Kanadier", "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte". Only very rarely are these melodies used for contemporary Low German song, because other sources are more readily available. Nor are they commonly used by "Auswanderer" who volitionally had less contact with literary sources in the high language, or as one author dares to tell us, "suffer from considerable cultural deterioration" (Bender, 1973c: 291)!

Where Low German songs are reportedly translations or parodies of High German song, the original melody is retained for the Low German version. Since many of these Low German songs appear in various Low German dialects in nineteenth century collections of Prussian folklore, it is possible that some Mennonites have always sung the Low German version, while others learned the High German version. However, most Mennonites assume that the songs were originally 'written' in High German, the literary language, and were later translated into Low German, because 'they were just for the children'. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence at present to substantiate or falsify this speculation.

What can however be documented, is the use of certain High German folksong melodies for specific topics in Low German song.

The tune of the High German children's song "Alle Jahre Wieder"<sup>1</sup> ("Every Year again"), was used by Mennonites of all immigration periods for a variety of Low German children's songs. A tune called "Frage und Antwort Spiel" ("Question and Answer Play") was coupled with question-answer type lyrics. Among "Russlaender" there existed the use of these tunes for "Schluesselbund *Leeda*" in which Low German verses were added to High German songs with the intent of teasing someone.

The predominance of High German melodies for Low German songs coming from Russia stands in sharp contrast to the virtual non-existence of Ukrainian folksong melodies in this corpus of materials. In fact, only three Ukrainian melodies were found: two of these were used for teasing songs, and the other, from an anonymous source, is probably retained for a translation of a Russian lullaby.

One of the melodies used for teasing songs appears with lyrics such as "Aus dee Yued", "Aus dee Sheepa" and "Lamche haud en Kobbelche", all of which are songs ridiculing the individual who does not live by the social norms. Ukrainians identified this melody as "Oipied haiyem, haiyem", ("Near the Grove"), while Mennonites considered it to be a variant of the High German folktune "Fuchs du hast die Gans gestollen" ("Fox, you have stolen the goose").

Either of these interpretations, of the melody as Ukrainian or High German in origin, makes a critical social comment. If the tune were High German, one would have to comment on the similarity

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<sup>1</sup>Since it is a variant rather than the actual tune of "Alle Jahre Wieder" which is used, it is possible that the melody of both the High German and Low German songs is a variant of an older folk melody.

of topics in the lyrics. If, however, the tune were Ukrainian, its use for a song of social criticism would mirror a negative attitude on the part of Mennonites to their peasant neighbors whom they considered culturally inferior.

The dearth of Ukrainian melodies among Low German songs has a twofold explanation. Firstly, Low German songs are more prevalent among "Kanadier" and "Auswanderer" than among Mennonites of any other immigration period. These people had only minimal contact with the Russian/Ukrainian<sup>1</sup> people before they moved to Canada, in the 1870's, providing little opportunity for them to learn Russian tunes. Even among "Russlaender" who remained in Russia for another fifty years and were educated in both Russian and High German, one finds virtually no Russian folktunes among Low German songs, despite the fact that they sang Russian folksongs.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the proportionately small number of Russian tunes used, and their use for songs of ridicule, in contrast to High German folktunes which were used for children's songs and lullabies, provides an index to Mennonite attitudes to these two ethnic groups, the Germans and the Russians.

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<sup>1</sup>Mennonites use the terms Russian and Ukrainian interchangeably to refer to their Ukrainian neighbors in the Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup>"Russlaender" knowledge of a respect for Russian folksongs is documented in such facts as the formation of a choir in 1924 by newly-arrived immigrants "for the purpose of singing German and Russian songs at the 'Jugendverein' (youth group) meetings" (Berg, 1979:89-90). This confirms Quiring's observation that among the Mennonites in Russia, Russian folksongs and tunes were accepted by the younger generations, mostly by those with secondary education.

From the very beginning of settlement in Russia the Mennonite cultural intellectual orientation was westward - first to the Prussian homeland, and in the second half of the nineteenth century to German culture collectively. There seems to have been an almost instinctive understanding that Germaness was basic to Mennonite survival in an alien culture.... The second assumption supposed that in a social, economic and cultural sense, the surrounding Slavic world was inferior to the Mennonite-German heritage and could add little or nothing to it (Towes, 1979:24-25).

Contrary to generalizations by ethnomusicologists like Bruno Nettl that musical change is "caused" by "contact among peoples and cultures" (Nettl, 1964:232), the contrast between Mennonite adaptation of German and Russian tunes reveals a selective borrowing process based on "factors of political domination and social resistance" (Blacking, 1977:13). High German tunes, associated with "cultural advancement" (Epp, 1974:178), could be used with children in the home, but Russian tunes, representative of "cultural debasement" were only used for teasing tunes sung on the village streets.

Turning to the next category of melodic sources, we note that the melodies of High German religious tunes are used for three types of Low German songs: Low German hymns, children's songs, and social comment or criticism songs.

Low German hymns are, as a rule, translations of High German, and occasionally English, hymns. Since they are translations, their original melodies are retained. This particular phenomenon has, however, not occurred at the grassroots level. Instead, these hymns are translations by Mennonites of Mennonite Brethren Church background for radio broadcasts directed at the "Auswanderer" in Mexico and Paraguay, and people of predominantly Low German speaking background, usually belonging to the Reinlander and Sommerfelder Churches, in

Manitoba, Saskatchewan and even California. Musically and theologically, these hymns, usually gospel songs, contrast with the chorales sung in the churches represented in the radio audience. This choice is intentional because of the evangelistic thrust of these radio broadcasts.

Secondly, the use of High German religious tunes for children's songs is a distinctively "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" trait. A "Russlaender" lady used the tune "Wie sollt ich muessig bleiben?" ("How can I remain idle?") and a "Neueingewanderte" lady used the tune "Er lebt" ("He lives") for the children's songs "*Tiep Heenaches*". "Jesus liebt mich" ("Jesus loves me") was coupled with "*Miene Mame es mie gout*" ("My mother loves me"), while "Russlaender", almost without exception, used the tune of the Christmas song "Ihr Kinderlein kommet" ("O come little children") for the lullaby "*Zuezha Petruetzha*".

People who used these religious tunes for Low German children's songs did not regard them as religious tunes because of their new function. When I suggested to one lady that the tune she had used for "*Tiep Heenaches*" was actually a religious tune, she was quite adamant in stating that the tunes were very different and sang the song again to prove her point. When we listened to it on tape, she reluctantly admitted a similarity between the two melodies although she was not prepared to accept them as identical.

The emergence of hymn tunes for children's songs at this point in Russian Mennonite history may have been a subconscious reaction to threats to Mennonite religious and cultural ideals, first through intensified emphasis on russification after 1870, and later through

socio-political upheavals caused by the Russian Revolution. Because "religious instruction, including the singing of hymns had been forbidden in school...music in the church became more and more important" after the revolution (Berg, 1979:43). The elders of the church, concerned about their young people, envisioned music as a way of passing on the faith (ibid., 44).

There may also have been another reason for the use of these particular hymn tunes for children's songs. The hymn tunes which are used, are folklike, and would not be as overtly symbolic of the religious tradition as the chorale tunes were. On the other hand, these particular tunes may originally have been folktunes which were borrowed for hymns, thus retaining their original function.

Thirdly, when High German hymn tunes were used by adults, they were coupled with lyrics of social comment or criticism such as "*Een maunchet Poa*" ("Many a Couple") which criticizes a bride and groom who are scheming to dominate each other, "*Ons Nohba es mie doll yevorden*" ("My neighbor has become angry with me") which criticizes the neighbor who borrows and breaks one's belongings, and "Legend of the *Gausseshlinyels*" which exposes the rowdy behavior of the *Gausseshlinyels*.

Like hymn tunes used in social protest movements by labor groups in the southern United States at the turn of the century (Greenway, 1953:12), these tunes were used, not only for their familiarity, but for their potential for parody. Their ability to evoke a picture of an unrealized ideal, exaggerates the disparity between this ideal and the actual life situation depicted in the Low German lyrics. Though some Mennonites felt it was sacreligious to

use hymn tunes for 'humorous' songs - possibly a reaction to the use of something associated with the high language, for purposes of the low language - many listeners appreciated the unmasking of inconsistencies in Mennonite belief and practice.

All of the songs in this category were found among Mennonites of General Conference Church background, descendents of the "Kirchliche" Mennonites or "Grosse Gemeinde" in Russia. All of the tunes used for parodies, were part of their own religious tradition. This contrasts with other groups of Mennonites who have not used any hymn tunes for parodies, often on account of conservative religious influences such as pietism.

Another melodic source for Low German song has been that of English religious songs. The melodies of these songs, such as religious choruses and Christmas songs are always retained when their lyrics are translated into Low German. These songs are sung only by "Auswanderer" children who learned the songs before returning from Paraguay or Mexico. In other words, they are 'serious' songs sung by children who still speak the language, showing a differential rate of language change between them and other Mennonite children. All of these songs have been translated within the past few decades either by elders of the 'conservative' Mennonite churches, or by members of other Mennonite churches who taught Vacation Bible School and the like among these Mennonites.

The final melodic source for Low German songs reflects Mennonite experience in Manitoba. Through the media and public school education in the English language, Mennonites have encountered and adopted the songs of many other cultural backgrounds. These melodies,

called North American folksongs for the purposes of this study, range from American cowboy songs like "Chisholm Trail" to southern folksongs like "Old Black Joe", to "Auld Lang Syne", a Scottish folktune which is itself embedded in North American culture.

North American folksong melodies are used for all of the pre-1950 Low German songs, and most of the songs written in the past few decades. Notable exceptions are reunion songs for which song writers often chose melodies associated with, and hence symbolic of, various eras of Mennonite history.

Pre-1950 Low German songs using North American folksong melodies include "*Onze goude oule Tiet*" ("Our good old time/days"), based on the tune "In the good old summertime," the Mennonite 'hired hand' song "*Komma kei yei yippie yippie yeh*", using the cowboy tune "Chisholm Trail", and "*Ons Nohba Klohse haud ne Koa*", using the tune "Mlle. from Armentiere", along with a number of children's songs sung to the tune "The Farmer in the Dell". All of these songs, written by "Kanadier", are parodies or original lyrics used for the same purpose as the original lyrics of these tunes.

Among post-1970 Low German songs, those used for entertainment at "*Plautdietshe Ohvende*" are usually parodies, retaining their original tune to amplify the humor. Though a few of these songs, especially those written for reunions, use popular tunes like "Something to Sing about" or "This Land is your Land", most of them rely on more traditional tunes like "For he's a jolly good fellow" or "Old MacDonald had a Farm".



Of these songs, only about 10 percent are composed by "Russlaender", of rural background, and the remainder by "Kanadier", also of rural background. Less than 5 percent of the "Kanadier" songs come from the "Auswanderer" sector who have often voluntarily separated themselves from the impact of the media and public school education. Since minimal research was conducted among "Auswanderer", more extensive research could modify these findings. "Neueingewanderte", who have a comparatively short Canadian history, have not been involved in writing contemporary Low German song. It appears, from these findings, that contemporary Low German song is a distinctively "Kanadier" phenomenon, at least in Manitoba.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the songs borrowing melodies from known sources, there were a number of melodies which were not attributable to any such source. This included songs like "*Dee Gouda Hoed*" ("The Good Shepherd"), "*Dee Rouzzefeldshe Yunges*" ("The Boys of Rosenfeld") and "*Mien Fohda zehd een sheen Moryen*" ("My father said one fine morning"). Though they were similar to musical idioms such as High German folksong, there was no way of determining whether they were borrowed or, in fact, original.

Only three contemporary original melodies were found. Of these, two melodies use a musical idiom similar to High German folksong. The third, "*Vie zent hia fondoag toup yekohme*" ("We have gathered together here today"), uses a chorale-like melody to show its

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<sup>1</sup>Whether or not a similar Low German folklore renaissance is occurring among Mennonites in other parts of Canada or Latin America would require further investigation.

similarity to the traditional 'opening hymn' in the worship services of certain of the 'conservative' Mennonite churches.

The lack of original melodies is not unique to Low German song. It is characteristic of Mennonite music making as a whole. Manitoba Mennonites have distinguished themselves for their "choral excellence" (Gibson, 1970:131), but this reputation has been built with borrowed music from the standard European classical repertoire rather than by singing music by their own composers, as Ukrainian and Jewish choirs do. Mennonites have not come up with a plausible explanation for this gap in their musical heritage. Low German song 'writing', then, simply reflects this tradition.

In this survey of musical sources, I have made implicit reference to several factors which have governed the selection of music for Low German songs. We now need to examine these criteria more systematically.

#### Criteria for Musical Borrowing

In his study of Ukrainian-Canadian music, Robert Klymasz cites the use of tunes like "This Land is your Land" and "You are my Sunshine" (Klymasz, 1972:376), stating that these, as well as country music tunes, are easily assimilated into contemporary Ukrainian songs because of the correspondence of so many significant formal characteristics. These characteristics include four-line stanzas, couplet formation, and decasyllabic lines with a break in the middle of the line (ibid.: 375).

This provides one level of explanation. Though there are a number of borrowed High German melodies which are in 6/8 time, as

compared with North American folksong melodies, which are by and large in 4/4 time, melodies from both sources have a regular beat, minimal syncopation, four line stanzas, and similar meter: 4.4.4.4. or 8.8.8.8. This contrasts with Slavic tunes which frequently contain shifts in meter and extensive use of syncopation.

Yet, the agreement of formal characteristics is obviously not the prime consideration. Mennonites have managed to find Russian melodies like "Oipied haiyem, haiyem", which sound very much like German folksongs, yet they have used virtually no Russian tunes. Conversely, Mennonites have used North American tunes like "You are my Sunshine", whose metrical pattern does not agree with other music they have chosen. Formal characteristics then are not the controlling factor.

Instead of looking merely at musicological factors, we must also take into account sociological factors such as the nature of inter-ethnic relations between the ethnic group which is borrowing music and the ethnic sources from which it can borrow.

In Russia, the Mennonites were exposed to Ukrainian, some Jewish, and after 1870, literary Russian influences, while maintaining their contact with germanic influences (Toews, 1979:24-25). As mentioned earlier, they chose German over Slavic influences because it offered better opportunities for 'cultural advancement', even in Russia at that time.

Coming to Manitoba, Mennonites were once again exposed to Jewish and Ukrainian, in addition to French, Metis and Anglo-Saxon influences. Here many of them, except for the "Auswanderer", once

again chose to be identified with the segment of society which offered most opportunity for 'cultural advancement': the Anglo-Saxon element.

These choices are mirrored in selection of melodic sources for Low German song, even though one "Russlaender" lady was quite certain that one could use 'any old melody' for a Low German song. There are options, but they are culturally defined. Even for songs in the low language, prestige factors such as the opportunity for upward social mobility, usually associated with the high language, are operative.

Like the operation of ordered rules in linguistics, after this general criterion is met, other criteria come into play in the selection of a melody for a newly composed Low German poem. These criteria are metrical agreement between text and melody, familiarity of the melody, and thematic unity between the original and new lyrics.

Though metrical agreement between melody and text were discredited at the level of generalization proposed by Klymasz, this factor is relevant at this next level of generalization. Variants of the High German folksong melody "Alle Jahre Wieder" were used for many children's songs because the 4.4.4.4. metre, commonly used for children's verse (Burling, 1966:1418), was particularly suited to this genre of poetry.

Secondly, choosing a melody which is familiar to the listener is of importance because this frees him to concentrate on the lyrics which are considered to be of more interest than the melody.

And lastly, though familiarity was of importance, patterning in the selection of familiar melodies contradicted the assumption that 'any old melody' was acceptable. Take for example the following melody-lyric combinations: the tune, "Something to sing about...this land of ours" with "*Mien Darp - Bloumenfelt*" ("My Village - Blumenfeld"), a reunion song extolling the virtues of life in a traditional Mennonite village, or the tune "Auld Lange Syne" coupled with "*Blingrul Lament*" ("Bilingual/Blind Lament"), which bemoans the loss of the Low German language, and lastly, the hymn tune "Mir ist Erbarmung wiederfahren" ("(God's) mercy has been extended to me") used with "*Ons Nohba es mie doll yevorden*", a song rationalizing one's lack of patience with an irresponsible neighbor. In each case, the Low German lyrics comment on the basic sentiment expressed in the original lyrics of the borrowed melody, whether it is singing about one's homeland, lamenting the loss of a year or language, or discussing the essence of mercy from a theological versus a practical perspective.

Other melodies were chosen to make an indirect humorous comment on the Low German text. One notes the marriage of a tune like "On top of Old Smokey...I lost my poor lover" with the lament of the "*Acht Meyalles*" ("Eight Girls") who have yet to find a lover before they can lose him! And why would one use a tune like "Old MacDonald had a farm" for a song about a closely-knit community as described in "*En Muhsdarp vohn vie aula zaumpt*" ("In Mouse Village we all live together") or a tune like "Kelligrew's Soiree" which describes over-indulgence, with lyrics about overeating at lunch or "*Faspa*" ("Lunchtime")?

Writers of reunion songs, on the other hand, were more concerned about the historical era represented by the tunes they chose. Peter Elias chose the tune "Something to sing about" for his Blumenfeld reunion song because he wanted the tune to represent Mennonite experience in Canada, and because he did not want to offend people who would consider it sacrilegious to use a hymn tune. Menno Wiebe, author of the Reinland Reunion Songs, chose melodies which reflected a broad spectrum of Mennonite history: the Russian experience ("Stenka Razin"), the gospel song tradition which accompanied religious revivals in certain Mennonite groups ("Es lebe Gott allein in mire"/"God alone lives in me"), and North American folksong influences ("For he's a jolly good fellow"). One must remember, however, that these were sophisticated and informed selections by an individual with considerable historical and musical knowledge.

Familiar melodies, therefore, were chosen for their ability to reinforce the lyrics of the Low German song, through thematic unity between the borrowed and the new song, through indirect humorous comment on the lyrics, or through symbolic representation of a particular historical era.

And yet, not all melodies of Low German songs are borrowed. When a Low German song is a translation or a parody of an English or High German song, the original melody is always retained. For a translation, this is simply a matter of expediency, but when the Low German song happens to be a parody of another song, the retention of the original melody gains importance.

The effectiveness of this convention for parody is demonstrated by the Low German version of "You are my Sunshine." The

listener, familiar with the English lyrics, expects to hear a translation of "you make me happy, when skies are grey". Instead, he hears "you make me happy in the moonlight/moonshine". The listener finds the surprise of the changed lyrics, as well as the new meaning, humorous. The use of the original melody for parodies, therefore, by relying on the listener's expectations, proves to be effective for "*Plautdietshe Ohvent*" Leeda written to be humorous and entertaining, demonstrating a creative playfulness in a bilingual and bicultural setting.

We have discussed the criteria which govern the selection of tunes for Low German songs, but have not discussed the process by which a particular tune and a set of lyrics are welded together. A case-study of a recently composed "*Heischraitje*" song illustrates this process.

#### The Composition Process: A Case Study

Because one of the members of the "*Heischraitje*" was planning to get married, the other members decided to write a song to be sung at the program which has become a traditional part of many Mennonite wedding receptions. In contrast with the solemnity of the marriage ceremony held in the church sanctuary, this program, presented in the church basement or a community hall, customarily provides a humorous insight into aspects of the couple's courtship or the realities of marital life. In keeping with this expectation, the "*Heischraitje*" decided to write a humorous song describing the groom's childhood and courtship.

After considering several other options, one of the "*Heischraitje*" suggested using the tune "The Battle of New Orleans" (no pun intended), because the first line beginning "It was in the fall of 1950" had triggered his imagination to produce a similar Low German line for Dennis, the groom, who was born in 1951.<sup>1</sup>

Other lines followed, with people singing what had already been written, humming a little more of the tune in the hope that more lyrics would come to mind, re-reading the lyrics already written, and repeating the process, while they ate pizza and drank coke. Some members of the group suggested details of Dennis' life which they thought ought to be included: his rather average athletic skills, how he met his wife, and the fact that he, a Mennonite of conservative "Kleingemeinde" background, was breaking the endogamous norm by marrying a girl from a 'Pentecostal' church background.

Participant-observation and discussion with other writers of Low German songs indicates that the "*Heischraitje*" mode of writing is standard procedure both for groups as well as individuals. The process is always the same: one chooses a topic or subject for a song taking note of some details one wishes to include, finds a suitable melody, and then writes down words only.

With respect to the "*Heischraitje*", the most significant aspect of their musical composition is the fact that it is a group process, and not the work of a single individual. This is an obvious contradiction of Nettl's assertion that

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<sup>1</sup>Note that both songs are ballads.



all music is composed by individuals. The old belief that folk music rises, like a mist, from the collective consciousness of the village or band is hardly worth an argument (Nettl, 1973:14).

And yet Nettel dares to tell us that "folk music is the musical expression of a whole people or tribe, or a significant portion of a culture" (ibid.:15).

### The Learning Process

The composition process has implications for the learning process. As was stated, the words, but not the music were written down. This is understandable when one remembers that the majority of Low German songs are sung to familiar tunes. Harmonization, which is always improvised by singing groups such as the "*Heischraitje*" may be rehearsed, if necessary.

Instead, emphasis in rehearsals for public performance of contemporary Low German songs is on learning the words. To those who have not participated in composing the songs, the words are unfamiliar, but even those who have helped compose songs may have to spend time learning to read those lines they have not yet memorized, because there is no standard Low German orthography and some writers use rather unconventional and inconsistent spellings! When Low German songs are sung by groups like the West Reserve "Russlaender" girls' group who no longer speak Low German, they struggle, not only with orthography, but with the more basic problem of pronouncing words in a language which is really a foreign language to them.

Another aspect which is often rehearsed by groups is fitting the words and melodies together syllabically. This is often necessary in the case of parodies, where the Low German phrase may be

of a different length than the phrase of the original High German or English song.

In the case of the "Veertien Platdietshe Leeda" which appeared in published form in the 1960's, groups singing them for public or radio performance learned them from the publication. Other individuals learned them both from the book and from the radio program on which they were featured. However, most people spoke of hearing these songs, rather than of singing them, possibly because they did not accept the singing of hymns in the low language.

#### Other Musical Considerations

As is the case with most folksongs, discussion about the musical aspects of Low German songs generally centres around the melody. However, there are other musical aspects which require closer scrutiny. The discussion would not be complete without a look at harmonization, instrumentation, musical group structure, and aesthetic considerations.

#### Harmonization

People talked about singing songs together, but no mention was made about singing songs in harmony in traditional everyday contexts. Harmonization of Low German song enters the picture only in the early 1970's, when the songs began to be performed publicly.

Among these harmonizations are Esther Wiebe's arrangements of "*Lietche Racka*" ("Little Worker") and "*Vaut zent mie daut fea nushte*" ("Oh dear what can the matter be"), written for a CBC 'Prairie Choirs' program in the early 1970's. There are two unusual features about these musical arrangements. The first is the very

fact that they are written down. Harmonizations for Low German songs are generally improvised by groups like the "*Heischraitje*" or the Reinland Reunion *Gausseshlidyels* who transfer their knowledge of male quartet harmonization learned in the church, to the singing of Low German songs. The second unusual feature of these arrangements is the fact that they are written for a mixed group. Most groups singing Low German songs, by contrast, are either male or female, and only rarely mixed. This issue will be discussed in more detail somewhat later.

Improvised harmonizations by groups like the "*Heischraitje*" follow a fairly standardized pattern. Because they consider the words to be of utmost importance, the "*Heischraitje*" sing the verses of a song in unison, but harmonize the refrain in which the words are repeated for every stanza. This provides maximum clarity of words, while offering musical contrast.

Harmonization of Low German song, then, is a contemporary phenomenon which relies on the sacred mixed and male choir tradition passed on among Mennonites not only through the church choir, but also through regional choral festivals held formerly in Russia, and more recently in Manitoba until the two Mennonite colleges in Winnipeg, founded in the late 1940's, assumed this educational function (Berg, 1979:164-170).

#### Instrumental Accompaniment

Like harmony, instrumental accompaniment has been added to Low German song since it has become fashionable to perform it in public. It is quite possible that the 'hired hands' sang to the

accompaniment of their guitars, and perhaps the occasional mouth organ, but one can understand the impracticability of providing instrumental accompaniment for older Low German songs when one realizes that many of them are lullabies, children's play songs, or street songs.

With respect to contemporary song, songs sung at reunions, frequently staged out of doors, are often accompanied by guitars used for their portability and their ability to provide an adequate musical background to the singing. When reunion or "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" programs are held indoors, the instrumental ensemble often consists of piano and/or guitar.

The "*Heischraitje*" have expanded this instrumental ensemble, forming a jug band. To the guitar and piano, they have added a washtub bass, a washboard, a stiff-bristled steel broom, and a bathroom plunger. The use of the instruments is coordinated with the alteration between unison and harmony singing. The piano and guitar are used for the verses of songs, which are sung in unison, and the jug band is added to the refrains, sung in harmony.

The jug band, in contrast to the pianos, organs and even orchestras which accompany Mennonite choirs and musical groups singing in the high languages, is quite in keeping with the expectations of Mennonites who consider the low language to be crude. They presume that a 'crude' language would also have the accompaniment of 'crude' instruments, rather than the 'real' instruments which accompany other musical groups.



Photo of the "*Heischraitje*" by Dennis Fast

### Musical Group Formation

While we have referred to various groups which have performed Low German songs at events like reunions and "*Plautdietshe Ohvende*", and have discussed how they compose and learn new songs, we have not examined these groups in detail to discover their membership selection criteria.

At first glance, a male family trio (Blumenfeld Reunion) a grownup *Gausseshlonyels* group (Reinland Reunion), an adult volunteer choir (Horndean Reunion), and a group of teenaged girls (Neubergthal Village Picnic) appear to have little in common, apart from the fact that they have all, at one time or another, sung Low German songs.

However, when one adds a male quartet (Steinbach), a girls' double trio (Winkler) and another group of 20-30 year old *Gausseshlunyels* (the Landmark "*Heischraitje*"), all of which originated as church singing groups, a pattern begins to emerge.

Each of these groups are, in fact, singing groups which would normally participate in Sunday evening or even morning worship services in many Mennonite churches. Their singing would probably be categorized as 'special numbers', in contrast to 'songs' which the congregation and/or choir would normally sing. Until the mid-1950's, groups such as these would most often sing at evening services called "Jugendverein" (youth group) presented by the youth of the church for the entire congregation. An individual or family might be asked to prepare some music, or might make a musical contribution in the "Freiwilliges" (free will) option near the end of the program. (This aspect was discontinued as more professionalism entered the musical program of the church.)

Although these groups would have participated in church programs and worship services, the groups singing Low German songs differ from them in one significant aspect: most of them cut across Mennonite denominational boundaries, including persons of various Mennonite church boundaries. In villages in which one church served Mennonites of all denominational backgrounds, this was customary, but in villages or towns where denominational boundaries were sharply demarcated, singing groups would have been formed within those boundaries as well. This 'ecumenical' aspect of the Low German singing groups is possible because for most of these groups, like

those singing at reunion celebrations, it is a one-time commitment, with no long-range implications.

Other criteria appear to be more significant in the formation of these groups. Age and sex figure prominently in the selection of *Gausseshlinyels* or teenaged girls' groups such as the double trio. Kinship, while evident in the selection of the family trio, may, on the surface, appear to be a minimally significant factor. Yet, when one examines the list of *Gausseshlinyels* who have sung with the "Heischraitje" during the past five years, one notes that all of them have been either Pletts or Reimers. The "Heischraitje" say, however, that membership in the group is open to anyone in the community who can sing, is willing to work, and will show up for rehearsals fairly regularly.

These criteria are in direct contrast to those which qualified people for membership in the volunteer choir which sang at the Horndean Reunion. Here, interest and enthusiasm superceded all other qualifications. It is evident that musical qualifications are of increasing importance in direct correlation with the degree of professionalism within the group. For a volunteer choir which sings at one occasion, musical ability is of minimal importance. For a group like the "Heischraitje", who have begun recording their songs, musical qualifications become relatively important.

Immigration background is another factor which affects group selection. Since "Kanadier" are the only group of Mennonites who have already lived in Canada for a hundred years, they figured prominently in most of the groups formed for centennial celebrations. A notable exception were the Reinland *Gausseshlinyels*, most of whom

were "Russlaender" of Chortitza background who had settled in this village when it was vacated in the 1920's by "Auswanderer" moving south. Unlike many other "Russlaender", those involved with the Reinland centennial celebrations seemed favorably disposed to Low German. Another vocal group of "Russlaender" background, was the girls double trio which sang at "*Plautdietshe Ohvende*" in Winkler. However, these girls were not conversant with the language nor favorably disposed toward it. Instead, they attempted to preserve the common myth that Low German is a 'crude' language incapable of refined expression.

Immigration background and language attitudes were also evident among the "*Heischraitje*". Of "Kanadier" background, they still speak Low German fluently and see their performances, especially their recent ventures into operetta as an attempt to use Low German seriously.

### Aesthetics

With respect to aesthetics in Low German song, one heard mostly negative comments: "Low German songs are so crude," or "The melodies sound so hammered together" or, "They all sound the same to me." Positive aspects were not voiced. They were communicated in other ways.

Nobody verbalized it, but there seemed to be a consensus that the beauty of singing well lay in singing rhythmically. Many singers sang in a flowing style with very even note values when they were not being recorded. Yet, as soon as they were tape recorded, they began singing in a more punctuated rhythmic style, often substituting



dotted rhythms for equal eighth notes. Other people tapped their feet or hands, and rocked in rhythm to their singing, perhaps remembering the times when they had rocked or bounced their children and grandchildren to these traditional songs.

Many of the older people who sang these songs had very lovely singing voices, but made no explicit comments about the need for any particular vocal quality or style needed for these songs. A few people apologized for their voices which had become scratchy with age, but these comments were made with respect to singing in general, and not with respect to Low German songs in particular. It was assumed, instead, that one sang these songs with one's natural voice. Because some of the singers were singing songs which were no longer a part of their active repertoire, their primary concern was that of remembering the words.

Only in one particular type of song was vocal quality of importance: the social comment song using a chorale-type melody. In this category, one finds songs such as "*Een maunchet Poa*" and "*Vie zent hia fondaog toupyekohme*". Also included is the song "*Acht Meyalles*", also frequently sung in a chorale style though it uses the tune "On Top of Old Smokey".

Along with a slurred nasal vocal style, singers of these songs sometimes used the "Vorsaenger" (cantor) tradition of 'lining out' the song. In this tradition a leader sings a line of the song, then the group echoes that line. The pattern is repeated until the song is completed.

When used for Low German song, this vocal style was a conscious attempt to satirize the style of chorale singing prevalent in most Mennonite churches until the gospel song and English hymn replaced it. Since this style of singing is still used in some of the 'conservative' Mennonite churches, many people interpret its use as an attempt to ridicule this group of Mennonites. Used for ridicule only by individuals who have totally abandoned this style of singing in their own churches, it may also be their comment on their own past.

This interpretation, that the use of chorale type singing is a comment on their own tradition, rather than an attempt to ridicule other Mennonite groups, is given added weight by comparing this situation with a study of Haida argillite carvings. In this study it was found that

objects, themes, and designs having any sacred relevance to the Haida were not translated into argillite until they have lost their revered significance... Shamans... had been the most esteemed members of Haida society; to depict them literally in a curio medium was to impugn their social significance, to say the least (Kaufmann, 1976:68).

Thus, if sacred objects are not used in 'secular' contexts before they have lost their ritual significance, the singers of these chorale-like songs are also making a comment on change within their society.

Furthermore, in the song "*Acht Meyalles*", the use of the "Vorsaenger" singing style for performance makes another type of social comment. The lyric content of the song precludes that it will be sung by a group of women, although the singing style they use is a predominantly male idiom. Women sang with the men when the congregation sang, but they never assumed leadership in this style of

singing in the church. The fact that women use this style of singing for this song reflects the lack of traditional channels for female, particularly single female self-expression in the life of the church. (There are still Mennonite churches in which some men assume that if a woman is at all interested in church politics, or matters of theology, she will discuss these issues at home with her husband.) This would leave the single female without any voice. Singing in the male vocal idiom, therefore, is a statement of protest on the part of the female singers. Thus, the use of a particular type of vocal quality is able to reinforce the message of a song.

### Conclusion

In this discussion of the musical aspects of Low German songs, we have viewed the topic from several perspectives: from the standpoint of the sources from which the melodies are borrowed, from the standpoint of the composition and learning process of Low German song, and from various musical aspects of performance such as instrumentation, harmonization, and vocal style, in addition to aesthetics. Each of these perspectives has provided insight into the social significance of singing in Low German.

Though reference has been made to the contexts in which these songs are sung, they have not been discussed in detail. A discussion of these contexts should provide insight into their influence on the contents of the songs.

## CHAPTER V

### SOCIAL CONTEXT

...looking around the magnificent concert hall...I overheard a few ladies in the seats in front of me chattering in Low German. Not one bit awed by the plush surroundings, they were discussing their geraniums and how Aunt Tina was doing after her gall bladder operation (Warkentine, 1974:17).

Warkentine may be saying that one ought not to discuss Aunt Tina's gall bladder operation in public. He may also be saying that one ought not to use Low German, the language in which Mennonites have traditionally baked bread, milked the cows, and gossiped about their neighbors, in "plush surroundings". Low German discussions of domestic life, it is presumed, are inappropriate for a context in which many Mennonites expect to hear a literary language like High German or English.

In the past, acceptable contexts for Low German songs consisted primarily of the home, where parents and older siblings sang for the entertainment of smaller children, or the village street, where *Gausseshlidyels* critiqued their society. However, in the past two decades, Manitoba Mennonites have begun hearing Low German songs in several other contexts: on religious radio broadcasts, at Low German evenings of entertainment, and at historical-commemorative events such as centennials and reunions. Although we have referred to all of these contexts earlier, we need to examine them in more detail in order to understand the impact of context on the contents of Low German songs.

### Domain and Role Relationships

In looking at social context, we can take our cue from socio-linguists who have become increasingly aware that listening to content alone is inadequate for understanding the social meaning of language. Instead, they have concluded that 'what' is said, depends on 'who' is saying it to 'whom', and 'where' and 'when' it is being said. Though there is a lack of consensus about terminology among socio-linguists, the terms proposed by Fishman have analytic viability. Fishman has substituted the term 'domain' for the 'when' or general social context, 'role-relations' for the 'who to whom' aspect, and 'locale' for the 'where' or specific social context (Fishman, 1972:18-22).

According to Fishman, linguists have isolated as many as nine domains: "the family, the playground and street, the school...the church, literature, the press, the military, the courts and the governmental institutions" (ibid.:18). Rather than being universally applicable, Fishman's categories are indicative of his own place in society: an academic living in an urban context within a highly structured state. Although ethnic minorities like the Mennonites have historically occupied niches in state societies, Fishman's categories do not account for the more traditional aspects of village life such as work (he must be an academic!), voluntary associations or informal village celebrations. Similarly, the inclusion of domains like the courts and military are not applicable to the present study, necessitating the restructuring of Fishman's domains.

Restructuring these domains in concentric circles of decreasing social intimacy, beginning with the family, going on to the village community, and then to the larger public, provides a viable

option for looking at the social contexts in which one would hear Low German songs. The family and village domains can be broken down into social and domestic spheres. The village domain also encompasses ritual and educational spheres. The larger public domain, on the other hand, extends its parameters to regional events as well as to the media.

### Familial Context

Within each of these domains, we see various role-relationships in operation. Looking first of all at the family, we see a number of role-relationships within which we could expect to hear Low German songs: sibling-sibling, parent-child, husband-wife, aunt/uncle-niece/nephew, and grandparent-grandchild relationships. We will examine each of these relationships in turn.

Before the advent of television, children playing together in their own homes entertained themselves by singing chants like "*Seet en Maakstje enne Mia*" ("A little girl was sitting inside a stone fence"), nursery rhymes like "*M'rieche haud en chlienet Laum*" ("Mary had a little lamb"), or religious songs like "*Mien leeva Gott*" ("My dear God"). Older children sometimes used variants of songs to tease younger children ("*Aus dee Yued*"/"When the Jew?") or to scare them into good behavior ("*Tiep Heenaches*"/"Little Chickens"). In the past, most "Kanadier" children sang, or at least knew of some Low German songs. Presently, only "Auswanderer" children, recently returned from Latin America, still know and use Low German songs to entertain themselves when they play together.

In the past, most Mennonite families had at least one older sister who could babysit the younger children. Younger siblings would be entertained with songs like "*Vie, vie, vie, vie ventche*" ("Shush, shush, shush my little one") to which an endless number of verses could be improvised, or action songs like "*Backe, backe Kuake*" ("Bake, bake cookies"). With the advent of smaller families, and more entertainment options, older siblings now rarely sing to younger siblings in any language, let alone in Low German.

Parents sang to and with their children in various locales. Mother might sing while she went about her household duties, and father while he rode his wagon to town, accompanied by several of his children. Some fathers entertained their children with song as they (the children, of course), waited for supper to be served. The songs the parents sang in these contexts were children's songs, especially *Shpelches* (games), which the children themselves sang when they played together.

Both parents sang lullabies to the little ones at night. Apparently the choice of parent depended on which one "came from a family that always sang" or "enjoyed singing". Several young Mennonite mothers say that they still sing Low German lullabies to their little ones, but they are a small minority.

The high incidence of Mennonite fathers who sang to their children in the home is of interest, since some folklorists imply that mother does most of the singing to the children.<sup>1</sup> Though their

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<sup>1</sup>Porter (1978) claims that "Women are the bearers of the older song traditions: men are the innovators" (p. 16).

Anglo-Saxon neighbors sometimes criticized the industrious nature of some of the West Reserve Mennonites by saying that "their women 'had' to work on the fields", there was a clear demarcation of sex roles within the household itself. Father repaired the house, but mother performed the domestic chores within the household. The fact that so many Mennonite fathers sang to their children probably reflects this division of labor: mother sang while she worked in the house, but since father's 'real work' was carried on outside of the house, his time in the house could be used to 'entertain the children' with song, if he did not have any 'important paper-work' to do. Though the stated purpose of these songs was 'to entertain', a glance back at the content of these songs, shows that father used this context to socialize the child to the values of the family and society.

There are only two reports of husbands and wives singing Low German songs to each other. In one case, Andrew Hamm, a late resident of the village of Neubergthal, composed a song about his courtship with his wife. Commenting on her reluctance to marry him, he frequently sang the song in her presence to tease her about her eventual acceptance of his proposal. In the other song, a woman who enjoys poetry, composed words and music<sup>1</sup> designed to persuade her fishing-enthusiast husband to abandon his favorite sport long enough to take her on a trip to the West Coast to visit their

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<sup>1</sup>The woman called the melody she composed, a "*beyrafnis melodie*" (funeral melody), implying that it was long and drawn out, having the character of a lament. She attributed her success, in part, to her 'appropriately chosen' melody.



children. Though the song was considered too personal to be shared with the researcher, it achieved the desired result: the fishing-enthusiast took his wife to the West Coast for a vacation, the following week.

One grandfather talked about the songs he had learned as a child from his aunts, who were known for their sense of humor and interest in folklore. He learned these songs while his aunts, young girls at the time, worked as domestic help in his home in southern Manitoba. However, the talk was usually of uncles and nieces. It has not been systematically investigated, but it appears that the mother's younger brother often had a teasing relationship with his niece(s). It was from him that she learned 'naughty' or humorous songs like the 'Paraguayan version' of "*Eck yingk emohl em Voult*" ("I once went into the woods").

Grandparents talked about singing to infant grandchildren as they rocked them or played with them. One grandchild learned songs like "*Aus eck mohl en Bua vull voare*" ("When I wanted to become a farmer") from her grandmother as she fed the chickens. The granddaughter, who by now is a grandmother herself, says that because her family was poor, she found it easier to identify with Grandma Harms' earthy songs than with songs which talked about heaven and its streets of gold. It seems that grandparents sang the same repertoire that parents would sing to their children, but they appeared to have a little more time and patience to entertain the children.

Grandchildren appear to have reciprocated with only one song, "*Miene Mame es mie gout*" ("My mother loves me"), frequently

used to 'bribe' grandmother for gifts or candy. That children similarly tried to bribe their parents is intimated in the song "*Ungrím Dack*" ("Under the roof"), where a young boy tries to distract his father so that he will not punish him.

Apart from grandchildren singing Low German Christmas songs for their grandparents, there are few references to Low German songs at family gatherings. Singing together has been an integral part of many Mennonite family gatherings, but the repertoire has rarely included Low German songs, though there are families like the Ens family of Reinland who say that they sing the recently composed Reinland Reunion songs at their family gatherings.

#### Communal Domain

Turning to the communal domain, we look first of all at the domestic sphere of activity. There are some children's songs about mother's work in the home, but there are no Low German songs about women working together, or songs to accompany women as they worked together on activities such as quilting. Since a Low German song about pig-killing has yet to migrate to Manitoba from Saskatchewan, Manitoba Mennonites are left with a single known men's work song: "*Biem Drashen*" ("While threshing"), a song ridiculing the inefficiency of certain members of the threshing crew assigned to specific tasks.

And yet there are reports of young people singing as they worked, or as they travelled to work. One hears, for example, of southern Manitoba girls teasing their cousins by singing Low German songs while they washed dishes together, or of girls in the

Chortitza Colony in the Ukraine singing as they rode to and from the fields on horse-drawn wagons at harvest time, or of fellows in the Ukraine singing as they rode on wagons enroute to alternative service in the Russian government's reforestation project.

If we compare the amount of cooperative labor required for farming (after the initial pioneering stages) with that required for lumbering or fishing with traditional technology, we can understand why there are so few work-related songs amongst Mennonite farmers, especially by comparison with large collections of lumbering and fishing songs found in eastern Canada. But when one hears Canadian folksong collector Edith Fowke make a statement like

It was the lumber camps that preserved and spread the songs; and similarly it was in the lumber camps that new songs were created.... I don't think there's very much in the Prairies. Farming and ranching are not the type of thing that promote folk songs (CFB, 1978: 7, 11).

one detects not only a note of realism, but also an easterner's biased view of western Canada. After all, what about the prairie cowboy songs?

Singing together, for people of village or rural background, appears to have been part of the social, rather than the work sphere. These communal singing groups might be people of the same age-grade such as the *Gausseshlinyels* or the young people, people of the same occupational background such as the hired hands, or a cross-section of the entire community in events such as the annual village picnic.

When little children played with their neighbors, the locale might change to the neighbor's sandbox, but the songs they sang were essentially the ones they sang with their own siblings.

When older 'children' got together, matters changed. Teen-aged girls appeared to have had no repertoire of their own, but there are informal reports that they improvised Low German songs to tease each other. Teenaged boys, on the other hand, had a rather colorful repertoire of *Gausseleeda* or 'street songs'. According to the Reinfeld reunion song "Legend of the *Gausseshlinyels*", these songs were sung in locales such as Pete Yurchuck's store - the one tiny village store where the *Gausseshlinyels* congregated evenings. Participation in this group was one of the rites of passage for village youths, and composing bawdy songs, it appears, was an essential part of this transition stage.

The male hired hands would also find a meeting place on some farm during the weekends, possibly in a hayloft, to visit, and to sing or compose new songs about their 'heroic exploits'.

Since we have discussed the context in which Low German verses of "Schluesselbund" *Leeda* are sung in detail earlier, we will not elaborate further on them here. (See pp. 75-79).

Special ritual contexts in which Low German songs are heard range from recurring seasonal celebrations like Christmas to occasional celebrations like weddings.

Although they were not associated with any village festival, two Low German songs were traditionally sung more frequently in the spring than at any other time of year in Russia: "*Shokkel, shokkel sheiya*" ("Rock, rock my little one") and "*Ohtboa*" ("Stork"). The song "*Shokkel, shokkel sheiya*" contains references both to Easter and to swinging, an activity associated with springtime in both Russian and southern Manitoba Mennonite villages. Though Mennonite babies were

rarely born at harvesttime, one does not know whether it is a higher incidence of births, or simply the return of the birds which would make "*Ohtboa*" a preferred springtime song. However, not everyone in the village was allowed to sing this song in public. Two young girls sitting on a board fence and chanting this song were told not to sing about the stork because their mothers were widows (Peters, 1977:19).

Presently, there is one seasonal village event at which one may still occasionally hear some Low German songs. This is the annual village picnic, still celebrated in southern Manitoba villages like Neu Bergthal near Altona, frequently in conjunction with the end of the school year. The day's events include competitive sports activities, food served from an improvised hotdog stand, and a variety concert held in a community hall or machine shed in the evening. People of all ages attend and participate in the evening of skits, songs and poems tied together by a master of ceremonies known for his ability to speak and sense of humor.

At the 1978 Neu Bergthal picnic, the song "*Fedreihde Velt*" ("Upside down world"), brought to the village many years ago by the late pioneer Andrew Hamm, was sung by a group of teenaged girls, dressed in peasant farmer garb. The song "All you etta", an English-Low German quodlibet of the French Canadian folksong "Alouette", was used as an audience sing-along in addition to numerous English and High German folksongs sung by the village choir. The choir director, though favorably disposed to Low German, provided the rationale for her language choices in a private interview. As an American Mennonite of High German speaking background who had married a

villager, she did not know Low German, so had chosen High German and English repertoire for her choir. Had she known Low German, or found suitable songs, she would have included these songs to complement those in the other languages borrowed by Mennonites.

There are no known Low German songs for the celebration of births<sup>1</sup> and deaths,<sup>2</sup> but other village celebrations such as engagements, weddings and anniversaries have provided the occasion for the performance of Low German song.

Comments about traditional engagement parties (Wiebe, 1970: 103) lead one to believe that because they fell within the parameters of public performance, High German, Russian<sup>3</sup> and later English would have been used. However, as recently as 1975, a male quartet sang the song "*Et via emohl en Frieya*" ("There once was a suitor") at an engagement party held for a friend's son in North Kildonan, a predominantly Mennonite enclave in Winnipeg, Manitoba's capital city.

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<sup>1</sup>A number of Low German poems written for the birthdays of friends or relatives have been found, but none of these has been set to music.

<sup>2</sup>Several Low German songs refer to death; "*Ons Nohba es dehm Kohta ferackt*" ("Our neighbor's tomcat has died"), "*Komma kei, yei...*", and "*O begrowt mie nich*" ("Oh bury me not"). In each of these songs malapropisms are used in reference to death, giving a serious topic which is rarely discussed, a humorous twist.

<sup>3</sup>At a wedding reception program held in honor of an "Um-siedler" couple in a North Kildonan Mennonite Church in 1978, about one-third of the program consisted of Russian items, confirming the change in status of that language among Mennonites over the past century, since the "Kanadier" came to Canada.

Though there have been sporadic attempts to revive the tradition of playing "Schluesselbund" games at Mennonite weddings within the past decade, these attempts have met with minimal success. Instead, one finds wedding reception programs for wedding guests of all ages. The informality of these programs, usually held in a church basement or community hall, offers sharp contrast to the wedding ceremony held in the church sanctuary. The program, presented by relatives and close friends of the bridal couple, usually includes a number of poems, readings, perhaps some skits, instrumental and vocal numbers and the reading of telegrams. Though predominantly English, the program, on occasion, includes some Low German songs like "*Een maunchet Poa*" ("Many a couple"), "*Duh bes mien Zonneshien*" ("You are my sunshine"), and "*Aun 'ne 1951*" ("In 1951"), a song written by the "*Heischraitje*" for one of their members.

In the religious sphere, Low German songs have been sung at seasonal celebrations like the annual children's church Christmas program ("*Daut es vada Vienacht*"/"Once again its Christmas"; "*Eck via zou yiern en Bethlehem*"/"I'd love to be in Bethlehem"), summer vacation Bible School ("*Mien leeva Gott*"/"My dear God"), and in children's worship services ("*Mien Tues es em Himmel*"/"My home is in heaven"). When they are sung in church, these songs are sung only in Sunday School or other children's services held in the lower auditorium, but never in the adult worship services held in the main sanctuary of the church building. The single exception is the children's Christmas program, held in the main sanctuary. Since this is defined as essentially a children's service, rules for adult

worship services, such as choice of language, are not applicable here.

The children singing these songs, both traditionally and in the recent past, are "Auswanderer" children whose families have migrated to Canada from Latin America within the past few decades, and now attend a High German speaking church such as the Old Colony or Sommerfelder Churches.

There is one religious Low German song, sung by adults, which appears to break all the rules. This song, "*Zingt am leeflich*" ("Sing to Him lovingly") has reportedly been sung at choral festivals called "Saengerfests" in Russia, in worship services in the Mennonite World War II camps in Germany, and in "Saengerfests" and "Jugendverein" (youth meetings) held in southern Manitoba till the mid 1950's. No one could explain why a single Low German religious song about God's guidance in difficult times would be used by adults in a context in which they normally did not sing Low German songs, apart from the fact that the song is beautiful poetry expressing the essence of the Mennonite religious experience in a way in which much of the borrowed religious music can never express it.

Low German was, as a rule, not used in educational<sup>1</sup> contexts in Russia or southern Manitoba. Low German songs might be heard on the school yard, usually at recess time when the teacher was out of

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<sup>1</sup>Rempel, a Mennonite historian says that Low German "was also the language of instruction in the village schools during the first several decades in Russia" (1974:4). There are no known records to document his statement, but there may be some truth in it because it is known that earliest settlers coming to Russia in 1789 were Low German speaking with little or no formal education.



earshot. Children would tease their peers with variants of "*Shlohp Chindche Shlohp*" ("Sleep baby sleep") or "Allema1 kann ich nicht lustig sein" ("I can never be happy again"). Children in a Russian Mennonite school were criticized by their teacher for singing a song ("Allema1...") which contained ethnic slurs against the Russians, while southern Manitoba Mennonite children were punished for using Low German, the forbidden language on the school yard (Penner, 1973: 11).

Although students tried using Low German at literary programs in towns like Winkler in the mid-twentieth century, it was not until the early 1970's that students at these high schools were at liberty to present Low German songs and dramas to the public. The phenomenon of Low German high school drama appeared on the East Reserve at the same time,<sup>1</sup> but it had been preceded by a Low German program held in conjunction with the Hanover Fair as early as 1965 (The Carillon, 1965:1). This compares favorably with a Low German drama presented in conjunction with the "Sunflower Festival", an outgrowth of the Rhineland Agricultural Society Fair in Altona in 1967 (RRVE, 1967:27 (28)1, 1967b:27(31)1).

### Sociopolitical Context

#### Russian

However, before we examine the phenomenon of contemporary Low German performance in more detail, we need to look at the broader socio-political context in which Low German songs emerged both in

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<sup>1</sup>See The Carillon, 1974a:27(17):3.

Russia and in southern Manitoba, in order to understand the fluctuating emergence and decline of these songs.

Looking at the nineteenth century Russian Mennonite experience, we might ask what there was about the socio-political context which fostered not only the retention of many Low German songs of Prussian origin, but also the creation of new songs within the Russian context.

The immigration policies of Catherine the Great had favored agriculturally inclined ethnic minorities, and given people like the Mennonites the privilege of block settlement. Other privileges included relative political and economic, as well as religious autonomy. This autonomy, coupled with Mennonite assumptions of their superiority over the surrounding peasant population, allowed the Mennonites, especially after 1850, to develop as a virtually autonomous state within a monarchical system, called by some historians, the "Mennonite commonwealth" (Rempel, 1974; Francis, 1955).

The retention of Low German songs of Prussian origin in this context is understandable from several perspectives. Firstly, the relative cultural and geographic isolation of Mennonites in Russia provided limited opportunity for inter-ethnic interaction and the introduction of new elements into their folklore. Secondly, except for some interaction with Russian governmental officials, til 1870, the Mennonites saw themselves as the dominant society in their interaction with Ukrainians, Jews and beggars, so they had nothing to gain by borrowing folklore from these sources. And thirdly, as mentioned earlier, the favorable disposition of Mennonites to Prussian

and German culture as a whole, created an atmosphere in which all aspects of germanic culture, even Low German songs, could survive.

These factors, however, do not account for the creation of new songs in the Russian context. Certainly, the relative autonomy and isolation of Mennonites allowed them to continue using the languages brought from Prussia til the 1870's when russification programs were introduced by the Russian government. However, the emergence of the "Mennonite Commonwealth" meant that the Mennonites

now faced the age-old dilemma of applying a radical religious commitment to an all-embracing social structure, unchallenged by outside political and religious forces (Toews, 1970:125).

Though the Low German songs emerging in this context refer in vague general terms to Russians and beggars, the lack of challenges to the system by outsiders, as mentioned in the quotation by Toews, changed the focus to tensions among the Mennonites themselves. The songs appearing at this time, express these in-group inequalities and tensions, sometimes by applauding Mennonite ideals such as endogamy, and at other times by criticizing the loser or non-conformist in Mennonite society.

That there are not more songs of social criticism at this time in Mennonite history is indicative of several things: that there were political means such as the 1860's 'Landless Commission' or immigration for dealing with the problems of inequalities among Mennonites, and, that there might be other verbal means such as gossip or the folktale for critiquing Mennonite society.

### Early Canadian

By comparison, the early Canadian context, from the 1870's to the mid-twentieth century, seems to have spawned few Low German songs. This is often explained by Mennonites as a reflection of pioneering hardships, which left little time for leisure time activities such as singing together, new technology which increased farm size and led many people to abandon their villages for homesteads, the advent of the automobile and increased mobility, the mass media such as radio and later TV which decreased the need for people to entertain themselves creatively through activities such as song, and with increasing wealth, more individualism, which often conflicted with communal activities such as singing.

In spite of the decreased emphasis on informal music making, some new Low German songs emerged, to be sung alongside those brought from Russia. As in the songs from Russia, the individual is ridiculed. In this case, it is the immigrant farmer whose knowledge is inadequate to cope with new technology, i.e., with a car.

One notes an interesting shift in focus in the songs composed in the early Manitoban experience. Whereas the songs composed in Russia critiqued the individual within society, it appears that some of the early Manitoban songs served as a voice for the dissenting Mennonite: the individual who borrows a popular war tune such as "Mlle. from Armentierres", the individual who criticizes the work ethic, and the individual who writes Low German lyrics for square dance tunes (Klassen, 1981:18). Obviously, Mennonite leaders lost some of their control over the community at this time.

Unlike Mennonites in the "Mennonite Commonwealth" in Russia, Mennonites in Manitoba had to contend with outside forces fairly early in their Manitoban experience. The socio-political context in which the Mennonites found themselves in the early twentieth century, had a profound impact on Mennonite attitudes toward their Germanic heritage and consequently, their output of Low German songs.

The introduction of English language instruction in the schools after 1916 in the hope of assimilating minority groups like the Mennonites in the direction of the Anglo-Saxon majority, anti-German feelings during the wars which caused many Mennonites to camouflage their Germanic heritage and identity, not to mention the willingness of many Mennonites to identify with the dominant society in hope of upward social mobility, influenced the retention of the Mennonite heritage, especially with respect to language. Consequently, this period in Mennonite history has the smallest output of Low German songs.

#### Contemporary Canadian

A significant change occurred in the mid 1960's. It became acceptable to sing Low German songs, not only in the hayloft, but even on stage for public entertainment.

This acceptability was preconditioned by a Canadian socio-political milieu which began to favor public expression of ethnic minority identity. Though the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism of 1963 was superseded in 1971 by the federal Multiculturalism policy, it had already set the stage for the development of a renewed ethnic consciousness.

The Commission's recommendations for fair employment practices, universal ethnic accessibility to public office and educational opportunities in minority languages, once again made it appear acceptable to be ethnic after a period in Canadian history in which immigration policies had favored immigrants who would most easily assimilate to the dominant culture.

With the Dominion on the verge of celebrating the centennial of Confederation in the mid 1960's, organizations like the Canadian Folk Arts Council became more generous in their funding of minority group projects. The National Museum of Man, the National Film Board, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation were encouraged to concentrate more on ethnic minorities.

Highlighting the folklore of cultural minorities was envisaged as a means of developing a Canadian identity, and through it, national unity. Even in their own religious periodicals, Mennonites were being accosted by full-page advertisements concerning a multicultural program which, by 1973, had inherited a sizeable budget. They were told that

Canada prides itself on the fact its citizens come from many cultural backgrounds. The various talents, cultures and technical skills we are able to enjoy as Canadians, make Canada a strong and dynamic country (Mennonite Brethren Herald, 1976:38).

This emphasis on the Canadian cultural mosaic fostered the expression of ethnic identity throughout the country. In Manitoba, this was evidenced by the founding of events such as Dauphin's Ukrainian Festival, designed to stimulate the town's flagging economy. The visibility of the performing arts of other ethnic groups helped to

create an environment in which Mennonites could publicly rediscover their own heritage.

It is also significant that by the mid 1960's there were already many third generation immigrants among Manitoba Mennonites. As Nahirny and Fishman (1965) have pointed out, ethnicity, for third generation immigrants, is no longer the primary source of identity it was for first generation immigrants, or the stigma it was for second generation immigrants who felt restricted in their attempts at upward social mobility. Consequently, third generation immigrants often feel freer to express their ethnic identity publicly in a conscious manner.

Because the memory of anti-German feeling had receded in Canadian consciousness by the 1960's, the stigma of being, or speaking German, had been minimized.

During the War and for a time later, German immigrants were reluctant to build up large and visible ethnic associations (O'Bryan, 1976:9)

because of public sentiment and governmental legislation against the 'enemy language'. With the lessening of this bias, it became more acceptable for Mennonites to use both High and Low German publicly, thus admitting germanic influences on their history.

"Plautdietscha Ohvent": Communal Event in Contemporary Canadian Context.

Nevertheless, one must remember that although many "Kanadier" and some "Russlaender" acknowledged Low German to be their mother tongue, and accepted it as their domestic language, it retained its status as the low language and was, therefore, considered to be inappropriate for poetry, music, and drama, especially in public performance. And yet, by the 1960's, English had infiltrated Mennonite

ranks to the extent where it was now the 'lingua franca' and Low German was the 'foreign language' - almost a museum piece - for many third generation immigrants.

In a context of renewed emphasis on Canadian ethnic identity and heritage, a new phenomenon began to manifest itself in communities with predominantly "Kanadier" populations. This phenomenon was announced in small town newspapers with headlines like "900 attend Threshermen's Low German Concert" (The Pembina Times, 1970:1) in Winkler, "Students present Low German dramas" (RRVE, 1971:5) also presented in Winkler, and "Low German play brings warm response" (The Carillon, 1974a:3) in Steinbach.

Mennonites call this phenomenon the "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*", or Low German evening. Initially, songs were used as fillers for these one to two hour programs of dramas, skits and readings, but with the advent of the "*Heischraitje*", they became an integral part of the program. The contents of the songs have already been discussed (p.88ff), but let us take a closer look at the immediate context in which these events occur.

An eyewitness at one of these programs asks us to imagine we are looking into a high school auditorium with

several hundred people sitting on wooden stacking chairs in semi-circular fashion around a stage. In the audience are parents, grandparents, teenagers, young marrieds, and babes in arms. People are casually dressed, but one sees an unusual number of hockey jackets. Must be some sports fanatics around!

The lights are dim, but there is a steady hum of voices and a continuous cracking sound..."Sunflower seeds..."No, we call it 'Knackzoht'. Tastes real good. Have some.".... I decline ...don't want those shells to get under my dentures!



The cracking and chatter subside as people crane to see what the commotion up front is all about. A farmer with bib overalls, straw hat and a vicious looking pitch fork has stomped up to centre stage and is welcoming the audience... Must be speaking Low German...shades of Chaucer... "By the way," he says, "have you ever heard the story of the Mennonite farmer who couldn't talk English so good?" (c.f. Friesen, 1977:1)

...another Landmark "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" has begun.

When comparing this 1978 "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" in Landmark with a similar event in Winkler at that time, we observe several significant differences in the composition of the audience. The audience at the Landmark event was primarily local, while the audience at the Winkler event came from the surrounding villages as well as the town. Age of the audience also differed. As stated, the Landmark audience was composed of a favorable cross-section of the community. The Winkler audience, in comparison, contained mostly middle-aged couples and senior citizens.

The fact that fewer young people attend these events in Winkler than in Landmark indicates several things. Firstly, it indicates that young people in Winkler have more leisure time activities available to them than do young people in a smaller centre such as Landmark. Secondly, it indicates a differential rate of language change. Young people in Landmark still understand Low German, while many young people in Winkler no longer speak or understand Low German. It also indicates that Landmark is predominantly "Kanadier". And lastly, the fact that the community as a whole attends an event in a village like Landmark, reveals that it is still a relatively

closed community.<sup>1</sup> The relationship of these factors to the contemporary Low German renaissance will be explored in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

We could look at the "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" as a prelude to another context in which Low German songs began to appear after 1970. Beginning in 1974, another phenomenon began to manifest itself.

### Regional Domain

1974, the centennial of Mennonite migration to the East Reserve, provided the occasion for considerable reflection about the Mennonite heritage. Under the influence of the Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee, active from 1972-1976, the East Reserve celebrated its centennial at Steinbach's Mennonite Village Museum in 1974. This regional celebration on the East Reserve, was followed in 1975 by a West Reserve village centennial celebration in Reinland, the oldest Mennonite village on the West Reserve. This particular celebration received so much publicity and popular acclaim that residents of other West Reserve villages began to plan similar celebrations. Most of these celebrations were village centennials, but by the late 1970's, even the sixty-seventh anniversary of the founding of a village such as Horndean provided sufficient cause for a reunion.

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<sup>1</sup>Villagers complain about the outsiders who have moved into the community in the past few years. Many of these are 'city people' who decided to move out to the 'quiet countryside' and commute to Winnipeg to work. Villagers say, "They want to take advantage of the good discipline in our schools, but they don't want to have their own kids disciplined."

Though held within the confines of the village, the village reunion is really a regional event, since it draws together hundreds of past and present residents of the village from all over the North American continent to participate in a celebration of their common history.

In contrast to the "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*". the Reunion or "*Traffen*" (meeting) is usually a two or three day event. Like the "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*". the Reunion is held at the village school or community hall which serves as a neutral meeting round for Mennonites of various Mennonite and even non-Mennonite denominational backgrounds.

One of the distinctive aspects of Mennonite culture which continually surfaces in this context is Low German. Sometimes it is used consciously for poems, skits or songs, and sometimes almost subconsciously as the language in which one recalls the Mennonite past. Low German songs and dramas are performed publicly by kin groups, the grownup *Gausseshlinyels* or volunteer choirs at one or more of the programs held during the weekend reunion.

#### Urban Context

Low German songs, a predominantly rural phenomenon, have made several pilgrimages to Winnipeg, Manitoba's capital city, in the past few years. A 1974 Mennonite Centennial Hymn Sing, held in Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall, featured several Low German religious songs from the book *Veertien Platdietsche Leeda* (Fourteen Low German Songs). The Mennonite Festival of Art and Music, a fund raising event held annually in Polo Park by the Ladies Auxiliary of

Westgate Collegiate in Winnipeg, regularly includes performances of Low German songs by the "*Heischraitje*". These performances have drawn large crowds and even some favorable comments from urban Mennonites who view this flowering of peasant art with a degree of scepticism. More recently, Mennonites have 'infiltrated' "Folklorama", a week-long publicly sanctioned display of ethnicity held annually in Winnipeg during the month of August. Here too, Low German song has become part of the expression of ethnic identity. Support for these performances comes primarily from Mennonites of rural background who allow Low German some credence. Urban Mennonites with a pro-High German background, remain aloof from, and critical of, these performances.

#### Performance Context

With regards to the performance context, we observe that performers appear in costume whenever certain topics are discussed in Low German song.

When single women sing about their single fate, as for example in "*Acht Meyalles*", they are always camouflaged as 'typical old maids'. Similarly, when men sing Low German songs of social comment, they appear in costume. The "*Heischraitje*", for example, perform wearing overalls and straw hats, and carrying pitch forks, in the guise of a threshing crew or hired hands, when they make comments about the disparity between the rich and the poor, or between Mennonites and their neighbors of other ethnic backgrounds, that is, when they provide a social critique of tradition.

Audience-performer relationships at "Heischraitje" performances are also of interest. In an attempt to create a *Tuhs* (at home) atmosphere, the "Heischraitje" provide *Knackzoht* or sunflower seeds for their audience, provided the program is not held in a carpeted building. At times, the "Heischraitje", as well as other groups, invite their audiences to sing along in the chorus of some of their songs. The creation of this informal atmosphere, thus makes an audience more receptive to a familial type discussion of the inconsistencies in Mennonite belief and practice.

Costuming and dramatization thus provide an opportunity for discussing socially tabooed subjects in a socially acceptable manner.

#### Research Context

The research context itself was of interest. Much of the material was collected through interviews held in the homes of informants. Most interviews were conducted around the kitchen table, rather than in the living room where one would expect people to entertain 'strangers'. There are a number of possible explanations: the living room in certain homes may not be used during the week, people though it would be easier to manage a tape recorder on a table, a young researcher was not considered to be a formal guest, or, perhaps it was assumed that a domestic language such as Low German belongs in the kitchen, while one would visit with High German speaking visitors in the living room.

Several songs were found in unlikely contexts: in Gladstone's Shopping Mall in Winkler, in the staff room at Canadian Mennonite

Bible College in Winnipeg, and on a North West Orient Flight enroute from Chicago to Miami, Florida.

Though this discussion of the social context of Low German songs has shown how the changing socio-political contexts have given rise to new Low German songs, it has not fully explained the social significance of singing in Low German. The social function of these songs is discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER VI

### SINGING MENNONITE<sup>1</sup>

For a man to speak one language rather than another is a ritual act, it is a statement about one's personal status; to speak the same language as one's neighbors expresses solidarity with those neighbors, to speak a different language from one's neighbors expresses social distance or even hostility (Leach, 1954:49).

The relationship between language and ethnicity received increasingly more attention by North American sociologists observing the influx of post World War II ethnic minority immigrants. According to sociologists of the 1950's, who subscribed to assimilationist and melting pot theories, ethnicity was on the verge of breathing its last as it gave birth to "anticolonial nationalism" (Young, 1976:7). However, not only did ethnicity refuse to die, it soon reasserted its vitality in phenomena such as the Black urban riots in the southern States, Black independence movements in Africa, and the beginning of the Quebec separatist movement in eastern Canada in the late 1960's. No, ethnicity was not dead, nor was its ill-defined relationship with language.

The fact that widely divergent societies such as the British, Canadians, and South Africans share a common language, and that ethnicity persists despite language change among groups like the Hutterites, supports the assumption that there is no 'a priori'

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<sup>1</sup>The phrase 'Singing Mennonite' was coined by my advisor Dr. Louise Sweet, as a parallelism to 'speaking Mennonite'.

relationship between language and ethnicity.<sup>1</sup> Yet, again and again language surfaced as one of the salient issues in ethnic minority struggles of the 1960's and 70's, and frequently as one of the defining features of ethnicity in less volatile situations. Mennonites in the Soviet Union, for example, were described in the mid-70's as 'Baptists who speak Low German'.

Though the linkage of language and ethnicity is not one by definition, language nevertheless has a unique capacity to serve as a symbol of ethnicity. Why is this the case? Because, according to sociolinguist Joshua Fishman, language is able to express not only the inherited aspect of ethnicity (paternity), and the behavioral expression of that inheritance (patrimony), but also the meanings individuals attach to paternity and patrimony, or phenomenology. Because language is the "recorder of paternity, the expresser of patrimony, and the carrier of phenomenology," it has an extremely high likelihood of becoming a symbol of ethnicity. In fact, Fishman goes so far as to say that the relationship between language and ethnicity is one of "sanctity by association" (Fishman, 1977:25).

'Speaking Mennonite': Low German as a Symbol of Mennonite Ethnicity

For many Manitoba Mennonites, the idea that the relationship between being of Russian Mennonite descent and speaking Low German is one of "sanctity by association", would indeed be

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<sup>1</sup>Fishman (1966) discusses the persistence of ethnicity despite the fact of language change, in contrast to Lieberman (1970), who like many sociolinguists thinks that mother-tongue maintenance is central to ethnic continuity.



questionable. After all, even peasant farmers like *Koop 'n Bua* (Koop and Buhr), the legendary *Shtruckformash fon Muhsdarp* (bush farmers from Mouse Village) found in Arnold Dyck's Low German novels lapse into High German when they discuss Mennonite distinctives such as pacifism. Likewise, certain attitudes toward Low German found in Arnold Dyck's *De Opnaom* (Dyck, 1951), a novel about Russian Mennonite boys' involvement in forestry service, make it obvious that some Mennonites do not regard Low German as their 'paternity'. In this novel, Dyck introduces

Krahn, a proud, haughty, presumptuous recruit whose father owns a factory and has failed to teach him Low German... which he calls a rude, uncouth, boorish peasant speech (Suderman, 1969:6).

If Low German is neither universally spoken among Mennonites, nor acceptable as a language in which to discuss Mennonite theological distinctives, can it nevertheless function as a symbol of Mennonite ethnicity?

The affirmative argument gains support from several sources. Firstly, unlike High German, Russian and English, Mennonites in Russia and Manitoba have shared Low German only with a negligible number of people: a few Lutheran neighbors, their Russian servants, and Jewish peddlars. This may be the reason why Low German is the only language which has rated the label 'speaking Mennonite', although literalists claim that this is a logical impossibility (Pokrant, 1978:4). It should be noted, however, that these people with whom Mennonites have shared Low German, are people whom the Mennonites consider to be culturally beneath them. This implies that the language is used only by certain people, of a certain social status,

within certain role-relationships. Therefore, though Low German, the 'low' language, 'speaks Mennonite', it probably does so only for Mennonites of a particular social stratum in the Mennonite social hierarchy.

Secondly, one notes an almost universal Mennonite<sup>1</sup> use of Low German for in-group humor. The idea that one is 'speaking Mennonite' when one speaks Low German is strongly endorsed by the unwritten rule which says that the punch-line of a good Mennonite joke must be told in Low German, "because it isn't funny when you translate it." One Anglo-Saxon in-law, who says Low German stories were always translated for her, "learned a little Low German, just so that I don't miss all the good jokes" (Vogt, 1978:13).

Even serious stories were given a humorous twist by the insertion of a Low German phrase. The story is told of a man injured in a lumbering accident. His companions, seeing his gaping wound, assume that he is dead. One of them says so.

At that the victim who had fallen on his face slowly moved his head and whispered in Low German, "*Nich gauns*" (not quite). He was rushed to the hospital and survived (Peters, 1977a:9).

Thirdly, the fact that contemporary Mennonite poets use the rejection of Low German as a synonym for the rejection of traditional Mennonite values and identity, is another indication of the extent to which Low German 'speaks Mennonite'. In David Waltner-Toews' "Mennonite Blues", a mother, reacting to her son's rejection

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<sup>1</sup>I.e., not only by Mennonites who still use the spoken language but even by those, like third or fourth generation immigrants, who no longer speak the language.

of his mother tongue expresses her anger saying

He says Low German is a pile of manure  
 Listen here, my little boy.  
 I will surround you with Low German  
 I will speak piles of it to you.  
 Then you will know what Low German is!  
 Then you will remember -  
 a mother's anger is a willow switch.  
 (Waltner-Toews, 1977:28).

The fact that Low German usage in Russia and Manitoba has been confined almost exclusively to Mennonites, secondly that it is regarded as a language which is not only capable of, but desirable for expression of in-group humor, and thirdly, that it has served as a poetic symbol of the rejection of traditional Mennonite values and identity, therefore, qualifies Low German for the label 'speaking Mennonite', even though it may do so for only a certain portion of the Mennonites.

As Leach says in the quotation introducing this chapter, an individual's choice of a particular language is a statement about his identity and his relationship to his neighbor. This choice is a political act by which one expresses either solidarity with or hostility towards one's neighbor. Therefore, an individual's choice of Low German is a statement about his relationship to Mennonite, as well as to non-Mennonite people. In this capacity, Low German serves as a symbol of Mennonite ethnicity, an index to inter- and intra-ethnic differences. And, if speaking Low German is 'speaking Mennonite', is singing Low German songs not 'singing Mennonite'?

'Singing Mennonite': Low German Songs as a Symbol of Mennonite Ethnicity

a) Vis-a-Vis other Ethnic Groups

That the use of Low German expresses Mennonite ethnicity, both in terms of group solidarity as well as social distance from those who do not speak the language, may at this point in the discussion appear as an obvious conclusion. We could expect the singing of Low German songs on the streets of Russian Mennonite villages or at southern Manitoba village picnics, reunions or Low German evenings of entertainment to exclude the non-Low German speaking public, and thereby to reaffirm the Mennonite cultural heritage.

However, as has been shown in the preceding discussion (chapters III and IV), Low German songs 'sing Mennonite' in much more explicit ways, both through references to ethnic outsiders, as well as through selective borrowing of materials from these outsiders. A summary review illustrates this generalization.

Sometimes Low German songs 'sing Mennonite' through general warnings about strangers, as for example in the *Chingaleeda* brought from Russia, and the recently composed Horndean Reunion songs. Social distance from strangers is also evident in the "we-they" comments found in the early<sup>1</sup> "*Heischraitje*" songs. By pointing out the virtues of the ethnic insider who lives in a village 'where we all know each other', one is led to believe that the ethnic outsider is morally inferior.

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<sup>1</sup>The "we-they" comments are much more common in the early "*Heischraitje*" songs than in their later songs, which unfortunately could not be included in this study.

At other times, the songs 'sing Mennonite' through indirect references to the ethnic outsider, as for example, the beggar, who will surely steal Mennonite children who do not go to sleep without fussing. Though the ethnic identity of the beggar is not spelled out, the little child in Russia would have assumed him to be a Russian peasant or a gypsy,<sup>1</sup> while the child in southern Manitoba would have associated the term beggar with the Metis or halfbreeds as the Mennonites called native people who came begging at their doorsteps.

And thirdly, the lyrics of Low German songs 'sing Mennonite' through explicit references to ethnic outsiders. These references are found primarily in *Gausseleeda*, songs of social comment and criticism, though they are alluded to in "Schluesselbund" *Leeda*.

In all of these lyrics, the ethnic outsider is seen in stereotypical terms, usually with "at least mildly perjorative connotations" (Young, 1976:147). That Low German songs 'sing Mennonite' in this sense is not at all surprising when one realizes that even Mennonite dogs have always known how to treat strangers. Spitz, a 'Mennonite dog' who lived in Russia several decades ago, knew that

A friend of the house may pass without further ado...  
In the case of one of the more remote neighbors or a Jew, the poodle will growl, escort the visitor to the door, and maintain an attitude of reserve. However, should a Russian, or a gypsy, or a beggar of any nationality come through the street or yard gate....

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<sup>1</sup>In his autobiography, Arnold Dyck tells us "...it's the gypsies now!...they steal children.... Every boy in the village knows that, because many of them, when standing around a gypsy camp in the meadow, at the end of the village in the evening, have heard children cry in the tents. Why were they kept in tents... Because they are white stolen children, whom nobody is supposed to see" (Dyck, 1974:132-133).

He yelps for all he is worth, attacks the stranger's legs, grabs for his stick - he may not bite anywhere else - and creates such an uproar that it's heard in the house and all over the yard.... One quiets Spitz with a "Go lie down," but he knows that it isn't meant (Dyck, 1974:50-52).



(Dyck, 1974:51)

The lyrics, however, 'sing Mennonite' in yet another way. We note the correspondence between Mennonite Low German songs and children's songs of other north European germanic people of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And yet, we also observe the absence of other materials commonly found in Low German poetry and song of that period: "Maria" songs associated with the Catholic tradition, and epics celebrating the exploits of noblemen and war heroes (c.f. Alpers, 1924; Kern, 1922). The absence of these materials from the Mennonite Low German repertoire indicates ethnic

differentiation between the Mennonites and the surrounding societies who possessed these songs in abundance.

We can also observe this differentiation from the larger society in the contemporary songs of the "*Heischraitje*". The "*Heischraitje*" critique of their own society is based on a traditional religious and moral code. The fact that they critique their society, rather than condoning it, and by this espousing a self-indulgent way of life, stands in sharp contrast to contemporary popular song in which gratification of the individual, often at the expense of traditional and communal values, is flaunted as a desirable way of life.

Likewise, the melodies borrowed for Low German songs 'sing Mennonite'. In his discussion of assimilated fine arts in the fourth world, Nelson Graburn notes:

attempts of acculturated peoples to copy or use traditional arts of the dominant civilized peoples by whom they are being influenced (Graburn, 1969:465).

One observes a similar principle at work in the choice of melodies for Low German songs. Mennonites have consistently borrowed melodies from cultures they respected, while ignoring the melodies of people they considered to be culturally inferior to them. We find for example, the abundance of High German melodies for children's songs, coming from Russia, numerous North American folksong melodies used for contemporary Low German songs, and the dearth of Ukrainian and French melodies. These choices once again 'sing Mennonite'. They reveal how Mennonites rank themselves in relation to other ethnic groups.

An apparent paradox emerges when we compare the way in which Low German songs 'sing Mennonite' verbally, with the way they express ethnicity musically. The reader will recall that the verbal references to other ethnic groups were to groups whom the Mennonites considered to be culturally inferior to them,<sup>1</sup> while the melodies were borrowed from societies considered to be culturally, and especially politically, above them. Strangely enough, this paradox reveals two different ways of saying the same thing: by criticizing or ridiculing societies below them, and imitating societies above them, Mennonites were staking their claim for political viability and legitimacy - a claim for upward social mobility.

Although Low German songs have traditionally been sung in much the same contexts as the folksongs of other ethnic groups, the contexts in which the contemporary Low German songs are performed, have a unique way of 'speaking Mennonite'. The fact that the "*Plautdietscha Ohvent*" format mirrors that of the Sunday evening church service, not only shows continuity in the Mennonite tradition, it also contrasts with the dance hall atmosphere in which the folksongs of many of their surrounding societies are performed.

Like the choice of contexts, the references to ethnic outsiders, the absence of certain common European folksong themes, and selective borrowing of melodies show that Low German songs have

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<sup>1</sup>Poems honoring the Russian Czarina Catherine the Great, by contrast, were written in High German, the high language considered to be the appropriate vehicle for the expression of ideas in the domains of politics and poetry.



served as a vehicle for inter-ethnic differentiation, and therefore have 'sung Mennonite'.

b) By the Expression of Mennonite Ideals

Low German songs, however, do not 'sing Mennonite' only by evaluating the ethnic outsider, but also by expressing ideals and tensions among Mennonites themselves.

Looking first of all at pan-Mennonite ideals expressed in these songs, we observe that these ideals are expressed both directly and indirectly, and positively as well as negatively. On the one hand, we hear comments about the type of behavior which is expected of both children and adults, especially by implication, in those songs which recreate an idyllic past. On the other hand, we can assume what the ideals of Mennonite society are from seeing, firstly, which actions and attitudes are ridiculed as socially unacceptable behavior, secondly which social norms are criticized by certain individuals who fail to abide by them, and thirdly, which socially unacceptable behavior is celebrated in song.

Most songs expressing these ideals positively centre around the family. The ideal in marriage is that a couple work together rather than trying to dominate each other. For a woman, the ideal role in Mennonite society appears to be that of being a wife, mother and accomplished cook. For the man, the ideal is that of being a husband, father and farmer. Both parents contribute to the raising, primarily the discipline, of the children: rewarding obedience and punishing disobedience. Familial harmony is seen as the ultimate goal.

The recreation of an idyllic past in the reunion songs, provides an insight into traditional communal goals. Knowing and socializing with one's neighbor are synonymous with the ideals of social intimacy and communal harmony. These ideals are summarized in a contemporary reunion song. According to "The Ballad of Peter Harms", sung at the Reinland Reunion, the ideal person in the community is one who even as a child, participates in all communal activities, and as an adult, marries and continues to contribute to the community in a respectable profession.

More common than the explicit expression of social ideals, is the criticism of socially unacceptable behavior. Because Low German reserves no moralistic vocabulary such as the High German religious terminology derived from pietism and Luther's translation of the Bible for discussing 'good behavior' or criticizing unacceptable behavior, it uses different tones of voice: scolding, ridicule and humor. These, we can conclude, are acceptable ways of regaining and maintaining communal harmony in Mennonite society.

From these criticism we can further extrapolate Mennonite ideals. In traditional songs coming from Russia, we hear criticism of village peasants who fail to uphold social mores, or, who fail to exhibit occupational skills or find a suitable mate. The rich, too, are criticized - for their greed and dishonesty. That no one is beyond the bounds of social criticism is seen furthermore in songs coming from the early Canadian context. Parents are ridiculed for their ignorance of social decorum, servants for their crude table manners, and neighbors and neighboring villagers for crude behavior

and inability to cope with a technological society. Obviously, this behavior is the antithesis of the ideal.

However, individuals who failed to live up to the expectations of their communities also had recourse to Low German song and frequently used humor to try to gain the sympathy of the community as they rationalized their behavior. Low German song, for example, was used to justify one's anger with an irresponsible neighbor, one's drinking (for medicinal purposes, of course), and one's resistance to the work ethic. Again, this behavior obviously vitiates the ideal.

The 'celebration of disobedience' or 'rituals of rebellion' in other Low German songs, provide further insight into social taboos, and by implication, ideals of Mennonite society. The delight with which the poet recalls the events of promiscuous behavior, or aimless, or even worse, reckless driving, tells us that not only the behavior, but even the discussion of it in public were tabooed by the community.

The 'celebration of disobedience', like the criticism as well as positive expression of pan-Mennonite ideals thus provide an insight into Mennonite identity. The identity expressed here has as its ideal the creation and maintenance of communal unity and harmony, based on a traditional moral code.

#### 'Singing Intra-Mennonite': Low German Songs as a Symbol of Intra-Mennonite Differentiation

Thus far in the discussion of Low German songs as a symbol of Mennonite ethnicity vis-a-vis other ethnic groups and via the expression of Mennonite ideals, these songs have simply 'sung

Mennonite' in that they, like other traditional arts have been shown to

have important functions in maintaining ethnic identity and social structure, and in didactically instilling the important values in group members (Graburn, 1976b:4).

However, lest the foregoing discussion of ideals in Low German songs leave the impression that these songs have successfully created and maintained a state of universal bliss among Mennonites, we need to balance the picture by looking at the ways in which Low German songs have consistently served as a symbol of intra-Mennonite differentiation.

The songs reveal intra-Mennonite differences in at least five significant areas: immigration period, parochial biases, East/West Reserve differences, intervillage differences, and tensions in the social hierarchy.

With respect to immigration period, intra-Mennonite differences are revealed in several ways. The most obvious of these is differential knowledge of Low German songs. As has been shown in the earlier discussion, though there were a number of songs which were familiar to Mennonites of all immigration periods, there were a number which were known only by "Kanadier", "Auswanderer" or "Russlaender". Further research would be needed to determine whether or not any songs were the exclusive territory of "Neueingewanderte".

Differences in immigration period also became evident when one looked at the sources for Low German song melodies. "Russlaender" by and large used more tunes of High German folksong background, and were noted particularly for using more religious tunes

for children's songs, possibly as a subconscious reaction to the curtailment of religious freedom in early twentieth century Russia.

We also find differential participation in contemporary Low German musical events on the basis of immigration background. Recent immigrants were rarely involved in historic-commemorative events such as reunions. Also, it is primarily "Kanadier" who have been involved in other Low German evenings of entertainment, possibly because of their place in the Mennonite social hierarchy, which will be discussed somewhat later.

Secondly, intra-Mennonite differences are expressed in terms of parochial biases. Though denominational background is referred to explicitly only in a "Heischraitje" song from one of the recent operettas not included in this study, singers of Low German songs find other more subtle ways of expressing this fact. One of these is in the expression of ideals which characterize certain parochial groups: only among "Auswanderer" would 'pride' be mentioned as the worst possible social 'sin'.

We note also that "Schluesselbund" *Leeda* are found mostly among "Kirchliche" Mennonites, while square dance tunes are found among Mennonites of Old Colony or Sommerfelder background, indicating different forms of acceptable socializing among the young people of these groups. Other musical elements exemplify these differences as well. It is only among Mennonites who no longer use the slow chorale tunes in their church services that these tunes are used for songs of social comment or criticism.

By contrast, the children in these traditional or 'conservative' churches, are the only Mennonite children who sing any

Low German religious songs, indicative of both differential language, as well as socio-cultural change in general, between these Mennonites and other groups.

The evidence of parochial biases among Mennonites found in Low German song come as no surprise to the student of Mennonite history, who is aware that

Mennonites know themselves more in terms of their particular denominational identities than in terms of a general Mennonite image (Epp, 1978:290).

What might, however, be surprising is the fact that this type of fragmentation among Mennonites is revealed in a 'cultural appendage' such as Low German songs.

Thirdly, Low German songs provide the vehicle for the expression of East/West reserve differences among Manitoba Mennonites. This may be expressed in terms of Low German dialectical differences, ridiculed in one song, or in varying participation in contemporary Low German musical entertainment. As noted earlier, groups participating in West Reserve performances, were by and large "Russlaender" who no longer spoke the language, who used this form of entertainment to express social criticism of things such as immigrant English and peasant ways. By contrast, East Reserve performers, notably the "Heischraitje", who are still fluent in their Low German mother-tongue, while they have used Low German evenings to express social criticism in the past, have more recently begun to explore a range of feelings not traditionally thought to be expressed in that language: homesickness, the pain of broken relationships and the sense of loss experienced by the continually uprooted peasant

immigrant. These two attitudes again reflect differing positions in the Mennonite social hierarchy.

Turning to the topic of village rivalries, we find these explicitly referred to in traditional songs in terms of village nicknames. However, these differences can also be seen in the fact that certain songs were familiar only to immigrants coming from a particular village or region in Russia. In contemporary Manitoba, we note the almost possessive, uncritically nostalgic attitude with which villagers embrace "our reunion songs."

As has been intimated earlier, the all-encompassing intra-Mennonite differentiation expressed in the Low German songs, is that of differences of rank and status occupied by various groups of Mennonites in the social hierarchy.

This comes to the fore already at the level of language choice. Not only is the Molotschna dialect seen in the songs of East Reserve Mennonites, and the Chortitza dialect among West Reserve "Kanadier" who 'sing Mennonite', but those Mennonites who consciously 'sing Mennonite' are separated from the elitists who refuse to have anything to do with a 'peasant' language. We observe this negative attitude particularly among "Russlaender", especially those of Molotschna Colony background. Low German, the domestic language of the people, though it has been romanticized by poets as being "at the heart of the Prussian-Russian Mennonite experience and culture in a way that High German never was and English will never be" (Reimer, 1979b:22), is still, for all intents and purposes, the Mennonite peasant language, and has been traditionally associated with those in the lower echelons of the Mennonite social hierarchy.

That this is the case, is evident also in the occupational background represented in the songs; it is always that of the peasant farmer, never that of the estate owner, teacher or businessman.

Furthermore, the status of Low German is evident in the linguistic register used in most of these songs. For the most part, they are written in street language, rather than in the language of the Mennonite minister or mayor. The songs represent a level of social control, but not that of the official channels such as the clergy or village politician. Rather, they represent such influence as the ordinary peasant farmer or teen-aged idealist was able to exert in his community through social criticism or village gossip.

The evidence of factionalism among Manitoba Mennonites is seen as well in the presence of two drama groups: the urban Winnipeg Mennonite Theatre, whose stated objective of "the performance of the dramatic arts...with special reference to the Mennonite and German-Canadian communities in Manitoba" (Enns, 1978:20) does not appear to be met by the performance of Puccini operas in Italian, and by contrast, the "*Heischraitje*" and the Landmark Alumni Drama Club, a rural popular drama group who are becoming known for their performances of various aspects of Mennonite history, and for their function not only as 'tellers of tales', but also as social critics. Obviously, these groups represent at least two of the major factions among Mennonites: a faction which vies for recognition in the western classical art tradition, and a faction which attempts to mirror Mennonite society while singing and acting for their own enjoyment.

In his review of a "*Heischraitje*" performance, one reviewer comments that it is



an irony that this Low German theatre renaissance should be spontaneously generated in the once dour and disapproving environs of a Kleine Gemeinde community (Reimer, 1979:10).

The fact that, in a small relatively closed Mennonite community which has traditionally had the church as its social centre, a group calling themselves grasshoppers, that is, insects which undermine the stability of an agrarian community, produce a recording called "Sprie" meaning 'chaff', a recording in which those who work day and night solely for material gain are told that their ideals are 'chaff', in Low German, the secular language, suggests that they are secular social critics of a relatively closed religious community.

The "*Heischraitje*" themselves interpret their name quite differently. They began initially as a group singing religious songs, and chose the name from the biblical story of John the Baptist, known as the 'voice crying in the wilderness' who was fed by locusts and wild honey. They do, however, see themselves as social critics of a relatively closed community, although they generally state that they sing simply because they enjoy doing so. Their function as social critics of Mennonite society, certainly contrasts with that of the predominantly "Russlaender" urban theatre groups which appears to be more oriented to the goals of artistic performance articulated by the larger non-Mennonite society.

The differences between these two theatre groups is only one example of the "lack of internal consensus" (Epp, 1978:289) which seems to characterize Mennonites. As well, we have seen how the Low German songs have revealed other evidences of this factionalism: through the expression of immigration, parochial, East/West Reserve and inter-village differences.

'Singing Mennonite' in Contemporary Canadian Society

As suggested intermittently, contemporary Low German songs 'sing Mennonite' in a somewhat different way than do earlier songs. We see, for example, a more self-conscious discussion of ethnic identity. Though this may reflect the personal biases of certain individuals writing these songs, it also reflects the changing socio-political context in which these songs are being sung.

In the discussion of social context in Chapter V, we saw that these contemporary songs were written in a context of growing awareness of cultural pluralism and greater consciousness of Mennonite history because of the celebration of various centennials.

Folklorists like Robert Klymasz, who have studied the expression of ethnicity in contemporary society, attribute the resurgence of ethnic expression to several factors: the freedom of third generation immigrants from delimiting aspects of ethnicity experienced by first and second generation immigrants, the need of individuals to react to the homogenizing influence of the mass media, and the presence of a dominant society which condones certain expressions of ethnicity, and, in fact, defines them as contributions to Canadian culture (Klymasz, 1970b:111-120). Others, like artistic director, John Hirsh, would also attribute this change to a new anti-colonial attitude (Kucherawy, 1981:24).

Paramount among the factors Klymasz mentions, however, is the possibility of cultural, or as one folklorist calls it, "romantic pluralism" (Danielson, 1972:411). This allows the individual belonging to an ethnic minority to

indulge in a fantasy of ethnic separateness and individuality without transgressing the limits and patterns prescribed and sanctioned by the surrounding dominant English speaking culture (Klymasz, 1970b:123).

Mennonite writers too have seen this 'fantasy of ethnic separateness' as a problem for a people whose "essence is not integration but separation" (Epp, 1978:291) from surrounding societies. The "*Heischraitje*" in "*Blingyul Lament*" ("Bilingual/Blind Lament") and Mennonite educator Victor Peters (1977b:14) point to politicians who, through the institution of the Manitoba Schools Act, were able to use English as the agent of assimilation par excellence. Similarly, Mennonite historian Frank Epp (1978), surveying the contemporary Canadian political scene, expresses his mistrust of the policy of multiculturalism, because its support for the public expression of ethnic minority identity may be a subtle way of actually undermining that identity, leading Mennonites to applaud the fact

that our society, neither angrily fractured nor blandly homogeneous, may be one of the few societies in the world that can celebrate its cultural variety (Penner, 1981a:11).

Yes, we could bemoan the fact that Mennonites have jumped onto the Canadian ethnic minority bandwagon, that they have 'allowed' songs in the low status language to 'sing Mennonite' for them, and that they have permitted the Low German song tradition of the past to be forgotten, and the new tradition to become commercialized.

These conclusions could certainly be substantiated, but there are other aspects of the flowering of Low German song which we ought to remember as well. Firstly, since, as the "*Heischraitje*" tell us in "*Blingyul Lament*", many Mennonites have voluntarily assimilated

to the dominant society, sacrificing such values as their language, the fact that other Mennonites still sing in this language may, in fact be indicative of the extent to which they have resisted assimilation, favoring instead a policy of accommodation.

And secondly, the renaissance of Low German song, while part of a larger social process, may itself be a tool for the creation of a new ethnic consciousness and unity among the Mennonites, since according to Epp

A wide variety of public events and celebrations, including the traditional song fests, the more recent dramatic presentations and art exhibitions, and all kinds of mass gatherings which have cut across many of the dividing lines, have contributed substantially to a new sense of Mennonite peoplehood (Epp, 1978:219).

Low German songs have been sung at these events, and in fact, have often been the feature which has attracted Mennonites to attend mass gatherings such as the annual Mennonite Festival of Art and Music, or the Mennonite Pavilion at Folklorama.

Not only has there been a resurgence of Low German song at this public level, but also at the familial level. Young mothers report singing Low German lullabies to their babies, and this is certainly in keeping with tradition. However, families also report singing Low German songs at family gatherings and this appears to be almost solely a contemporary feature. In other words, it is now socially acceptable for an adult to sing in the low language, a language once reserved for babies, *Gausseshlinyels* and dogs.

The other distinctive feature of these songs is, that contrary to generalizations by folklorists like Klymasz, who tell us that the 'new world' or ethnic folklore tends to be simpler than

that of the immigrant folklore complex (Klymasz, 1973:136-137), contemporary Low German songs are more elaborate in terms of harmonization, instrumentation and vocal style than their 'old world' counterparts. With respect to Low German song, this is understandable if we remember that these songs in the low language are now entering an arena, the arena of performance, once reserved exclusively for the high language.

Further research would be required to determine whether the development of an adult musical repertoire in a low language, or the elaboration of a musical style in a low language when it serves a high language function are unique to the Mennonites, or characteristic of similar processes in other societies. I presume that they are characteristic rather than unique, but that the flexibility with which these traditions are adapted to a new social context are part of the essence of being Mennonite, that is, constantly migrating to new social environments and having to adjust to them. Perhaps a significant aspect of 'singing Mennonite' is that of learning to express one's cultural heritage in a changing world.

### Summary and Conclusions

As an initial study in a new field, this study of Low German songs has probably raised as many questions as it has answered, and left many aspects of Low German song unstudied. Also, as intimated throughout the paper, many phenomena, such as the songs of the "Auswanderer", the "Neueingewanderte" and the "Umsiedler", and the most recent "*Heischraitje*" operettas, have been given only passing, if any, mention. The questioning reader will also wonder how the

findings among southern Manitoba Mennonites compare with knowledge of Low German songs among other groups of Mennonites, such as those in Saskatchewan, or various parts of Latin America, among whom there are reportedly a considerable number of Low German songs. No doubt, there are numerous other unstudied areas in Low German folklore.

Though this study of Low German song is an introductory study, it has provided insight into the questions raised earlier, that is, the existence of songs in a language in which one supposedly does not sing, the diversity of repertoire within a single ethno-religious group, and changes in lyric content, melodic sources and performance contexts over the past one and a half centuries.

The assumption that one does not sing in Low German was clarified in the light of sociolinguistic research on 'diglossia', where finding on 'low status' languages such as Low German made it possible to predict that firstly, there would be widespread denial of the existence of these songs, and secondly, they would be found primarily within a minority group among the Mennonites themselves. These predictions were, in fact, substantiated. Low German songs, if and when they were found, were found almost exclusively among "Kanadier" Mennonites.

Secondly, the diversity of Low German song repertoire among Mennonites was linked to factors such as immigration patterns, parochial biases, intervillage or East/West Reserve differences, or differences in an individual's place in the Mennonite social hierarchy.

And thirdly, the changing Low German song repertoire is

representative of patterns of Mennonite resistance and accommodation to their Ukrainian, German, French and English-speaking neighbors in nineteenth century Russia, early twentieth century, and post 1970, Manitoba. Thus, even in the songs performed in a low status language we observe musical borrowing from ethnic groups of higher prestige, while the musical resources of groups considered culturally inferior to the Mennonites are ignored.

'Singing Mennonite', as we have seen, is no idle act of entertainment. It is a political act. An individual expresses his identity, vis-a-vis other ethnic groups, and vis-a-vis other Mennonites in the Mennonite social hierarchy, by 'singing Mennonite'.

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VOLUME II

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## APPENDIX I

## LOW GERMAN ORTHOGRAPHY

Anyone writing in Low German is immediately faced with the problem of choosing an orthography for a dialect which has no standardized spelling, even among Mennonites of a single immigration period.

The orthography developed for this particular study was derived in part from the writings of Reuben Epp (1972), Valeda Unger (1974), various authors writing in the Mennonite Mirror (1971-1981), and from discussion with, and the unpublished poetry of, Menno Wiebe.

The orthography, however, reflects the author's personal biases. Because she is a "Kanadier" of Chortitza Colony origin, the idiosyncracies of that particular dialect are at times favored over those of "Kanadier" of Molotschna Colony background, or "Russlaender" of either Chortitza or Molotschna Colony background, despite attempts to transcribe each group's dialect as accurately as possible.

Secondly, the author has chosen a phonetic alphabet, in contrast to those Mennonite authors who write Low German primarily on the basis of High German orthography. Instead, certain concessions, such as the use of double consonants after a short vowel, are made, in order to make the Low German orthography maximally readable to the English-speaking reader as well.

The orthography used was charted on a phonetic chart, but will be selectively reproduced here in the form of a pronunciation key. All vowels are included, but only irregularities in pronunciation of consonants are mentioned.

Pronunciation Key

## Consonants

- "ch" - voiceless alveolar fricative in word initial position, often rendered "tj/ty", with no known English equivalent
- voiceless velar fricative in word final position, as the "ch" in the High German "loch" (hole).
- "g" - voiced guttural if word initial as "g" in 'good'.  
voiceless guttural if word final
- "sh" - voiceless alveopalatal grooved fricative  
pronounced as "sh" in 'shine'

"zh" - voiced alveopalatal grooved fricative pronounced as  
"s" in 'treasure'

## Vowels

### short vowels

i - as in "Chint" (child)	or in 'bit'
e - as in "met" (with)	or in 'met'
a - as in "lach" (lay)	or in 'ah'
o - as in "mot" (must)	or in 'but'
u - as in "uch" (also)	or in 'look'

### long vowels

ie - as in "mien" (my)	or in 'lean'
eh - as in "neh" (no)	or in 'bay'
ei - as in "yeit" (goes)	or in 'lie'
oh - as in "Ohdla" (eagle)	or in 'no'
ue <sup>1</sup> - as in "bueti" (outside)	or in 'cute'

### glides

ia - as in "Fia" (fire)	
ea - as in "vea" (who)	or in 'mare'
au - as in "aul" (already)	or in 'owl'
oa - as in "Koa" (car)	or in 'story'
oi <sup>2</sup> - as in "Foikel" (pigs)	or in 'boy'
ua - as in "Ua" (watch)	
ou - as in "Kou" (cow)	or in 'out'

All nouns are capitalized.

<sup>1</sup>Rendered as "uh" in Molotschna and "Russlaender" dialects (see Vol. I:48).

<sup>2</sup>Rendered as "oa" in Molotschna and "Russlaender" dialects.

## APPENDIX II

## ANNOTATED COLLECTION OF LOW GERMAN SONGS

The annotated collection of Low German songs contains the Low German lyrics and melody, an English translation, and comments on each of the songs collected for this study. The songs are arranged in the order in which they are discussed in Volume I, as well as in the order of familiarity and chronological age. The primary historical eras from which they emerged are designated as 'ethnic' - for songs coming from Russia, 'immigrant' - for songs composed in Canada before 1960, and 'contemporary' - for songs composed after 1960.<sup>1</sup>

The upper left hand corner contains information on the origins of each song: the source of its tune, the writer of its lyrics, and bibliographic information, if it is published.

The upper right hand corner of each page contains information of the source from which the song was collected: the name of the informant, his immigration period, present address of the informant, date collected/recorded, and recorded source.

The following key serves to further clarify this information:

## Immigration Period:

- A - "Auswanderer", or "Kanadier" who migrated to Latin America in the 1920's who have returned to Manitoba
- Am. - American, migrated to Canada from the Central States
- Br. - Brazil
- ER - East Reserve, designates East Reserve "Kanadier" of Chortitza Colony background
- Ger. - Germany, designates "Neueingewanderte" who migrated to Canada from Russia through Germany
- K - "Kanadier", migrated to Canada in the 1870's
- R - "Russlaender", migrated to Canada in the 1920's
- Me. - Mexico, or "Auswanderer" from Mexico
- Mo. - Molotschna Colony, in Russia

<sup>1</sup>c.f. Klymasz' (1973) distinction between ethnic and immigrant.

- N - "Neueingewanderte", migrated to Canada after WW II
- Pa. - Paraguay

#### Recorded Sources

- BCC - Blumenfeld Centennial Celebration cassette
- HR - Horndean Reunion cassette
- PD - *Plat Deetsch mus ick* cassette
- PDC - *Plautdietshe Leeda* cassette
- PDL - *Plautdietshe Leeda* - reel to reel tape
- PEA - Kenneth Peacock tapes
- RCC - Reinland Centennial Celebration cassette
- WPH - Wilmer Penner reel to reel tape of the "*Heis chraitje*"

#### Other

- arr. - arranged by
- comp. - composed by
- T - tune
- trans. - translated
- v. - variant
- vs. - verse

Illustrations are taken from the works of Mennonite artists. All signed sketches (A. Dyck), come from Arnold Dyck's Lost on the Steppes (1974). Unsigned sketches are the work of Mennonite artist John Klassen (1973). Bibliographic citations are given for all other illustrations.

*CHINGALEEDA* (Children's Songs)

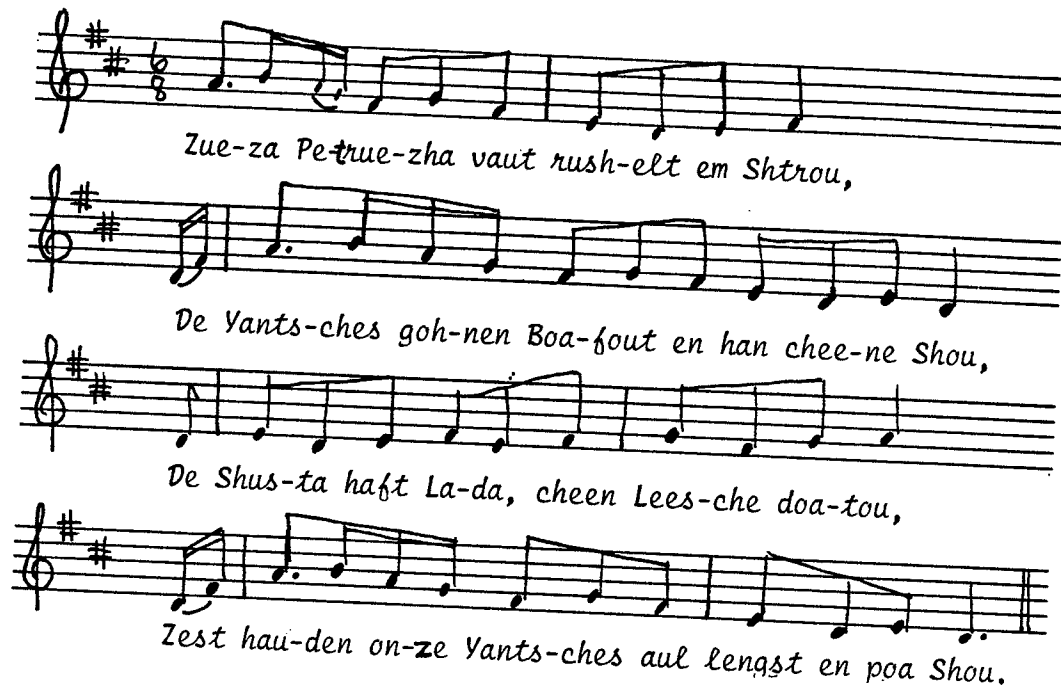
*Vieyenleeda* (Lullabies) - immigrant

## ZUEZA PETRUEZHA

("Susie, my little one")

Tune 1: from Humperdinck's "Hansel and Gretel"

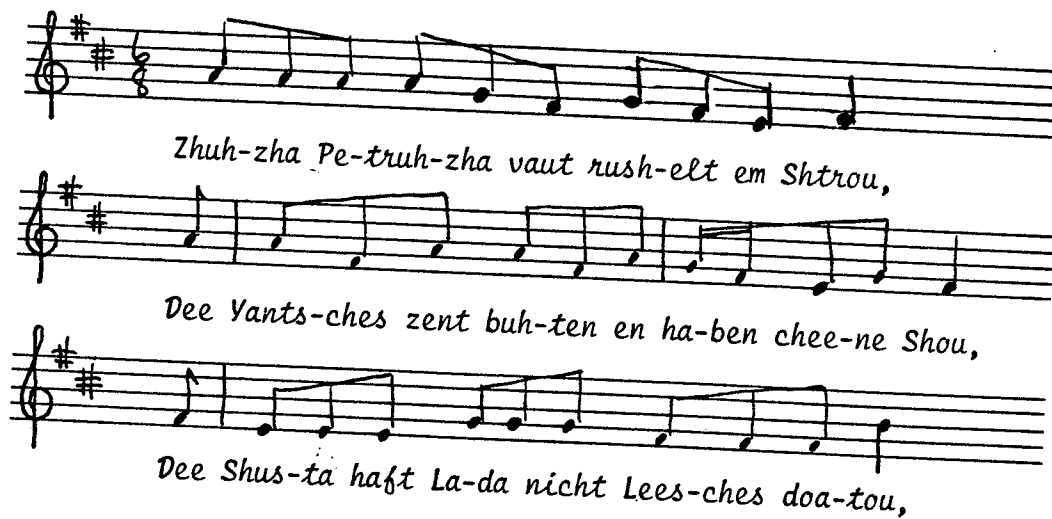
K,R



Zue-za Pe-true-zha vault rush-elt em Shtrou,  
 De Yants-ches goh-nen Boa-fout en han chee-ne Shou,  
 De Shus-ta haft La-da, cheen Lees-che doa-tou,  
 Zest hau-den on-ze Yants-ches aul lengst en poa Shou.

Tune 2: Variant 1

Mrs. Isaac Thiessen - R  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 May 10, 1978  
 PDL-5



Zhuh-zha Pe-truh-zha vault rush-elt em Shtrou,  
 Dee Yants-ches zent buh-ten en ha-ben chee-ne Shou,  
 Dee Shus-ta haft La-da nicht Lees-ches doa-tou,



## Tune 2: Variant 2

R,N

Zuh-zha Pe-truh-zha vout rush-elt em Shtrou,  
Dee Yants-ches gohne boaft, en dee ha-be chee-ne Shou,  
Dee Shus-ta haft La-da, cheen Lees-che doa-tou,  
Zest haud ons chlie-na Pee-ta aul lang en poa Shou.

## Translation:

Susie, my little one, what's rustling in the straw?  
The geese<sup>1</sup> are going barefoot/outside (T2:v1),  
They haven't any shoes.  
The shoemaker has leather, but no little last,  
Or our little geese/Peter (T2:v2)  
would have had shoes long ago.

## Comments:

"Zueza Petruetzha" is the most universally known Low German song. It is used both as a lullaby and as a song to entertain children.

<sup>1</sup>The *che* diminutive ending, used in most Low German children's songs, will be assumed, rather than translated each time it appears.



The theme is a typical lullaby theme in that it presents a problem.<sup>1</sup> Though the problem of the geese<sup>2</sup> is not resolved, the child is reassured that it can sleep peacefully. The poor little geese, the parent may tell the child, have only a bed of straw, while the child has a warm bed in a warm house.

When used to entertain small children, the song is frequently personalized by the addition of the child's name to the last line, for example, the reference to 'our little Peter'.

As one would expect with a well-known folksong, there were numerous variants of this song. There were almost as many versions of the last line as there were singers, but the basic thought remained unchanged. Variants of the first line ranged from "Zueza Petruetza" to "Zhuzha Petruetza", revealing a common dialectical difference between "Kanadier" and "Russlaender", to such variations as "Zueze leeve Zueze" (Susie, dear Susie) and "Eiya Popciya" (Poor old goose) found in Humperdinck's operetta, "Hansel and Gretel". Zueze/Zueza was usually translated as 'Susie', though the rendition of the word as Zhuzha suggested it might be a shushing term, commonly found in Prussian lullabies.

The words recall a familiar sight in Mennonite agrarian society: geese walking in the straw. But, like the British nursery rhyme, the song may have had its origin as a comment on a social problem. One would have to know whether a literal or a metaphorical use of the term goose was intended.

As can be seen, there are two distinctly different melodies for this song. Tune 1 is found in Humperdinck's folkopera written in 1893. However, this tune is more commonly sung among "Kanadier" who had immigrated to Canada some twenty years before the folkopera was written, so it is likely that Humperdinck used a folk tune for this children's rhyme which was already appearing in variant forms in folklore collections of the mid-nineteenth century (Firmenich, 1846: 188).

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<sup>1</sup>Daiken (1959) considers problem/resolution type lyrics, typical of lullabies.

<sup>2</sup>The reference to geese going barefoot is already mentioned in sixteenth century Dutch folklore. In his painting "The Blue Cloak" (The Netherlandish Proverbs), Bruegel illustrates the proverb "Who knows why the geese go barefoot?" The implication is that the lullaby may have come, at least in poetic form, along with the Mennonites who left Holland in the sixteenth century.

The present-day familiarity of this tune has a two-fold basis: firstly, the operetta has been performed by several Manitoba Mennonite groups, and secondly, the song is used as the theme song for "Children's Party" on CFAM, a southern Manitoba radio station.

The two variants of Tune 2 are based on a High German Christmas carol, "Ihr Kinderlein Kommet" ("O Come little Children"). Variant 1, like Tune 1, uses a 6/8 meter to establish a slow, rocking rhythm, while Variant 2 uses a 2/4 meter for the same melodic contour. Variant 2 was the more common, and the characteristically "Russlaender" tune. Like "Neueingewanderte", "Russlaender" often chose tunes of religious songs for children's songs, though they seemed to be unaware of this borrowing practice. They claimed, instead, that they were just singing the song to a familiar melody.



SHOKKEL SHOKKEL SHEIYA  
 ("Rock, rock, shush")

Tune 1: Chant - Teasing Tune

K, R, N

Shok-kel shok-kel shei-ya, Ous-tren eht vie Ei-ya,  
 Pink-sten eht vie vit-tet Brout,  
 Shtoav vie nich, dan voa vie grout.  
 (Shtoav vie doch, dan foa vie en't Loch.)

Tune 2: Chant - Falling  
 fourth

Rev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
 Carman, Manitoba  
 May 30, 1978  
 PDL-5

Shok-kel shok-kel shei-ya, Ous-tren eht vie Ei-ya,  
 Pink-sten eht vie vit-tet Brout,  
 Shtoav vie nich, dan voa vie grout.

## Tune 3: Variant 1

Mr. J. G. Sawatzky - K  
Winkler, Manitoba  
July 17, 1978  
PDL-8

Shok-kel shok-kel shei-ya, Ous-tren eht vie Ei-ya,  
Pink-sten eht vie vit-tet Brout,  
Shtoav vie nich dan voa vie grout.

## Tune 3: Variant 2

Ladies at Sunset Home - R  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
January 27, 1978  
PDL-3

Shok-kel shok-kel shei-ya, Ous-tre eht vie Ei-ya,  
Pink-ste eht vie vit-tet Brout,  
Shtoav vie nich dan voa vie grout.

Tune 3: Variant 3

Ella Friesen - R  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
June 5, 1978  
PDL-7

Shok-kel shok-kel shei-ya, Ous-tren eht vie Ei-ya,  
Pink-sten eht vie vit-tet Broat,  
Shtoav vie nich dan voa vie grout,  
Shtoav vie doch dan kohm ve en't Loch,  
Kik-ke-re-kie, de Hohn es dout,  
Frat nich mee-ya zien Bot-ta Brout,  
Riat nich mee-ya met ee-nem Fout.

Mrs. Dave Bueckert - R  
Winkler, Manitoba  
May 30, 1978  
PDL-5

Shok-kel shok-kel shei-ya, Ous-tre eht vie Ei-ya,  
Pink-ste eht vie vit-tet Brout,  
Shtoav vie nich dan voa vie grout,  
Shtoav vie doch dan fōa vie en't Loch,  
Shok-kel shok-kel shei-ya.

## Translation:

Swing/rock, rock shush,<sup>1</sup>  
At Eastertime we eat eggs,  
At Pentecost we eat white bread,  
If we don't die, then we'll grow up.  
(If we die though, we'll go into the hole.)  
Kikkerekie, the rooster is dead,  
Eats no more his buttered bread,  
Stirs no more with a single foot.  
(last three lines - Tune 3: Variant 3, only)

<sup>1</sup>The meaning of *sheiya* is uncertain. It may be either a shushing term, or simply a rhyming word.

## Comments:

'*Shokkel Shokkel Sheiya*' is one of the most familiar Low German lullabies. Although it was recited instead of sung in some homes, most families sang it to one of two melodies: a teasing tune (Tune 1), or a High German folksong melody (Tune 3), used by predominantly "Kanadier" and "Russlaender" respectively.

The 'teasing tune', folklorists tell us, is universal; it is used by children around the world to tease their siblings or peers. The chant variant (Tune 2) was a personal idiomatic expression, used by only one individual. Tune 3 also had numerous personal variants.

This song is often used as a lullaby, yet, the ambiguity of the term *shokkel* meaning either rock or swing, suggests that the song is equally appropriate as a play song. This song, often learned from an older sibling or one's mother, was sung by both adults and children to entertain smaller children.

The song reminded some Mennonites of a traditional spring pastime because of its reference to swinging, Easter and Pentecost. In the past it was customary for swings, big enough to seat several children, to be strung up between two tall trees, or even between two beams in a barn, as soon as the first signs of spring appeared. During the daytime the children, and later at night, the youth of the village, would use these swings to entertain themselves. Originating in southern Russia, the custom was continued in southern Manitoba villages.

It is likely that the poem originally consisted of four lines,<sup>1</sup> since many people sang only the first four lines. The fifth line was probably added later as a teasing function, with the reference to going into the hole serving as a euphemism for death, or going into the grave.

At first glance it appears that there is no thematic continuity between the first three and the last three lines. A second look suggests that not only is the rooster 'someone' who died a premature death, but that it happened for an Easter or Pentecost celebration. The transition from talking about human to talking about animal death suggests a frivolous attitude which would be 'tolerated' only in folklore.

However, one thinks that this rhyme might have been composed by children, and like skipping songs, its content would be subservient to the preservation of a regular rhyme and rhythm.

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<sup>1</sup>This follows a widespread pattern of nursery rhymes in many languages. They generally consist of four lines, with four major beats in each line (Burling, 1966:1418).

No equivalent or variant of "*Shokkel Shokkel Sheiya*" has been found in any folklore collection, so it is quite possible that this is an original Mennonite folksong.





SHLOHP CHINDCHE SHLOHP  
 ("Sleep Baby Sleep")

Tune 1: Erk and Boehme, 1892(III):579

R, K

Shlohp Chind-che shlohp,  
 Dien Foh-da hee't de Shohp,  
 Diene Ma-me shed't en Boum-che,  
 Doa fellt e-rauf en Droum-che,  
 Shlohp Chind-che shlohp.

Translation:

Sleep baby sleep, your father herds the sheep,  
 Your mother shakes a little tree,  
 There falls down a little dream,  
 Sleep baby sleep.

Comments:

Better known in High German, this lullaby had almost as many lyric variants as it had singers, though melodic differences were minimal.

According to a "Kanadier" version

*Dee Mutta es en Pommerlaund,  
Pommerlaund es aufyebrent.<sup>1</sup>*

In both its Low German and High German versions, this lullaby was better known among "Russlaender". Some young schoolboys in southern Manitoba decided they could add some color to the lyrics, so improvised the following parody:

*Shlohp Chindche shlohp,  
Dien Fohda es en Shohp,  
Diene Mutta es en Engelein,  
En duh bes en chlienet Bengelein,<sup>2</sup>  
Shlohp, Chindche shlohp.*

which is translated as:

Sleep baby sleep,  
Your father is a sheep,  
Your mother is an angel,  
And you are a little rascal,  
Sleep baby sleep.

The ambiguity created by the mispronunciation of the word *heed't* (is herding) as *heet* (is called) may have given rise to this parody. And no doubt, many a mother or older sibling has been tempted to sing *Bengelein* (rascal) to a child which refused to fall asleep within a reasonable time limit.

This parody, used for teasing purposes, seems tame by comparison with one found in Holstein by Firmenich. Both mother and baby get a bad press report in this one; mother is called a *Meerekatt* (green monkey), and baby a *Waterratt* (waterrat), while father remains a sheep!

---

<sup>1</sup>Translation: 'Your mother is in Pommerland, and Pommerland has burned.' Saying that Pommerland is burning is a figurative way of saying that the sun is setting in the west, and hence it is time to go to sleep. References to Pommerania, a northern province of nineteenth century Germany, were found only among "Kanadier".

<sup>2</sup>The *Englel/Bengel* pun is frequently used in Low German. A misbehaving child would be told "*Due bes en Engel met en 'B' doafea*" ("You are an angel with a 'B' in front of it").

Tune 2: Erk and Boehme,  
1893(III):580

Mrs. I. W. Buhler - R  
Winkler, Manitoba  
March 14, 1978  
PDL-4

Shlop Chind-che shlohp, doa buh-ten stoan' de Shohp,  
En shvoa-tet en en vit-tet,  
En van daut Chint-che nich shloh-pe vell,  
Dan chemt daut shvoa-te en bit et.

Translation:

Sleep baby sleep, outside stand the sheep,  
A black one and a white one,  
And if the little child won't sleep,  
Then the black one will come and bite it.

Comments:

Threatening children who refuse to fall asleep is, unfortunately, a universal phenomenon in lullabies. Here the black sheep, representing evil forces or the unknown, are used to threaten. In another version, the child is threatened by the beggar-woman with her long knife:

Shlohp...  
Nue chemt daut oule Prachaviev,  
Met daut groute Massakniev...!

<sup>1</sup>Translation: "Sleep...now comes the old beggar-woman,  
With her long (sword-like) knife."

Since beggars were a common sight in Russian and certain Manitoba towns and villages, this would have posed a real threat to the child. In some homes, threatening misbehaving children with the prospect of being sent along with beggars, peddlars or gypsies was a means of social control. After all, even the little boys in the village knew that gypsies

steal whatever they can lay their hands on. Including children. Every boy in the village knows that, because many of them, when standing around a gypsy camp in the meadow, at the end of the village in the evening, have heard children cry in the tents. Why were they kept in the tents, why weren't they allowed to wallow in the dust outside like others? Because they are white, stolen children, whom nobody is supposed to see, that's why (Dyck, 1974:132-133).



## VIE, VIE, VIE, VIE VENTCHE

## Tune 1

Hilda Matsuo  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
March 19, 1978

*Vie, vie, vie, vie, vent-che,*

*Mor-ye shlacht vie'n Ent-che*

*Zeet fon Suk-ka, Fat fon Bot-ta,*

*Daut shmakt on-ze (Lies-che) sheen.*

## Tune 2: "Alle Jahre Wieder" variant

R, N

*Vie vie vie vie vent-che,*

*Mor-ye shlacht vie en Ent-che,*

*Zeet fon Tsuk-ka, Fat fon Bot-ta,*

*Daut shmakt on-ze (Lies-che) sheen.*

2. *Vie vie vie vie vohnche, Mor-ye schlacht vie en Hohnche...*
3. *Vie vie vie vie vienche, Morye schlacht vie en Shvienche...*
4. *Vie vie vie vie vanche, Morye schlacht vie en Hanche...*

## Translation:

1. *Vie, vie, vie, vie ventche,<sup>1</sup> Tomorrow we'll slaughter a duck,  
Sweet from sugar, Fat from butter,  
That will taste good to our (child's name).*
2. *Vie, vie, vie, vie vohnche, Tomoroow we'll slaughter a rooster...*
3. *Vie, vie, vie, vie vienche, Tomorrow we'll slaughter a pig...*
4. *Vie, vie, vie, vie vanche, Tomorrow we'll kill a hen...*

## Comments:

In this lullaby, the child is persuaded to sleep with the promise of a reward on the morrow. The lullaby is personalized by the insertion of the child's name. The promise and the personalization are ways of persuading the child that all is well with the world so it can safely fall asleep.

The song was not familiar to "Kanadier", though Hilda Matsuo, a Mennonite of German Lutheran background, who learned many of her Low German songs from "Kanadier" living in Kleefeld, sang it. Her source for this song is not known, but the melody she sings is a variant used by some "Russlaender". The song was familiar to "Neueingewanderte" as well, who often sang versions bearing remarkable similarity to those sung by "Russlaender".

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<sup>1</sup>These may be nonsense syllables used for rhythmic and rhyming purposes, or perhaps, a shushing term, since some variants used "Zhuh, zhuh, zhuh, zhuh zhentche", a shushing term commonly found in Prussian lullabies.

LIETCHE RACKA  
("Little Worker")

Tune: Russian folksong?

arr. by Esther Wiebe<sup>1</sup> - K  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Ves nich shloh-pe liet-che Rac-ka,  
Moakst nich fuats de Uach-ches tou,  
Zee, dee Mohnd steit aul em Him-mel,  
En dee Zonn yeit uck tou Ruh.  
Meed zent uck die-ne Ylie-da-ches,  
En dien Shtremp shlapt bie dien' Shou,  
Ves nich shloh-pe liet-che Rac-ka,  
Moakst nich fuats de Uach-ches tou?

<sup>1</sup>The arrangement is copied from an unpublished, mimeographed copy, with permission of the arranger.

## Translation:

Won't you sleep little worker  
 won't you close your eyes right now?  
 See the moon is already in the heavens  
 and the sun is going to rest.  
 Tired are all your little limbs  
 and your stockings sleep beside your shoes.  
 Won't you sleep little worker  
 won't you close your eyes right now?

## Comments:

Mrs. Wiebe wrote this arrangement of "*Lietcher Racker*" for a CBC "Prairie Choirs" program featuring Canadian ethnic music, in the mid-sixties.

One finds harmonization of a lullaby unusual, since lullabies are characteristically solos, but, as noted in Chapter IV, harmonization is one of the changes Low German songs undergo when they enter the domain of public performance.

Mrs. Wiebe learned the song on the telephone from an older lady living in a Mennonite senior citizens home in Winnipeg, but all attempts to find the original source have been futile.

Several of the people for whom I sang this song thought it sounded like a Russian folksong but no one could remember having heard or sung this particular song. One wonders why a song with such a potential for socializing the child into the work ethic is not generally known among the Mennonites, who are noted for their belief in the work ethic.





CHEMT DEE NACHT MET EARE SHTIERNCHES  
 ("When the Night comes with its Stars")

Tune: "Kommt der Nacht"

Mrs. Maria Guenter - N  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 March 28, 1978  
 PDL-4

Chemt de Nacht met ea-re Shtiern-ches,  
 Hiat daut Chint dann opp toh lie-re,  
 Lacht zich shtell em Bad hin-nen,  
 Beh.t dann from en shlapt dann en.

2. Kohme dann dee Engel raufa,  
 Singen am fehl sheene Leeda,  
 Aun dehm Batche leis on zacht,  
 Voake zee de gaunse Nacht.

Translation:

1. When the night comes with its stars,  
 The child ceases its studies,  
 Quietly lies down in bed,  
 Prays sincerely, and falls asleep.
2. Then the angels come down,  
 Sing many lovely songs to him,  
 And at his bedside, gently and softly,  
 Watch over him the whole night long.

## Comments:

Like other lullabies, this one was translated from High German into Low German, because it was being sung to little children. This song was known only in Mrs. Guenter's immediate family. While she sang it, her five-year-old granddaughter sat in a straight-backed chair and rocked in rhythm to her grandmother's singing.

The reference to the child ceasing from his studies seems unusual because one would expect a lullaby to be sung to a young child who would be leaving his play to go to bed. Apart from that, this lullaby is relatively similar to High German lullabies in which the child is reassured that it is 'safe' to fall asleep because angels will watch over him as he sleeps.

This was one of the few Low German lullabies which had any religious connotations, namely, the references to angels and praying, despite the fact that the Mennonites are an ethno-religious people. However, this finding is consistent with the assumption among Mennonites that 'High' and not 'Low' German, has traditionally been the language of religion.

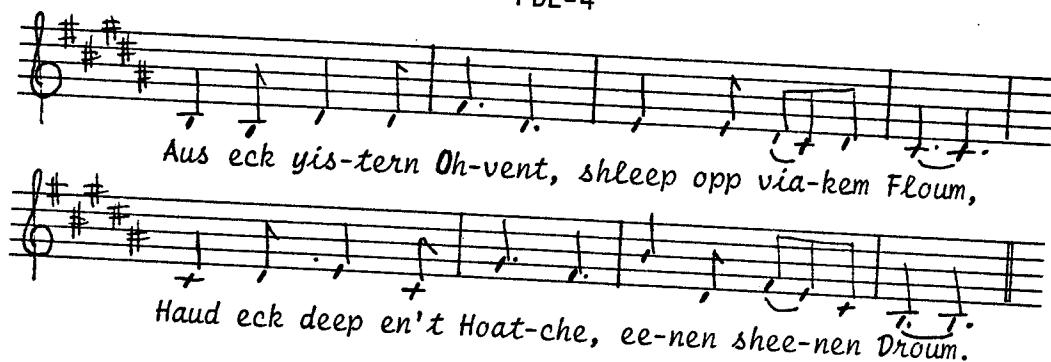


## AUS ECK YISTERN OHVENT

("Yesterday Evening")

Tune: comp. by Bernard A. Weber  
(1804) (Diekmann, 1975:  
115)

Mrs. I. W. Buhler - R  
Winkler, Manitoba  
March 14, 1978  
PDL-4



Aus eck yis-tern Oh-vent, shleep opp via-kem Floum,  
Haud eck deep en't Hoat-che, ee-nen shee-nen Droum.

2. Kaum en chlienet Engel,  
Haud zoun goldnet Hoa,  
Een shnee vittet Chleetche,  
Uachches hal onn kloa.
3. Fout mie aun mien Hauntche,  
Must eck met am goh'n,  
Ying met en dehn Himmel,  
Oh, doa via't zou sheen.
4. Haft mie uck fesproake,  
Vann eck shtoav e'mohl,  
Zaul eck bie am vohnen,  
En dehm Himmelszohl.

## Translation:

1. Yesterday evening while I was sleeping on soft straw,  
I had a beautiful dream deep in my heart,
2. A little angel came. It had such golden hair,  
a snow-white dress, and bright, clear eyes.
3. (He) took me by my hand and I had to go with him,  
Went along into heaven, and Oh! it was so beautiful  
there.
4. (He) has also promised me that someday when I die,  
I shall live with him in the heavenly chambers.

## Comments:

When I asked to record this song, Mrs. Buhler instinctively sang the High German version first. With a little encouragement, she agreed to sing the Low German version which she had translated for her little children many years ago before they moved to Canada, in 1925. Being a sensitive, poetic person, she wanted to "choose the right words to make it sound nice" so she rehearsed the song before we recorded it.

Mrs. Buhler, a "Russlaender" of Old Colony background (from the village of Grigoryevka) showed an obvious preference for High German, yet has translated this lullaby into Low German. When questioned about the discrepancy she replied, "Well, they were only sung to the children."

HAZHA POPCHE ZUHZHA  
 ("Shush, Dolly shush")

Mrs. Neufeld - (N)  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 March 28, 1978  
 PDL-4

Ha-zha Pop-che zuh-zha, dee Pra-cha es em Huh-ze,  
 Met dehm grou-ten la-da-nen Zack,  
 Vua hee au-le Ching-a nen shtopt.

2. Aule dee doa hiele,  
 zent dehn Pracha ziene.  
 Ohba dee doa shmokches zent,  
 daut zent aules miene.

Translation:

1. Shush dolly shush,  
 The beggar is in the house,  
 With his great big leather sack,  
 Into which he puts all the children.
2. All the ones who cry,  
 Belong to the beggar.  
 But the ones who are good,  
 Those are all mine.

Comments:

There are different ways and means of singing a child to sleep. Sometimes the singer uses terms of endearment like 'Shush dolly sleep.' At other times she/he may use the threat of bogey men, like the beggar with the huge leather sack, into which he puts children who cry. A beggar with a sack would have been a real threat to a child growing up

in a Russian Mennonite village, since beggars were a common sight, especially during times of famine.

One mother who sang this lullaby to her children, personalized it by including the child's name:

*"Oh ba onze Mits che dea es shmok,  
dea voat Pracha nich chrieye."*

meaning:

But our Mary is good,  
The beggar won't get her.



HAVIEZHU POPPA  
 ("Shush little dolly")

Published in  
*DE GOLDENE SHLUT*,  
 (Unger, 1974:11)

Veleda Unger Goulden - K/Mo.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 December 9, 1976

Translation:

Shush little dolly, what shall I sing you?  
 Apples and pears, father will bring you.  
 Apples and pears and dried figs,  
 Then you will sleep and be quiet.

Comments:

In this lullaby, the singer tries to quiet the child with the promise of a reward: a gift of fruit from father.

The shushing term is like that used in the preceding lullaby "*Hazha Popche suzha*," but the remainder of the song is like the question and answer section of "*Hotemaunche*", which follows.

The tune which is used for this lullaby, similar to "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" is commonly used in German folklore for question and answer songs. (Diekman, 1975:134).

This particular song was not commonly known as were the two that were similar to it.



## HOTEMAUNCHE

K, R, N

Hot-te-maunche rie-den, Pa-pa foat noh Vie-den,  
 Fon de Vie-den noh de Shtaut,  
 Bringt uck on-ze Chinga vault,  
 Vault zull pa-pa bringe? En Au-pil on en Chring-el,  
 En Au-pil en 'ne Peh-pa-kuak,  
 Daut shmakt on-ze ..... gout.  
 Een poa Shou met Shnal-len, dann voat ..... ran-nen,  
 Een poa Shou met ring-en, dann voat ..... shpring-en,  
 Een poa Shou met Band be-zatt, dann zit'et on-ze .. nat.



## Translation:

*Hotemaunche*<sup>1</sup> riding, Father is going for willows,  
 From the willows to the town, Will bring our children/  
 (child's name)... something.  
 What shall papa bring? An apple and a Russian bun,<sup>2</sup>  
 An apple and a peppernut,<sup>3</sup> Tastes good to our .....,  
 A pair of shoes with buckles, then ..... will run,  
 A pair of shoes with rings, then ..... will spring/jump,  
 A pair of shoes decorated with ribbon,  
 Then our ..... will look neat/cute.

## Comments:

The "Russlaender" version quoted here was the most complete version of this song. The song, however, varied with each individual singer.

In one "Russlaender" version, the father goes for willows, to a place

*Vua dee groute Vitboum/Ieykeboum steit,  
 En dee Vach noh Grouma yeit.*

which is translated as

Where the huge poplar/oak tree stands,  
 And the road leads to grandmother's (place).

The reference to the oak tree came from a former inhabitant of the village of Chortitza with its legendary thousand year old oak.

<sup>1</sup>There were almost as many variants of this term as there were singers of the song, but nobody was able to provide a reliable translation. Suggestions ranged from "Gee ho! Little man" to a 'knee bouncer' term.

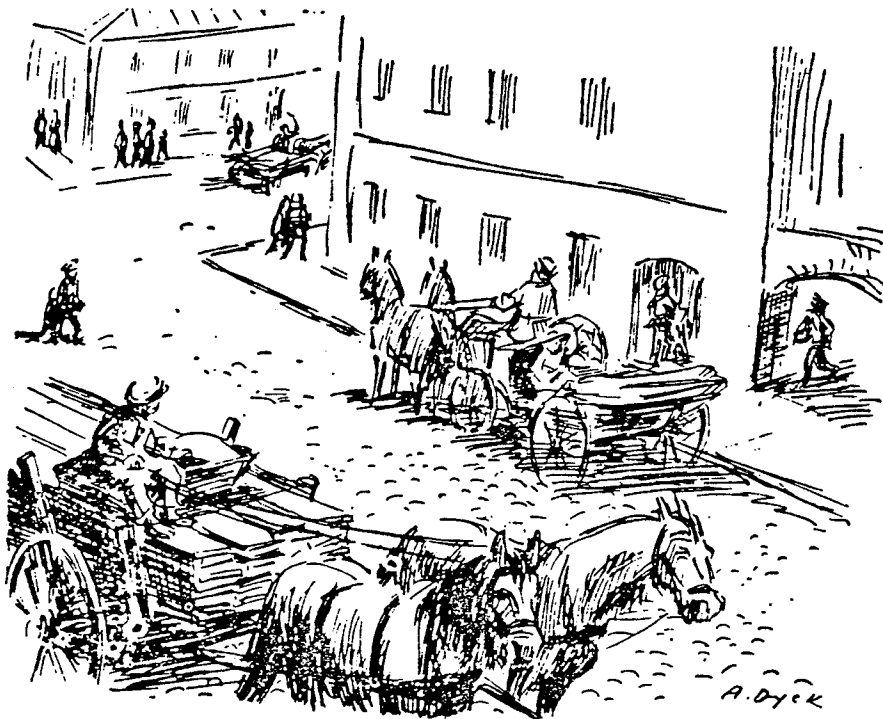
<sup>2</sup>Russian *Chringel* were made from a sweet, hard dough. After it had risen, the dough was cut into small pieces and rolled til it was about 8 inches long and 1 inch thick. The ends were joined to form a circle which was plunged into boiling water til it rose. Then it was set on a pan and baked, producing a shiny, sweet bun (Rosenfeld, 1962:11).

<sup>3</sup>"Peppernuts, no doubt, not only received their name from their small size, shape and texture, but also from their nut-like, spicy flavor and from the fact that some are flavored with pepper, peppermint, and molasses." (Dick, 1958:13).

In some versions, father went to see the miller rather than going for willows before he went to town. Sometimes the song recorded that he brought home apples, pears and dried figs<sup>1</sup> for the children. According to most versions, he brought home only food. The version quoted here is the only one which included the promises about shoes.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the version, the usage remained the same. The song was used to entertain children in Mennonite homes in Russia and later in Canada.

The melody remained consistent in all versions.



<sup>1</sup>Russian Mennonite children considered a dried fruit a treat equivalent to candy, "Big Macs" or "Slurpees" in contemporary society.

<sup>2</sup>The lines about the shoes are found in an East Frisian lullaby in Meier (Meier, 1972:206).

*Vieyenleeda* - ethnic

## DEE OULA LAUMPAUNSHTECKA

("The old lamplighter")

Tune: "When its lamplighting  
time"John J. Peters - (K)  
Winkler, Manitoba  
March 1979  
PDC-2

Vann daut Tiet es dee Laump aun-toh-shtek-ken,

Goh 'kk em Droum noch mohl vad-da noh Hues,

Yoh eck zee dee ou-le Laump noch em Fen-sta,

En dee bringt mie uck ze-cha noh Hues.

## Translation:

When it is time to light the lamp,  
I once again go home in my dream,  
Yes, I still see the old lamp in the window,  
And it surely brings me home.

## Comments:

About forty or fifty years ago when his children were small, Mr. Peters translated a number of songs into Low German to sing to his children. "Dee oula Laumpaunshtecka" is one of his translations.

He would sing to his children at dusk, before they went to bed. He recalls how one child would sit on his lap, another at his feet, and another would stand on the rocker of his rocking chair as he rocked and sang to his children.

There was no apparent reason for translating the song into Low German apart from the fact that it was sung to children.

## KULLA FELENGST MIEN SELVANET MOHNCHE

("Sail on my silvery moon")

Tune: "Sail on Silvery Moon"

John J. Peters - (K)  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 March 1979  
 PDC-2

Kul-la fe-lengst mien zel-va-net Mohn-che,

Kul-la fe-lengst doa huach boh-ven,

En viel eck zing mien zee-ya shee-net Leed-che,

Yoh-dee-ah-ley-die-oh!

## Translation:

Roll along my little silvery moon,  
 Roll along there up high,  
 While I sing my very lovely little song,  
 Yoh-dee-ah-ley-die-oh!

## Comments:

Like "Dee oola Laumpaunshtecka", this song was translated many years ago by Mr. Peters for his children. It was probably not sung with guitar, as he sings it now, because he used to sing it to his children at bedtime as he sat and rocked them.

Chants and *Shpelches* (game) - immigrant

## OHTBOA LANGNEHS

Tune: chant, falling minor third

K

Ohtboa langnehs, yingk oppe yreene vehs,  
 Haud roude Shteevelches aun, yingk skiteil aus en Ehdel-  
 maun.  
 Kaum dee Bock en shmeets am dohl,  
 Kaum dee Ohdla en holp am opp.  
 Fluach hee huach enne Loft.

Oht-boa, Oht-boa, vann-ee-ya chemst du vad-da?

Op-yoa, Op-yoa, vann de Rog-gen Riep-pen

Vann de Pog-gen pie-pen, Vann de Dear-ren kroar-ren,  
 Vann de Chal-va bloar-ren.

## Translation:

Stork long-nose went walking on the green fields.  
 Had red boots on and looked like a nobleman.  
 Came the ram and threw him down,  
 Came the eagle and helped him up.  
 So he flew high in the air.

Stork, stork, when are you coming again?  
 Next year, next year,  
 When the rye is ripening,  
 When the frogs are croaking (squeaking)  
 When the doors are creaking,  
 When the calves are howling.

## Comments:

In most "Kanadier" Mennonite homes where this folk poem was known, it was recited. In a few homes, however, the last part of the poem was chanted. Since Frishbier includes a similar poem<sup>1</sup> in his Prussian folksong collection, one can assume that there was another melody for it as well.

In this poem we are told that a stork going for a walk, is thrown down by a ram, and then helped up by an eagle. As the stork flies on its way, some children chant, asking him when he will return. His reply suggests that he will return in spring.

The annual return of the stork was a reality in many Mennonite homes at the turn of the century. In Russia, for example, there was an average of seven children per household between the years of 1890 and 1910. This number decreased steadily during the revolution and the wars (Krahn, 1972:294).

Though large families were common, open discussion about pregnancy or birth control were not. One would discuss matters like this only in terms such as 'the coming of the stork'.

This appears to be a children's chant. One can argue this point from both content and usage. The emphasis in the content is on the rhythm and rhyme, particularly in the chanted section. Elisabeth Peters'<sup>2</sup> description of village life in Russia, suggests that reciting poems about the stork was part of the ritual with which village children greeted the spring. They would chant these poems as they sat on board fences in the village (Peters, 1977:19).

We also need to comment on a humorous addition found in one variant of the main story. Here, when the eagle helps the stork get up, he also takes him to the king's door. The king asks, "Es doa vea?" (Is there somebody?), to which the stork replies, "Yoh, yoh. Hia es vea." (Yes, yes. Here is somebody.) The pun on the word somebody is of interest. The stork who comes every year is probably associated with the poorer people, while one can safely assume that the king would be associated with the rich, pretigious element of society. Yet the stork

---

<sup>1</sup>Frischbier's song is a 5 stanza poem, of which the first two are similar to this version of the poem.

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. Peters was the only "Russlaender" to refer to any poems about a stork. However, the poem which she quotes is substantially different from the one under discussion here.



feels like a nobleman,<sup>1</sup> so he insists on telling the king that he is somebody despite the apparent difference in status<sup>2</sup> between the two. The stork's literal answer then, sets up this delightful ambiguity.



---

<sup>1</sup>There is an amusing juxtaposition between having a long nose, and being a nobleman.

<sup>2</sup>The difference in status may only be apparent. Children are wealth in peasant society, so in that respect, the stork may have as much potential for power as the king does.

SEET EEN MAAKSTJE  
 ("A little girl sat")

Tune: chant, falling minor  
 third  
 Words: Unger, 1974:22.

Veleda Unger Goulden - K/Mo.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 December 9, 1976

Seet een Maaks-tje en'e Mia,  
 Sponn Sied sou fien aus'n Hoa,  
 Sou groff, aus'n Boa.  
 Aus de sav-ven Joa om wia-re,  
 Word see fien je-floch-te,  
 Tiem, jom, mei, ron,  
 Aun komm, Trin, komm, folj mie no.

## Translation:

A little girl sat inside a stone wall,  
 Spinning silk as fine as hair,  
 As coarse, as a bear,  
 When the seven years were over,  
 It was finely braided.  
 'Tiem, yom, mei, ron,'  
 Ann come, Katherine come, follow me.

## Comments:

One suspects that this chant was composed by children because the rhythm seems to be more important than the content, which lacks logical coherence. The reference to spinning reminds one of 'Rumpelstiltskin', a Grimm Brothers fairy tale, while the reference to the seven years reminds one of the biblical stories of Jacob (Genesis 29) or Joseph (Genesis 41). The last line of the chant suggests a follow the leader type of game.

As stated, in children's chants, the emphasis is on the rhythm, but even here we have a curious phenomenon. The first quatrain, 'Seet een...Boa.' has an irregular 14 beats, while the second quatrain 'Aus de...mie noh.' has the expected 16 (4 x 4) (Burling, 1966:1418). It seems that the missing two beats in the first quatrain ought to have been inserted between 'Spohn Sied' and 'sou fien'.

This little 'Shpelche' or game was used by children of "Kleine Gemeinde" background in the East Reserve several decades ago.



(Unger, 1974:22)

## TRIPYE TRAPYE TROHNCHE

("Trip, trap, trop")

Tune: Chant, falling  
fourthRev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
Carman, Manitoba  
May 30, 1978  
PDL-5<sup>1</sup>

Trip-ye trap-ye trohn-che,  
 dee Piad-ches goh-nen en't Bohn-che,  
 Dee Shvien-ches goh-nen e'm Kloh-va,  
 Dee Shohp-ches goh-nen e'm Hoh-va,  
 Chiaches gohnen en't lang-ge Graus,  
 Dann chemt ons dee Butta fer'm Paus. (spoken)

<sup>1</sup>The Low German songs sung by Rev. Klassen were first recorded by Kenneth Peacock (PEA-225, PEA-226) in September 1962, but the transcriptions given here are based on my own field research in 1978, though Peacock's tapes were used for comparative purposes. There appear to be no significant differences in the two recordings.

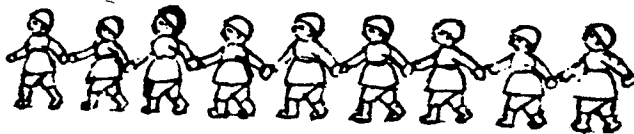
## Translation:

Trip, trap, trop, (rhyming words)  
 The horses are in the track,  
 The pigs are among the clover,  
 The sheep are among the oats,  
 The cows are in the long grass,  
 Then the butter is most suitable for us.

## Comments:

Rev. Klassen learned many Low German songs as a child, from his father who would sing these songs while they were waiting for supper. Sometimes his father would play with the children at bedtime. Taking the children on his knee, he would sing songs to amuse them. "*Tripye trapye trohnche*" was one of these songs.

A lyric variant which was recited, rather than sung, in many homes, appears in *De Goldene Shlut* (Unger, 1974:24).



FOUTCHE BESHLOHNNEN  
 ("Shoeing the foot")

Tune: Chant, falling  
 fourth

Rev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
 Carman, Manitoba  
 May 30, 1978  
 PDL-5

Fout-che be-shloh-nen, Fout-che be-shloh-nen,  
 Vou fehl Miel-ches zaul daut gohnen?  
 recited: Een, tvee, dree,  
 dann deit Dohv-che daut Fout-che vee!

Translation:

Shoeing the (horse's) foot,  
 Shoeing the foot,  
 How many miles shall it go?  
 One, two, three,  
 Then David's foot will hurt.

Comments:

This is one of many children's songs Rev. Klassen learned from his father. His father would take him on his knee and sing the song while tapping the child's foot. He would insert the child's name, eg., David, to personalize the song.

Though there were homes other than Mr. Klassen's in which the father sang to the children, it was more often the mother or older sister who sang these songs to the little children. From this standpoint, it is interesting that Rev. Klassen's Low German dialect shows some distinctly Chortitza Colony influences, such as the 'n' ending on present participles, rather than consistently reflecting the dialect of his father, whose family originated in the Molotschna Colony. The Chortitza influences may have come either from his mother, or from other "Kanadier".

HOLT ZOAVEN  
("Sawing wood")

Tune 1: Chant, falling  
fourth

Rev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
Carman, Manitoba  
May 30, 1978  
PDL-5

Holt zoa-yen, Voh-ta droa-yen,  
Fia moa-ken, Chielchi koa-ken,  
Brat-shnie-dash kohmt eh-te.  
Vann yie hann ye-yeh-ten,  
dann Kou toh zue-pe yoa-yen,  
Vann ze nich vel gohnen,  
dann vel vie buts-kopp shloh-nen,  
\*Büts, \*buts, \*büts. (spoken)

\*parent and child knock their heads together.

## Translation:

Sawing wood, carrying water, making fire, cooking  
noodles,  
Woodcutters come eat.  
After you have eaten, chase the cow to drink.  
If she doesn't want to go, then we want to knock our  
heads together,  
'Buts, buts, buts.'<sup>1</sup>

## Tune 2: Chant, major triad

Henry Wiebe - (N)  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
December 10, 1976

Holt soa-ge, Fia moa-ke, Chiel-che koa-ke,  
Bratt-shnie-dash kohmt eh-te,  
Vann yie ha ye-yeh-te,  
yoacht dee Chik-kel op daut Launt,  
Vel-le dee nich goh-ne  
dann vell vie \*Buts-kop shloh-ne.

<sup>1</sup>Possibly 'Bump, bump, bump'.



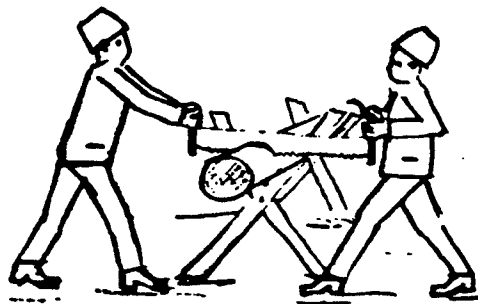
## Translation:

Sawing wood, making fire, cooking (homemade) noodles,  
 Woodcutters come eat.  
 After you have eaten, chase the chickens onto the land  
 (field).  
 If they don't want to go, then we'll knock our heads  
 together.

## Comments:

These two versions of "*Holt Soayen*", sung by a "Kanadier" and a "Russlaender", have retained a basic similarity though it is now over 100 years since the histories of these two singers split. The lyric content has undergone minimal changes. Both tunes, although using different melodic intervals, retain the chant character with fairly similar rhythmic patterning (c.f. Unger, 1974:28).

Social usage of the song has also remained unchanged: the song was sung to a young child, seated on the knees of an adult, facing the adult. The child would be rocked throughout the chant til the reference to '*Butskopp shlohn*', when the two would bump their heads together. Rev. Klassen learned this song from his father, but in most houses it was sung by a mother or older sister.



BAKKE, BAKKE KUAKEN  
 ("Baking, baking cookies")

Tune:

Grandma Hiebert - (K)  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 December 14, 1976

Bak-ke, bak-ke Kua-ken,  
 de Bak-ka haft ye-rou-pen,  
 Vea vell goude Kua-ken bak-ken,  
 Dee mot ha-ben Zeh-ven Za-chen,  
 Ei-ya en Shmolt, Bot-ta en s olt, Malk en Mehl,  
 Zaf-ran moakt de Kua-ken yehl.  
 Shuev ze en dehn Oh-ven nenn, Daut ze goa voa-ren.

\*clap

## Translation:

Baking, baking cookies. The baker has called out.  
Whoever wants to bake good cookies, he must have seven  
things.

Eggs and lard, butter and salt, milk and flour,  
Saffron makes the cookies yellow,  
Shove them into the oven, so that they get done.

## Comments:

A "Russlaender" man recalled singing this song in High German and reciting it in Low German, but only Grandma Hiebert, a "Kanadier" from the Bergtha- Colony (a daughter colony of Chortitza) sang it in Low German.

"Bakke, bakke Kuaken" was a children's game which Grandma learned from her older sister. One would take a small child on one's knee, and taking hold of the child's hands, would sing and clap with the child.

The poem is commonly found in High German folklore collections (Diekmann, 1975:31). The melody, in lines 2 and 3, is similar to "Twinkle, twinkle Little Star", which, in German folklore, was used with question and answer songs (Diekmann, 1975:134). A melody similar to the teasing song melody is found with this song in another collection (Erk and Boehme, 1893:(III):588).

BAKKE KUACHIS BAKKE  
 ("Baking cookies baking")

Tune: Chant, falling  
 fourth

Rev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
 Carman, Manitoba  
 May 30, 1978  
 PDL-5

\*  
 Bak-ke Kuak-ches bak-ke, daut Mehl-che es em Zack-che,  
 Daut Ei-che es em Korv-che, dee Kuk-kuk es ye-sh-ton-ve,  
 Vua voa vie am dann zia-ken? Hing-a on-ze Ia-ken.  
 Vua voa vie am be-groh-ven? Hing-a on-zen Back-oh-ven.  
 Daut Nehs-che es met Aush be-shtoven.

\*\* ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪  
 Shoav auf, shoav auf, shoav auf. (spoken)

\*sung while child sits on parent's lap. Parent takes  
 child's hands and claps them together as he sings.  
 \*\*parent takes child's hand and pretends to wipe ashes  
 off child's nose.

## Translation:

Baking cookies baking. The flour is in the sack.  
 The egg is in the basket. The cuckoo has died.  
 Where will we look for him? Behind our oaks.  
 Where will we bury him? Behind our outdoor oven.  
 The nose has been powdered with ashes,  
 Wipe (shove) off, wipe off, wipe off.

## Comments:

A lyric variant entitled "Kuacke, Kuacke backe" appears in *De goldene Shlut* (Unger, 1974:26). The use of diminutives (-che suffixes) suggests the chant is being sung with a very young child. Rev. Klassen has added a Mennonite touch to an otherwise typical children's game: the reference to the "Backohven", an outdoor clay oven used by Mennonites especially for baking bread in summertime. The use of the falling fourth is peculiar to Rev. Klassen.



(Unger, 1974:52)

RIA GRETCHÉ  
 ("Stir Porridge")

Tune: chant/recited

Rev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
 Carman, Manitoba  
 May 30, 1978  
 PD-5

Ria Gret-che, koak Kohl-che,  
 ria Gret-che, koak Kohl-che,

Recited: *Yef dehm vault, en dehm vault,  
 en dehm vault, en dehm vault,  
 En dissem riat de Kopp auf,  
 En shmiet 'em noh de Dea.*

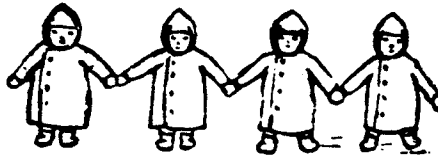
Translation:

Stir porridge, cook coals  
 Stir porridge, cook coals.  
 Give that one something, and that one something,  
 and that one something, and that one something,  
 And this one, tear off his head,  
 and throw him to the door.

Comments:

This is a finger game an adult or older sibling plays with a child. The adult takes the child's index finger of the right hand, and makes a circular motion in the palm of the left hand as if stirring porridge while he chants the first line. As he begins to recite the next part, he points to each finger on the left hand, as though feeding porridge to them. When he reaches the thumb, he pretends to tear it off and throw it away, possibly because it is not considered to be as attractive as the other fingers, or simply because it is a non-conformist. According to an alternative explanation, the thumb is thrown away because it does not work; and, anyone who does not do his share of the work, does not deserve to eat.

In most homes this rhyme was recited rather than chanted. Well known in "Kanadier" homes, the rhyme certainly pre-dates the 'snap, crackle and pop' sugar-coated cereals of today by several decades.



RUNDE RUNDE ROUSE  
("Ring around a rosy")

Tune: Chant, falling minor  
third

George K. Epp - N/Pa.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Run-de, Run-de, Rou-ze, Shee-ne Au-pel-kou-ze,  
"Veil-chen" on "Ver-giss-mein-nicht",<sup>1</sup>  
Au-le Ching-a zat-te zig.

The image shows three staves of musical notation in treble clef. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of the song. The second staff contains the melody for the second line, with the lyrics 'Run-de, Run-de, Rou-ze, Shee-ne Au-pel-kou-ze,' written below it. The third staff contains the melody for the third line, with the lyrics '"Veil-chen" on "Ver-giss-mein-nicht",<sup>1</sup>' written above it. The melody consists of a series of eighth notes with a falling minor third interval between the first and second notes of each phrase.

Translation:

Ring around a rosy, Lovely apricosy (apricots)  
Violets and forget-me-nots,  
All the children seat themselves.

Comments:

This familiar German circle game<sup>1</sup> was popular among "Neueingewanderte" children growing up in the Chortitza Colony about fifty years ago.

When the children wanted to begin playing a new game, they would join hands, walk in a circle, and sing this song. As they finished singing the last line, they would all fall down. The last one down would have to begin the next game.

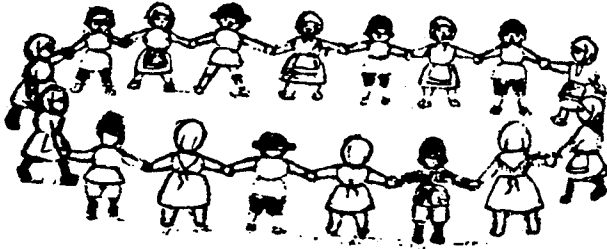
Younger children would sing this song repeatedly using it as a game, rather than as a way of finding a leader for a new game.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Note the use of High German words, implying that the Low German version is a translation from High German.

<sup>2</sup>Erk states that this circle game was familiar in all of Germany, where it was played as the younger Mennonite children played it (Erk, 1893:601).



There was an alternative ending to the song, but it was rarely used. The children preferred the chant tune to this one:



Other *Chingaleeda* - ethnic

## SHOHPCHE YINGK ENT VOULCHE

("A little sheep went into the woods")

K version: Variant 1

Isaac Brown - K  
Winkler, Manitoba  
March 2, 1977  
PDC-1

Shohp-che yingk nohm Voul-che,

Shtad zich aun en Shteen-che,

Oh vee deed daut Been-che,

Zehd daut Shohp-che 'Bah, bah, bah!'

Zehd daut Shohp-che 'Bah'.

Translation:

A little sheep went to the woods,  
Hurt itself on a stone, and how its leg hurt.  
Said the little sheep, "Baa, baa, baa,"  
said the sheep, "Baa".

K version: Variant 2

Nettie Kroeker - K  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 May 1, 1978  
 PDL-5

Shohp-che yingk ent Voul-che,  
 Shtad zich aun een Shteen-che,  
 Vou vee deed am zien Been-che,  
 Zehd daut Shohp-che mae, mae, mae,  
 Zehd daut Shohp-che mae.

Translation:

A little sheep went into the woods,  
 Hurt itself on a stone, and how his leg hurt,  
 Said the little sheep, "Maa, maa, maa,"  
 said the sheep, "Maa".

R/Molotschna version:

Judy Rempel - R/Mo.  
 St. Anne, Manitoba  
 August 20, 1978

Yingk een Shohp-che en-ne Vould,  
 Vull zig hoh-le een Shtecks-che Holt,

Shtad zig aun en Shteen-che,  
 Dann deed am vee daut Been-che,  
 Zehd daut Shohp-che "Mah, mah, mah,  
 Mah, mah, mah, mien Been-che."

## Translation:

A little sheep went into the woods,  
 Wanted to get itself a piece of wood,  
 Hurt itself on a stone, and how its leg hurt,  
 Said the sheep, 'Maa, maa, maa',  
 "Maa, maa, maa, my little leg".

R/Chortitza/(Grigoryevka)

Elisabeth Peters  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 VP-1 (1957)

Daut Laum-che yingk ent Voul-che,  
 En shtad zig aun en Shteen-che,  
 Vou vee deed dann daut Been-che

Donn zehd daut Laum-che, "Baa, Baa, Baa,  
Baa, Baa," mien Laum-che, "Baa".

## Translation:

The little lamb went into the woods,  
And hurt itself on a stone, and how it's leg hurt,  
Then the little lamb said, Baa, Baa, Baa.  
"Baa, Baa," my lamb, "Baa."

## N/Vollendam version:

Wanda Reimer - N/Pa.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
August 8, 1978

Et yingk en Shohp-che en dehm Vould,  
En shtad zig aun en Shteen-che,  
Vou vee deed dan daut Been-che,  
Dann zehd mien Shop-che "Mae",  
Don zehd mien Laumche "mae".

## Translation:

A little sheep went into the woods,  
 And hurt itself on a stone, How its leg hurt then.  
 Then my sheep said, "Maa." The my lamb said, "Maa."

## N/Chaco version:

Mrs. Neufeld - N/Pa.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 March 28, 1978  
 PDL-4

*Et yingk en Shohp-che en dehm Vould*

*En shtad zig aun een Shteen-che,*

*vous vee deed dann daut Been-che,*

*Don shriach daut Shohp-che "Maa, maa, maa, maa, maa."*

## Translation:

A little sheep went into the woods  
 And hurt itself on a stone. How its leg hurt then.  
 Then the little sheep cried/screamed,  
 "Maa, maa, maa, maa, maa."

## Additional verses:

2. ....Shtad zich aun een Shtruckche,  
 vous vee deed dann daut Buckche...
3. Shtockche/Kopche
4. Noagelche/Soagelche
5. Shoavelche/Zoagelche
6. Duache/Uache
7. Vechtche/Friechtche

## Translation:

2. ...Hurt itself on underbrush,  
how its stomach hurt...
3. stick/head
4. nail/tail
5. piece of broken glass/tail
6. little door or gate/ear
7. barrel/mouth

## Comments:

As can be seen from the numerous variants, this children's song was found among Mennonites of all immigration periods: "Kanadier", "Russlaender" of both Molotschna and Chortitza background, and "Neueingewanderte", coming to Canada through Paraguayan colonies in the Chaco and East Paraguay.

The words have remained basically unchanged in this story about a little sheep going into the woods, getting hurt and crying out in pain. The first verse invariably consisted of the 'Shteenche/Beenche'<sup>1</sup> dyad. Verses 2 and 3 were often added, and other verses with rhyming pairs were improvised by singers at will.

Melodies for "Kanadier" and "Russlaender" versions were similar. "Neueingewanderte" melodies differed. The version quoted here, uses a hymn tune, "Es lebe Gott allein in mir," found in the Russland Choralbuch of 1897. This is in keeping with the tendency of later immigrants to use hymn tunes for children's songs.

The song was used either as a lullaby, or to comfort children who had gotten injured while playing.<sup>2</sup> No distinction was made in using this song for either girls or boys; it could be sung to either though it seemed to endorse crying as a way of coping with an injury.

Since lullabies are generally sung by women in the immediate family context, one would expect them to be transmitted to future generations through the women in the family. One exception seems to reoccur, however: the introduction of new songs through inter-marriage. The "Neueingewanderte"/Chaco version of this song, was sung by the daughter of

<sup>1</sup>This usage is in accord with Erk's observation (1893(III):587).

"Um das Kind schwiegen zu machen, wenn es sich gestossen hat."  
(trans.: In order to quiet a child when it has hurt itself.)

<sup>2</sup>'Shtrukche/Bukche' and 'Shteenche/Beenche' are also found in Meier's collection of East Frisian folklore (Meier, 1972:225).



an "Neueingewanderte"/Vollendam lady. The daughter, having married someone from the Chaco, had learned a new lullaby from her in-laws. And, although it would seem that lullabies are the female song domain, this lullaby was also sung by a number of male informants, some of whom learned it from their fathers.



TIEP HEENACHES  
 ("Little Chickens")

Tune 1: one variant of the standard tune

K, R

Tiep Hee-na-ches, tiep Hoh-na-ches,  
 vout dou yie opp ons Hoff?

Yie plec-ke au-le Bloum-ches auf,  
 Daut es ons fehl tou groff.

Ma-me voat yuent shel-le, pa-pa voat yuent shloh-ne,  
 Tiep Hee-na-ches, tiep Hoh-na-ches,  
 vou voat yuent daut dann gohne?

## Translation:

Little chickens, little roosters  
 What are you doing on our yard?  
 You are picking all the flowers.  
 That seems 'too awful' to us.  
 Mother will scold you, father will hit (spank) you.  
 Little chickens, little roosters,  
 How will you feel then?

Tune 2: teasing song  
 variant

arr. by Esther Wiebe<sup>1</sup> - K  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba

*Tiep Hee-na-ches, tiep Hee-na-ches...*

*daut es ons gauns tou groff.*

*Mama voat yuent shel-le, pa-pa voat yuent shloh-ne,*

*Tiep Hee-na-ches, tiep Hee-na-ches,*

*vou voat yuent daut dann gohne?*

<sup>1</sup>Unpublished arrangement copied with permission from the author.

## Translation:

Little chickens, little chickens...  
 That seems terrible to us.  
 Mother will scold you,  
 Father will hit (spank) you,  
 Little chickens, little chickens,  
 How will you feel then?

## Tune 3: "Er Lebt"

Mrs. Maria Guenter - N/Pa.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 March 28, 1978  
 PDL-4

The musical score consists of nine staves of music in G-clef, 4/4 time. The lyrics are written below the notes in a cursive hand.

Tiep Hee-na-ches, tiep Hee-na-ches,  
 vaut dou yie opp dehm Hoff?

Yie plek-ke aul dee Blum-ches auf,  
 Yie moa-ke daut tou größ.

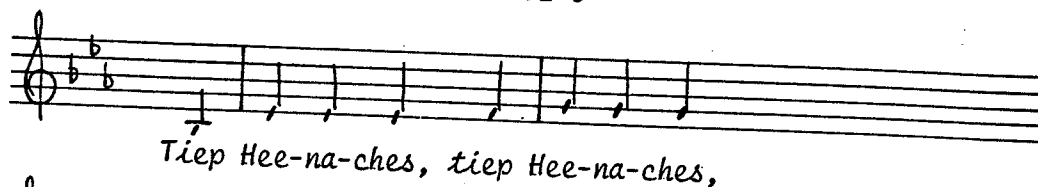
Dee Ma-ma voat yuent shelle,  
 dee Pa-pa voat yuent shloh-ne,  
 Tiep Hee-na-che, tiep Hee-na-che,  
 vou voat et die dann goh-ne?

Translation:

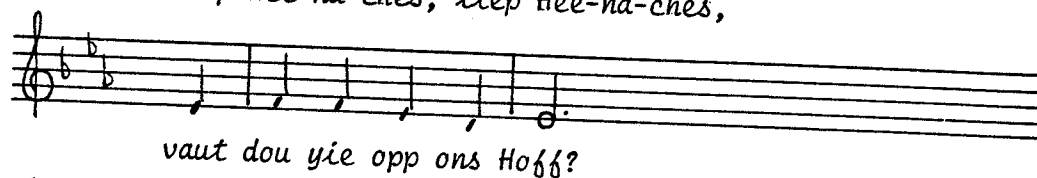
See 'Tune 1' translation.

Tune 4: "Wie Sollt Ich Mussig  
Bleiben"

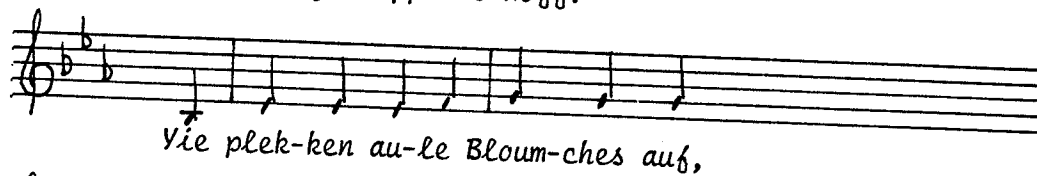
Mrs. Isaac Thiessen - R  
Winkler, Manitoba  
May 10, 1978  
PDL-5



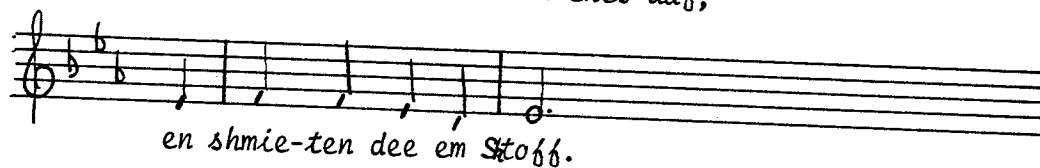
Tiep Hee-na-ches, tiep Hee-na-ches,



vaut dou yie opp ons Hoff?



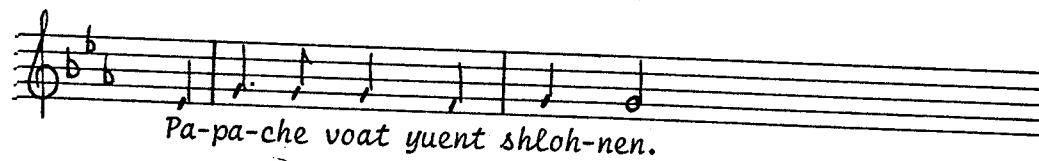
Yie plek-ken au-le Bloum-ches auf,



en shmie-ten dee em Stoff.



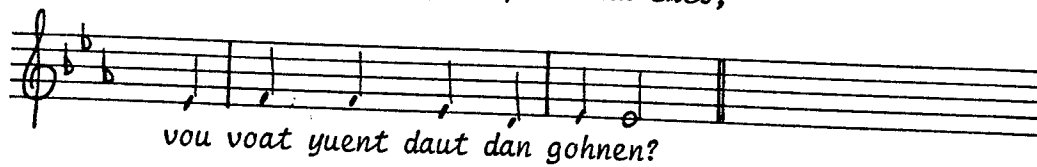
Ma-ma-che voat yuent shel-len,



Pa-pa-che voat yuent shloh-nen.



Tiep Hee-na-ches, tiep Hee-na-ches,



vou voat yuent daut dan gohnen?

## Translation:

Little chickens, little chickens,  
 What are you doing on our yard?  
 You are picking all the flowers,  
 And throwing them into the dust.  
 Mother will scold you,  
 Father will hit (spank) you,  
 Little chickens, little chickens,  
 How will you feel then?

## Comments:

The familiarity of this song among Mennonites could be due to its entertainment value as a children's song, but should probably be credited to its ability to reinforce the traditional social order. In this social order, there is a pecking order of behavioral and disciplinary action for disobedience from the parents, who have presumably made the rules. The parents' roles are divided: mother's disciplinary action is verbal, while father administers corporal punishment for bad behavior. Bad behavior, according to this song, is the act of destroying someone else's property. There is no discussion of healing broken relationships, possibly because children are involved, or because the song comes from a society with a punitive sense of justice.

The assumption that this song was used for didactic purposes is supported by comments of several informants. One lady who sang the song also told a moralistic animal folktale designed to inspire good behavior. One young mother recalled that in her childhood she and her older siblings would change the words to

*Mama voat yuent shlohne, papa voat yuent chiele*<sup>1</sup>

to instil a fear of punishment and thus good behavior on the part of younger siblings when they played together out of earshot of the parents. No doubt it was a somewhat self-protective measure on the part of older siblings, since they were held accountable for the misdemeanors of younger siblings when the parents were not around.

The tune variants warrant some discussion. Tune 1 is one variant of the most standard tune used for these words by "Kanadier" and "Russlaender". Both Tunes 1 and 2 appear in the instrumental accompaniment to the children's games in Act I, Scene III of "The Bridge" (Wiebe and Brandt, 1974) a Mennonite folk opera written for the Mennonite

<sup>1</sup>Trans. "Mother will spank you, father will beat you up." This contrasts with a variant found by Firmenich, in which the chickens/children are told "Mother will 'pinch' you, father will spank you" (my trans.) (Firmenich, 1854:37).

Centennial in 1974. Tunes 3 and 4 exhibit a characteristic common to "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" grandmother's versions of children's songs. They adapt a familiar hymn tune to fit the words of the children's song. This was apparently a subconscious process, since some of the ladies denied any similarity between the hymn tune and the children's song melody. One possible explanation is that both tunes evolved from an earlier version of a folk tune. All tunes given here differ substantially from those in Erk's Deutscher Liederhort (1893(III):592).



## SHPRUNGK EN BOCK

("A ram was springing")

Tune: "Gruenes Gras"  
 Erk and Boehme,  
 1893: (III) 608

Frank F. Ens - R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 PEA-304

Shprungk en Bock, shprungk en Bock,  
 en daut chlie-ne Goad-che,  
 Kaum dee Mut-ta drouz-lich aun,  
 fout am aun zien Boat-che,  
 Zehd ah em-ma mea, ea, ea,  
 mea, ea, ea, mea. (bleated)

## Translation:

A ram was spinging, a ram was springing  
 In the little garden,  
 The mother, she came angerly,  
 And grabbed him by the beard.  
 He kept saying, "Mea, ea, ea, mea, ea, ea, mea."



## Comments:

During their early years in Russia, Mennonites concentrated on raising sheep. Even after the mid-nineteenth century, when conditions began to favor grain farming, Mennonites continued to raise sheep on a small scale.

A ram invading mother's garden was a likely occurrence. One need not be surprised at mother's angry response, and cannot but laugh at the ram's pleas of innocence.

This song, like "*Tiep Heenaches*", may have been used by Mennonites for didactic purposes, teaching obedience through ridicule of pretended innocence.

## AUS ECK MOHL EN BUA VULL VOARE

("Once upon a time when I wanted to become a farmer")

Version 1

Esther Horch - K/Am.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 July 12, 1978  
 PDL-7

Aus eck mohl en Bua vull voa-re,  
 vull eck uck en Os-che ha,  
 Au-le Lied-ches vul-le vee-te  
 vou mien Os-che donn zull hee-te.  
 Grout-knoss heet de Oss,  
 Tiet-fe-driev heet daut Viev,  
 Viez-bracht heet de Knacht,  
 Lang-hauls heet de Gaunz,

Tip-pel-tohn heet de Hohn, Rann-a-rann-a-rann,  
Zou heët uck miene Hahn.

## Translation:

Once upon a time when I wanted to become a farmer  
I also wanted to have a little ox.  
All the people (diminutive) wanted to know  
what my little ox was supposed to be called.  
Big (animal) foot was (colled) my ox,  
Wasting-time was my wife,  
Giesbrecht was my (male) servant,  
Long-throat was my goose,  
Speckle-tone was my rooster,  
Run-a-run-a-run,  
So was called my hen.

## Version 2

Mrs. J. J. Thiessen - R  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
June 14, 1978

sung in C+

1. Aus eck mohl bie'm Bua-rie via,  
vull eck uck en Hohn ha-ben,  
Au-le Lied dee vul-le vee-te  
vou doch voll mien Hohn zull hee-te,

Krie-de rie-de rohn, zou heet dock voll mien Hohn.

2. Aus eck mohl bie'm Bua-re via,

vull eck uck ne Hahn ha-ben,

Tip-pel-tan zou heet mien' Hahn,

Krie-de rie-de rohn, zou heet dock voll mien' Hahn.

3. ...Kvak-kel-tan zou heet mien' Ent...Tip-pel-tan...

3. ...ne Ent...Kvakkeltan
4. ...ne Gaunz...Langhauuls
5. ...en Shvien...yerye vien
6. ...ne Kou...Plingtou
7. en Piad...Geld viat
8. ...en Chind...sheene Leen

Translation:

1. Once when I was at the farmer's, I also wanted to have a rooster,  
All the people wanted to know what my rooster was supposed to be called,  
'Kriede riede rohn', so was called my rooster.

2. ...a chicken...speckle-tone
3. ...a duck...quack-tone
4. ...a goose...long throat
5. ...a pig... ? wine
6. ...a cow... ?
7. ...a horse...money-worth
8. ...a child...lovely Helen

Comments:

One wonders why a song about a farmer would come from only two people in a community noted for its agrarian pursuits.

One explanation might be that the song is of Prussian origin and the Mennonites seem to have appropriated very few Prussian songs. (A version similar to the ones printed here is found in Frischbier's collection of Prussian songs (Frischbier, 1877:47).)

Another explanation might be that the singers of this song have different histories from many of the other informants. Mrs. Horch, the daughter of a minister who came to Canada via the U.S., learned the song from her 'Polish grandmother', as she calls her. Mrs. Thiessen, the daughter of a large estate owner in the Russian province of Ekaterinoslav, had no contact with village children, so learned all her songs from her mother. Most of the songs Mrs. Thiessen knew were of Prussian background, and were unfamiliar to other Mennonites.

At first glance the melodies of these two versions seem to be fairly dissimilar. A closer look reveals a basic similarity between the first two and last phrases of the two versions (indicated by phrase lines). This suggests that these two versions are variants of the same basic tune. The lyrics also are similar enough to suggest that these are two variants of an original poem. The only typically Mennonite aspect of the lyrics is the names: *Viesbracht* and *Leen*.

The original version was obviously a cumulative song, yet neither of these two versions consistently bear this out. The first version has been collapsed into a single verse, although the repetitive melodic and rhythmic motifs in lines 2-4 suggest that at one time the song was sung in a cumulative manner. The second version, omits the second line when the list of animals begins to accumulate (see verse 2). Despite these aberrations, one can assume that this is in fact a cumulative song.

The other common factor is the use of the song. In both homes, it was used to entertain children. Mrs. Horch writes that her Grand-mother Harms used to sing this and other songs about animals and farming while she fed the chickens and pigs (Horch, 1979:146).

There is, however, one significant difference in the two renditions of the song. The poor man's daughter sings about "Once upon a time when I 'wanted to be' a farmer", whereas the estate owner's

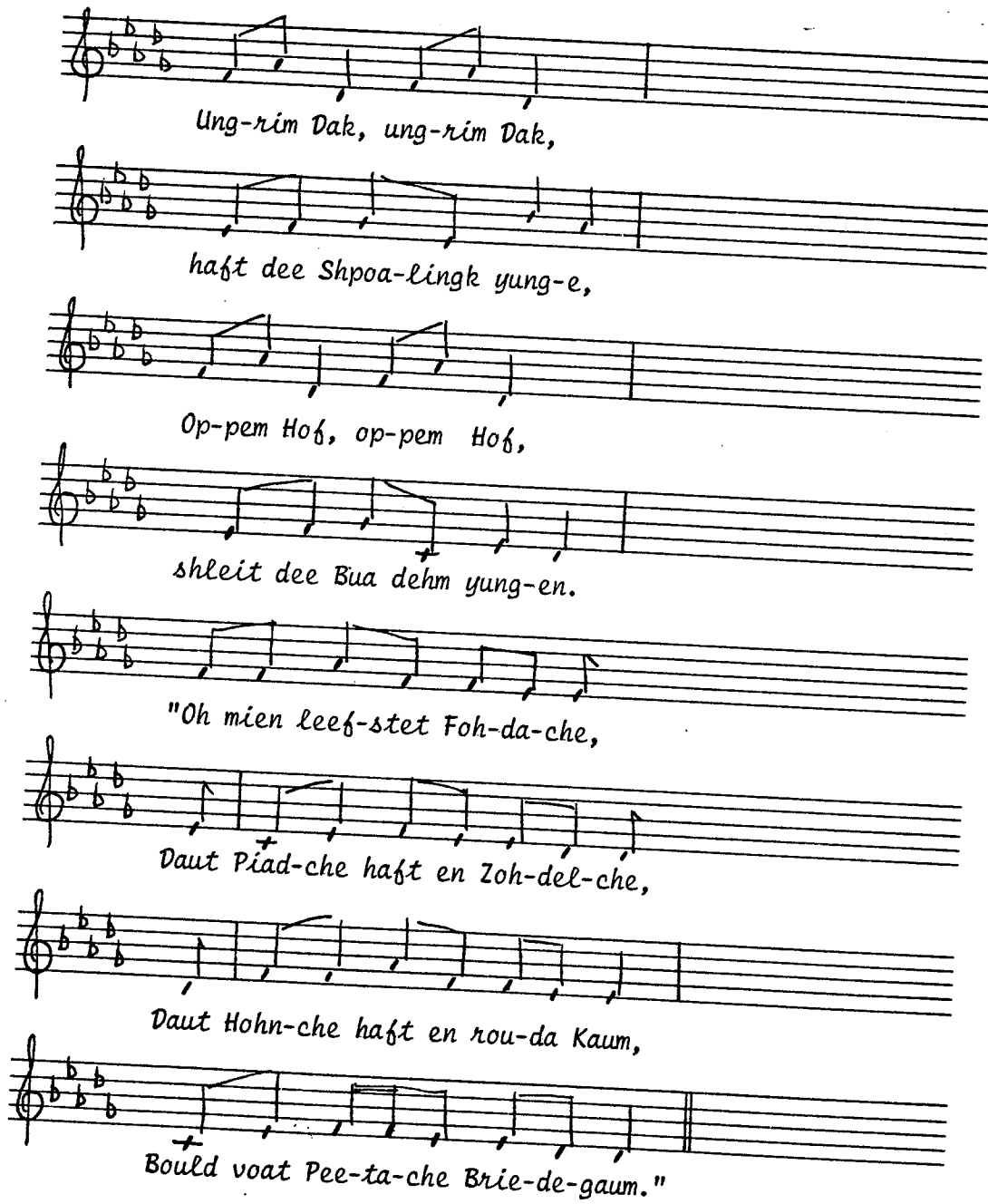
daughter sings about "Once upon a time when I 'visited' the farmer."  
An estate owner's daughter would hardly have aspirations to be a mere peasant farmer!

The differences between the rich and the poor are expressed in these subtle ways, rather than in the more explicit ways generally found in German folklore. Firmenich, for example, found songs like "Als ick moal en riker Mann was" ("When I was a rich man") (Firmenich, 1842:130), and "Eck woor en oorem Moan" ("I was a poor man") (ibid., 1846:814).



UNGRIM DAK  
 ("Under the roof")

Rev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
 Carman, Manitoba  
 May 30, 1978  
 PDL-5



Ung-rim Dak, ung-rim Dak,  
 haft dee Shpoa-lingk yung-e,  
 Op-pem Hof, op-pem Hof,  
 shleit dee Bua dehm yung-en.  
 "Oh mien leef-stet Foh-da-che,  
 Daut Piad-che haft en Zoh-del-che,  
 Daut Hohn-che haft en rou-da Kaum,  
 Bould voat Pee-ta-che Brie-de-gaum."

## Translation:

Under the roof, under the roof, the sparrow has young ones.

On the yard, on the yard, the farmer hits (punishes) the young one (young boy).

"Oh my dearest father, the horse has a saddle, The rooster has a red comb, soon Peter will become a bridegroom."

## Comments:

A young boy is trying to distract his father from punishing him. The author cleverly sets the stage for the boy's attempt by contrasting the protective covering which shelters the sparrow's young ones, with the open yard which offers no refuge for the farmer's young one. He reinforces this by suggesting that the two parents treat their young ones in radically different ways. The boy tries to argue with the father. Instead of using strict logic, he attempts to distract his father by the use of endearing terms, by referring to various animals on the farmyard, and by a reference to Peter's (possibly an older brother's) impending marriage. Surely the father would not want to detract from this joyous occasion by causing his young son such sorrow. Though the song is not characteristically Mennonite, many Mennonites can identify with the sentiments expressed by the young boy.

Rev. Klassen, a "Kanadier" of Molotschna background, in contrast to most of the "Kanadier" who are of Chortitza background, was the only individual who knew this song. He had learned it from his father.



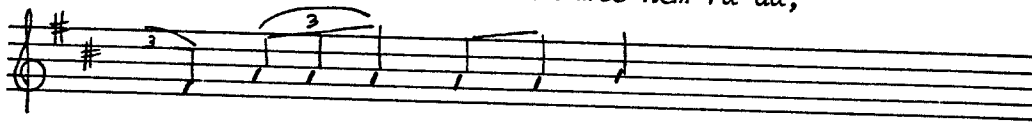
## DEE NEIYA REAYNSHORM

("The new umbrella")

Rev. D. D. Klassen - K/Mo.  
 Carman, Manitoba  
 May 30, 1978  
 PDL-5



1. Frits rann shvind noh mie-nem Fa-da,



Enn zei am daut doch kloa aun,



Daut bie zou-nem schlach-ten Va-da,



Eck nich noh am koh-men kaun.



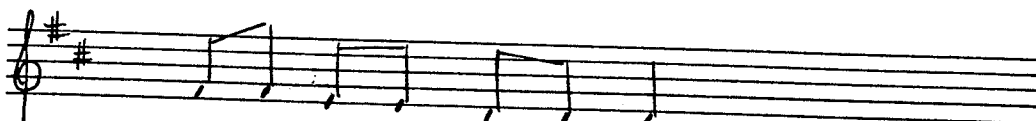
2. Reay-nen deit daut zous uet Bet-ten,



Daut de Vach moh yrohd zou shvamt,



En vea vudd daut Frits ver-bee-den



vann hee zik dehn Shorm met nemmt.

3. *"Domma Bengel," roupt dee Fohda,  
 "Domma Bengel vout zaul daut?  
 Denk bie zounem shlachtet Vada,  
 Voat dee nieya Shorm gauns naut."*

Translation:

1. Fred, run quickly to my cousin and tell him very clearly,  
 That in such bad weather I can't come to (visit) him.
2. It's raining like out of tubs so that the road actually swims,  
 And who would forbid Fred to take along the umbrella?
3. "Stupid rascal," calls the father, "Stupid rascal, what is this?  
 Realize that in such bad weather the new umbrella will get completely wet!"

Comments:

Rev. Klassen thoroughly enjoys singing this song, which he learned in his childhood, to entertain people, or to relieve a tense situation. He will invariably perform the song when it rains. In July of 1978, during the unveiling of a monument commemorating an aspect of Mennonite church history, it began to rain, and so there was a temporary delay in the proceedings. Rev. Klassen immediately began singing this song, much to the amusement of the audience at this 'historic occasion'.

The father's reluctance to allow the boy to use the new umbrella, may be a reflection of his stinginess; but, it may also be the practical concern of an individual who knows that he cannot afford to buy a new umbrella every year. In any case, the father's reluctance is typical of many Mennonite homes in which children are encouraged to 'save' new items for 'special occasions'.

MIENE MAME ES MIE GOUT  
 ("My mother loves me")

Tune: "Jesus Loves Me"

K, R



Mie-ne ma-me es mie gout,  
 yeft mie shee-net Eh-ten,  
 Shin-ke-fleesh en But-ta-brout,  
 Daut voa'k nie fe-yeh-ten.

Translation:

My mother loves me,  
 Gives me good food,  
 Ham and buttered bread,  
 I'll never forget that.

Comments:

A high school barbershop quartette<sup>1</sup> from Winkler sang this song at the Sunflower Festival in Altona in 1959. A lady in the audience was overheard saying, "Ohba horch emohl. Dee zinge Dietsch! Noch fon miene Mame!"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The quartette consisted of Johnny Friesen, Johnny Pauls, Alvin Pauls and George Sawatzky.

<sup>2</sup>"Listen! They are singing German! Even about 'my mother'!"

Many Mennonites recalled having sung this song when they were children. One teenager said that he was expected to sing this song to his grandmother anytime she was about to give him a gift or a little treat. Other children simply sang the song as they played.

*Shinkefleesh en Buttabrout* are favorite foods in many Mennonite homes, so the mother's gift to the child would be seen as a very lovingly given gift.

One wonders whether the words of the original tune, "Jesus loves me", inspired the Low German version, or whether the process was reversed. One notes, for example the use of the High German folksong tune "Schoen ist die Jugen" ("Youth is beautiful") for the religious song, "Gott ist die Liebe" ("God is love") (Meyer, 1927). It is possible that a similar process occurred with respect to "*Miene Mame es mie gout*" and "Jesus loves me."



MIE HUNGATT  
 ("I'm hungry")

Tune: "Ihr Kinderlein  
 Kommet"

Hilda Matsuo  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 March 19, 1978

Mie hung-att, mie pung-att,  
 mie shlak-katt de Buck,  
 Bie Grous-ma em Cha-la doa es ee-ne Kruck/Vruck.  
 Vea dee, dee vel ha-be dee chemt en zacht,  
 Bie Grous-ma em Cha-la, doa es ee-ne Kruck/Vruck.

Translation:

I'm hungry, my stomach is sliding and flapping around,  
 At grandmother's in the basement there is a crock/turnip.  
 Whoever wants simply comes and says so.  
 At grandmother's in the basement there is a crock/turnip.

Comments:

Originally of German Lutheran origin, Mrs. Matsuo and her Japanese husband are now members of a Mennonite church. She learned this and other Low German songs as a child living among "Kanadier" of the "Kleine Gemeinde" church living near Kleefeld in south-eastern Manitoba.

In many Mennonite homes, the children would recite the first line of the song when they were hungry. In other homes, the more respectable version of the poem, with the turnip in grandmother or grandfather's basement would be recited.

There is a certain irony in the version about the crock, or little brown jug. The surface reading of the text is that whoever wants to imbibe simply comes and says so. However, a child visiting at grandmother's house in those days would probably have come to mother and father and whispered if he wanted something beyond allowable limits, like an extra cookie. And no child would ever think of asking for the contents of the crock (possibly homemade wine)! Neither would an adult in many of these homes speak openly about drinking. The irony then is the apparent openness about a secretive act, not to mention the irony of using a tune like "Ihr Kinderlein Kommet" or "O Come Little Children" for a song about something totally forbidden to children.

HUPS MERYALCHE  
 ("Jump little girl")

Mrs. J. J. Thiessen - R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 January 27, 1978  
 PDL-3

*sung 8va*

Hups Mer-yal-che, Hups Mer-yal-che,  
 loht de Pop-ches daun-se,  
 Ha-be rou-de Yack-ches aun,  
 Zen voll fon de Fraun-se.

Translation:

Jump little girl, jump little girl  
 Let the little dolls dance,  
 They are wearing jackets of red,  
 Surely come from France.

Comments:

The earliest transcription of this song, entitled "Zum Tanze der Puppe" (For a doll's dancing), is found in Erk and Boehme's Deutscher Liederhort (1893: (III): 589). This version, dated 1800, is a children's song encouraging the little girl to dance with her doll because she has met a good man, a man from Complisance.

A parody of this song, found in an East Frisian folklore collection, contains several references to political events in 19th century Europe:

Hopp Merjantje, hopp merjantje!  
 Laat ju Puppkes dānzen:  
 Froger har wi de Pruszen in't Land;  
 Un nu de kahle Franzen.<sup>1</sup> (Meier, 1972:210).

Originally published by Meier in 1868, this song pre-dates the Franco-Prussian War by two years. Thus, the song belongs to an earlier historic era, probably the Napoleonic invasion of Prussian territories. Specifically, this could refer to the Battle of Jena of 1806, in East Friesland. Here Napoleon defeated the Prussian forces, holding the territory until his defeat, 1813-15.

The French army were identified by their red jackets, but it is not known whether the reference to 'bald Frenchmen' is literal or figurative. However, one can understand from this comment that the French were not well-liked.

Mrs. Thiessen thought that her particular version of this song referred to the Napoleonic invasions of Europe. Since most of the other songs she knew were of Prussian origin, it can be assumed that this song also came from Prussia. If it does, in fact, come from Prussia, one can understand why only the French would be referred to as invaders.

This song is simply another example of the use of nursery rhymes for political comment. Mrs. Thiessen learned the song from her mother who sang it while she rocked or bounced little children on her knee; i.e., the French dancing tune became an entertaining children's song when it entered a Mennonite home.




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<sup>1</sup> Jump little girl, jump little girl,  
 Let the little dolls dance.  
 Earlier we had Prussians in the land,  
 And now the bald Frenchmen.



ZING 'EM, ZING 'EM ZOU  
 ("Sing it, sing it so")

Mrs. Friesen - K  
 Neu Bergthal, Manitoba  
 June 23, 1978

Zing 'em, zing 'em zou,

Zing 'em Zack en bing 'em tou,

Haudst due nich zou zee'a ye-zung'en,

Via dee Zack nich ohp ye-shprung-en.

Translation:

Sing it, Sing it so,  
 Sing into the sack and tie it closed.  
 If you hadn't sung so hard,  
 The sack wouldn't have sprung open.

Comments:

This nonsense song was known in a few Mennonite homes. One "Neueingewanderte" man knew a slightly different version learned from his father. Instead of the reference to singing into the sack, it contained one of the most common Low German *Drackviad* or dirty words, *shiet*, i.e., "Shiet em Zack" or 'shit into the sack'. In some homes the expression was used freely, while in others it was totally unacceptable.

Other *Chingaleeda* - immigrant

## DOA VIER E'MOHL EN MAUN

("There once was a man")

Tune: "The Farmer in the Dell"

Veleda Unger Goulden - K/Mo.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
December 9, 1976

1. Doa vier e'mohl en Maun,  
Doa vier e'mohl en Maun,  
Doa vier e'mohl en Brummelsmaun,  
Doa vier e'mohl en Maun.
2. Dee Maun haud 'ne Fruh...
3. Dee Fruh haud en Chint...
4. Daut Chint haud en Hunt...
5. Dee Hunt haud 'ne Kaut...  
etc.

## Translation:

1. There once was a man,  
There once was a man,  
There once was a grumblingman,  
There once was a man.
2. The man had a wife...
3. The wife had a child...
4. The child had a dog...
5. The dog had a cat...

## Comments:

"Doa vier e'mohl en Maun" is a translation of "The Farmer in the Dell" which was sung by Mennonite children like Mrs. Goulden and her friends several decades ago in the East Reserve.

Mrs. Goulden's *De Goldene Shlut*, a collection of Low German nursery rhymes, also contains a rhyme entitled "Een Miatje" or "A Fairy Tale" beginning "Doa wie ee'mohl een Maun" (see Unger, 1974:50). This fairy tale differs from the song we have here. In the tale, we are told about a man who had a cow which had a calf which had a colorful hat. The tale ends with a golden lock, a gold feather, and the promise of another tale tomorrow. Although this story is different from the story in "The Farmer in the Dell", its man, cow, calf sequence may have inspired some child to translate "The Farmer in the Dell" into Low German.

ECK YINGK E'MOHL EM VOULT  
 ("I went into the woods")

Tune: "The Farmer in the Dell"

K, R

Lyric 1:

Eck yingk e'mohl em Voults,  
 Eck yingk e'mohl em Voults,  
 Eck yingk e'mohl em Brum-mels-voults,  
 Eck yingk e'mohl em Voults.

2. Vaut deedst due en dehm Voults?
3. Eck hohld mie doa vaut Holt.
4. Vaut deedst due met daut Holt?
5. Eck muack mie doamet Fia.
6. Vaut deedst due met dee Aush?
7. Eck muack mie doamet Luea.
8. Vaut deetst due met dee Luea?
9. Eck vosh doamet mien Hamd.
10. Vaut funkst due en daut Hamd?
11. Eck funk doa eene Lues.
12. Vaut deedst due met dee Lues?
13. Eck laddad mie dee auf.
14. Vaut deedst due met daut Ladda?
15. Eck muack mie doafon Shou.
16. Vaut deedst due met dee Shou?
17. Eck yingk doamet noh Choick.
18. Vaut sehden don dee Lied?
19. Dee sehden eck via dom.
20. Nue haft daut Leet en Eng.

## Translation:

I went into the woods, I went into the woods,  
I went into the 'Brummels' woods, I went into the woods.

2. What did you do in the woods?
3. I got myself some wood.
4. What did you do with the wood?
5. I made a fire with it.
6. What did you do with the ashes?
7. I made soap-water.
8. What did you do with the soap-water?
9. I washed my shirt.
10. What did you find in the shirt?
11. I found a louse there.
12. What did you do with the louse?
13. I 'leathered' it 'off'.
14. What did you do with the leather?
15. I made shoes.
16. What did you do with the shoes?
17. I went to church.
18. What did the people say then?
19. They said I was dumb.
20. Now the song has an end.

## Lyric 2:

Alviera Klippenstein - A/Pa./Bo.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
June 24, 1978  
PDL-7

1. *Eck yingk emohl en dehm Voult.*
2. *Vaut vusst due en dehm Voult?*
3. *Eck vull mie yriep'n en Hohs.*
4. *Vaut vusst due met dehm Hohs?*
5. *Eck vull dehm laddre auf.*
6. *Vaut vusst due met daut Ladda?*
7. *Eck vull doa moake Shou.*
8. *Vaut vusst due met dee Shou?*
9. *Eck vull doamet toh Choick.*
10. *Vaut sehde de Lied don?*
11. *Dee sehde eck via shtollt.*

## Translation:

1. I once went into the woods.
2. What did you want in the woods?
3. I wanted to catch myself a rabbit.
4. What did you do with the rabbit?
5. I wanted to skin it (leather it off).
6. What did you do with the leather?

7. I wanted to make shoes.
8. What did you do with the shoes?
9. I wanted to go to church.
10. What did the people say then?
11. They said that I was proud.

Comments:

Lyric 1 is fairly commonly known among "Kanadier". The story of this nonsense song is told in question-answer format. Most of the story is straightforward. Two points, however, need further elaboration: how one gets soap-water from ashes, and how one gets leather from a louse.

The following explanation of the soap-water to ashes process was given by one informant:

*Eena nemmt ne Viedenchiep. Doa benne moakt eena en Mast fon Shtrou. Dann nemmt eena Holt-aush en moakt dee en daut Shtrou nast nen. Dann plengat eena hoadet Bormvohta en dee Chiep, on lat daut doa derch lacken. Dann chricht eena sheenet viaket Vohta tohm vaushen.*

Translation: One takes a reed/willow basket and makes a nest of straw in it. Then one takes wood ashes and places them into this straw nest. One dribbles hard well-water into the basket and lets it drip through. Then one gets soft water for washing.

And soft water would produce soapy wash-water.

The louse to leather process has a rather different explanation, hinging on the ambiguous meaning of the word *laddad*. *Laddad*, literally meaning 'leathered', can be used in Low German to mean either 'lathered', as with soap, or 'leathered', as in skinning an animal, thereby producing leather for shoes. It is not surprising that something as ludicrous as skinning a louse gets a "They said I was dumb/stupid" response.

The last verse was improvised by one of the informants to illustrate how simple it is to add another verse to a nonsense song.

Lyric 2 appears to be a more 'sensible' version of the same song. Since all the action described is believable, one wonders why the people respond by saying "he was proud."

One needs to go beyond the actual lyric to find an answer for this apparent incongruity. As noted, the song has gone through several migrations: with the "Auswanderer" who moved to Paraguay in the 1920's, then to Bolivia, back to Paraguay, and back to Canada. Among the Mennonites who took this particular immigration route "Demutigkeit"

or humility is considered one of the highest Christian virtues. Wearing new shoes would make one susceptible to pride, a serious religious and social offence. This song is one of several examples of children's songs used for didactic purposes, in this case, to criticize non-conformist behavior.

The little girl (6 or 7 year-old) who sang the song, learned it from her uncle. There were several instances in which little girls learned more 'colorful' songs from male relatives of the preceding generations, usually from uncles, sometimes from grandfathers, often on the mother's side of the family, and vaguely reminiscent of the "asymmetrical joking relationship" anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown discovered among the Bathonga of Mozambique (Harris, 1968:528). Further investigation would be required to determine the significance of this phenomenon.



## M'RIECHE HAUD EN CHLIENET LAUM

("Mary had a little lamb")

Tune: "Mary had a little Lamb"

A/Me.

1. *M'rieche haud en chlienet Laum,  
chlienet Laum, chlienet Laum,  
M'rieche haud en chlienet Laum,  
daut via zou vitt aus Shnee.*
2. *Aulle veayn vua M'rieche yingk...  
doa yingk daut Laumche met.*
3. *Daut yingk met ar noh Shoul een Dach...  
donn via dee Liera doll.*

## Translation:

1. Mary had a little lamb...it was as white as snow.
2. Everywhere where Mary went...the lamb went along.
3. It went with her to school one day...then the teacher was angry.

## Comments:

According to their parents, some shy little girls who have recently immigrated to Winkler from Mexico, sing the first verse of this song in Low German while they play with their dolls and other toys.

The other two verses were sung by "Auswanderer" children from Mexico about twenty years ago. They enjoyed translating the song as much as singing it.

Translation of songs by children was found only among these "Auswanderer" children, possibly because they are among the few children who are still being taught Low German in their homes, in comparison with most other Mennonite children who learn English, or, very rarely, High German.



MIENE MAME ENN PAPPE SENT PLAUTDIETSCH  
 ("My mother and father are Low German")

Tune: "For he's a jolly good  
 fellow"

Published in  
*De Goldene Shlut*  
 (Unger, 1974:11)

Veleda Goulden Unger - K/Mo.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 December 9, 1976

Translation:

My mother and father are Low German (3 times)  
 Then I am Low German too.  
 My mother and father are Low German (3 times)  
 Then I am Low German too.

Comments:

These lyrics, familiar to Mennonites in the Steinbach area of the East Reserve, were probably inspired by the English version, "My mother and father are Irish."

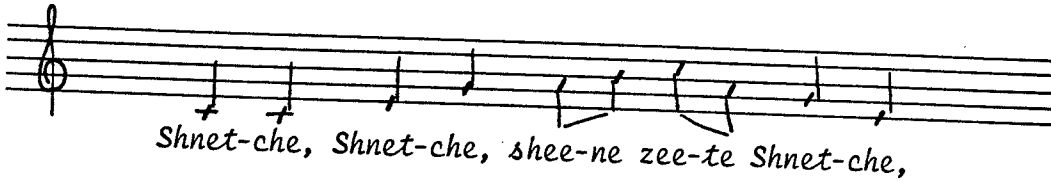
Of special interest is the assumption that Low German is not only a language, but also denotes a distinctive ethnic group, namely the Mennonites. For some Mennonites then, language and ethnicity are inextricably intertwined.



SHNETCHE, SHNETCHE  
 ("Biscuits, biscuits")

Tune: "Praise Him"/chant

Dan Sawatzky - K  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 June 8, 1978



Chanted:

*Met en besche Sierrup,  
 Met en besche Zouda,  
 Met en besche Malk,  
 Zent dee toup yeriat.  
 Sheene zeete Shnetche,  
 Haft Mame ons yebackt.*

Translation:

Biscuits, biscuits, lovely sweet biscuits,  
 With a little syrup,  
 With a little soda,  
 With a little milk,  
 They are mixed.  
 Lovely sweet biscuits.  
 Mother has baked for us.

Comments:

The fact that this recipe omits one of the necessary ingredients, that is flour, has seemingly not detracted from the pleasure Mennonite children have had reciting this nursery rhyme about a favorite food.

The tone of the rhyme is very positive. It suggests that there is material and emotional well-being in the home. Food is plentiful, and there is a loving relationship between mother and child. It appears to be a very normal thing for mother to be at home baking for the children.

Mr. Sawatzky, who sang this song for me in a telephone conversation, was uncertain about the tune used for this chorus "Praise Him, Praise Him all ye little children." If this is the case, this song,

Like "*Miene Mame es mie gout*" substitutes a Low German lyric about mother's goodness for a lyric about God's goodness. This may suggest an emotional bond between child and mother not found between father and child in some Mennonite homes, or simply the fact that, in traditional homes, the mother is present to meet the immediate needs of the child throughout the day.

A similar rhyme which was recited rather than sung, is also found in Unger (1974:37).

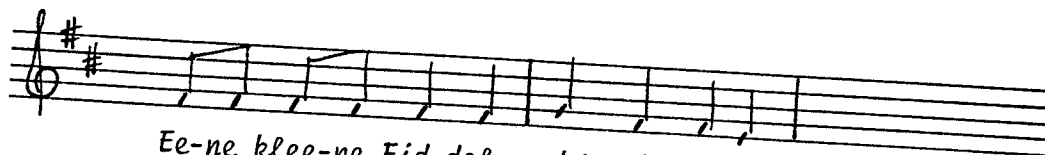


## EENE KLEENE FIDDLE

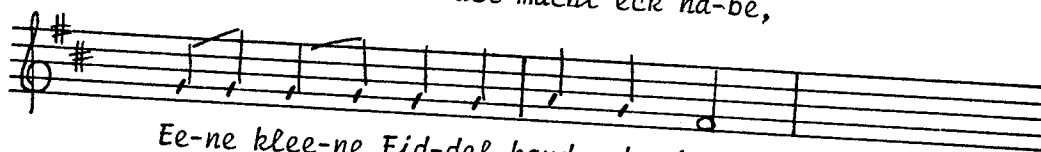
("A little fiddle")

Tune: German folksong  
 Text: Hoffmann von Fallersleben  
 (1798-1874)  
 (Diekmann, 1975:151)

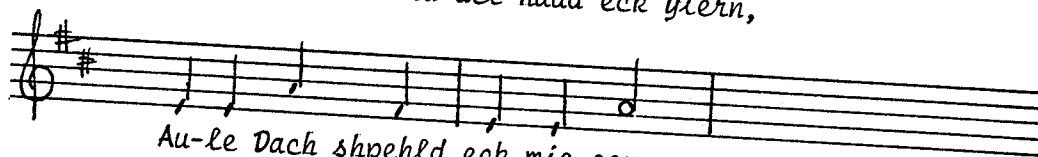
Mr. J. G. Sawatzky - K  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 July 17, 1978  
 PDL-7



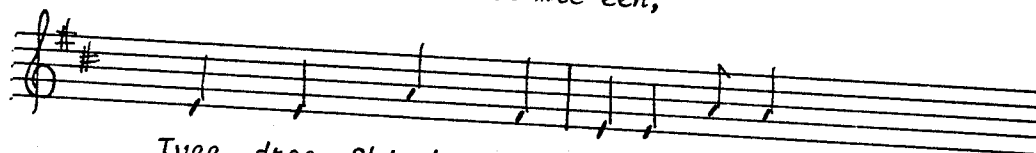
Ee-ne klee-ne Fid-del mucht eck ha-be,



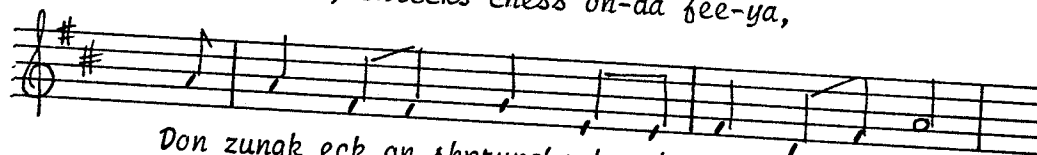
Ee-ne klee-ne Fid-del haud eck yiern,



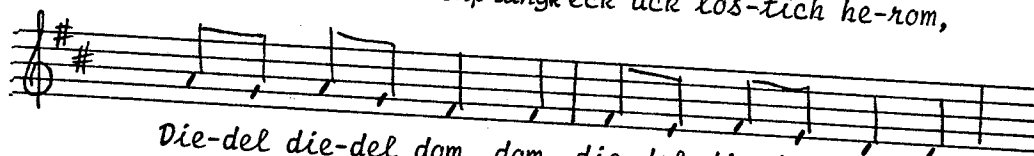
Au-le Dach shpehld eck mie een,



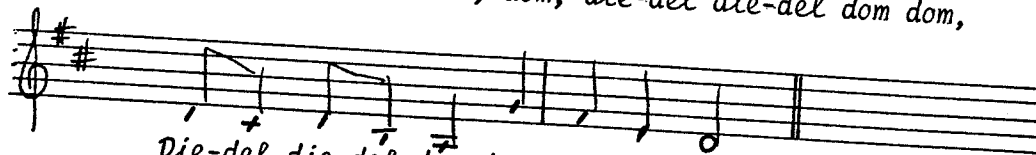
Tvee, dree, Shtecks-chess oh-da fee-ya,



Don zungk eck on shprung eck uck los-tich he-rom,



Die-del die-del dom, dom, die-del die-del dom dom,



Die-del die-del dom dom dom dom dom.

2. Eene kleene Fiddel klingt zou leeflich,  
 Eene kleene Fiddel klingt zou sheen,  
 Nohbash Kinga on ons Shpitz,  
 Kaumen aula aus dee Blitz,  
 Don zung vie on shprung vie uck lostich herom,  
 Diedel diedel dom dom...

Translation:

1. I'd like to have a little fiddle,  
 I'd badly like to have a little fiddle,  
 Every day I'd play one,  
 Two, three little pieces, or four,  
 Then I'd sing and jump around merrily,  
 Diddle diddle dom dom...
2. A little fiddle sounds so lovely,  
 A little fiddle sounds so beautiful,  
 The neighbor's children and our Spitz,  
 Would all come as lightning,  
 Diddle diddle dom...

Comments:

Mr. Sawatzky's life exemplifies the message of this song: that music is a happy, social activity.

He is one of the musical grandfathers who has translated a number of songs into Low German for his children and grandchildren. He used to sing these and familiar Low German songs like "Zuesa Petruetzha" to his children while he bounced them on his knee.

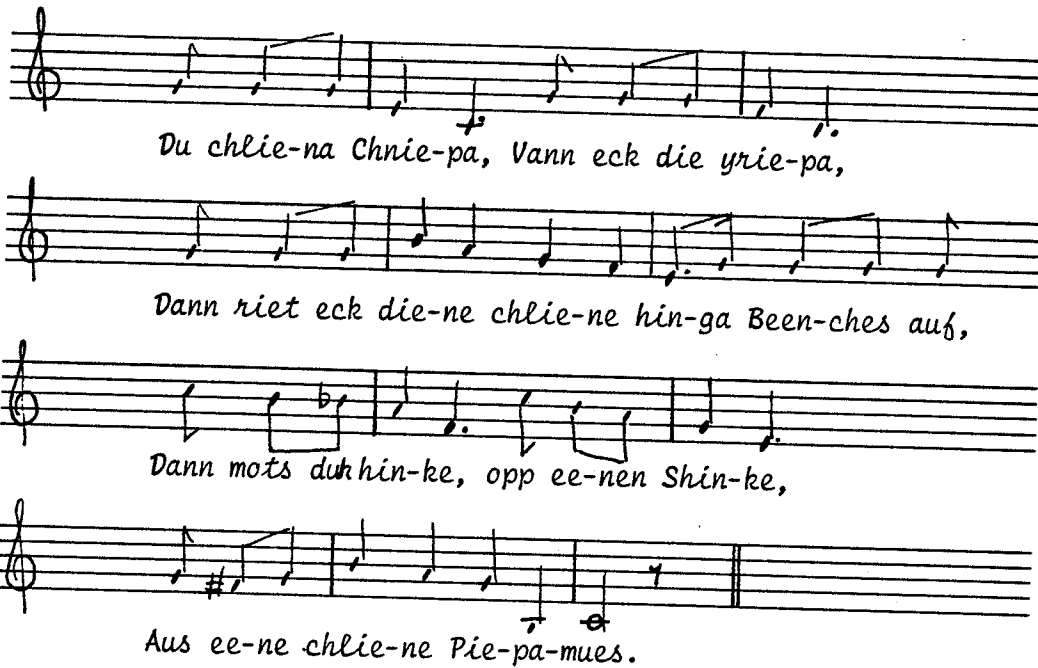
Though there were no children present when we recorded his songs, he accompanied his singing with a slight rocking motion, tapping his feet on the floor. It seemed as though he was reminiscing about the times when he used to sing these songs for his children, and even grandchildren who are growing up now.

In the past few years he has found a new outlet for his musical abilities. He is a violinist in the local Senior Citizens' Orchestra. After our taping session, we rehearsed one of the pieces he was preparing to play with the orchestra at the 1978 Pioneer Days celebration of the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach.

DUMCHLIENA CHNIEPA  
 ("You little insect")

Tune: "Du kleine Fliege"

Pat Plett - K/Mo.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 June 27, 1978



Du chlie-na Chnie-pa, Vann eck die yrie-pa,  
 Dann riet eck die-ne chlie-ne hin-ga Been-ches auf,  
 Dann mots dukhin-ke, opp ee-nen Shin-ke,  
 Aus ee-ne chlie-ne Pie-pa-mues.

Translation:

You little insect, if I catch you ('-pa' = rhyming syllable)  
 Then I'll tear off your little hind legs,  
 Then you'll have to hobble on one thigh,  
 Like a little (squeaky) mouse.

Comment:

This Low German parody of "Du kleine Fliege" ("You little Fly") was performed one August at the annual Kleefeld Honey Festival. No details about the origins of the song or its performance were available.

VEISTLICHE/CHOIKE LEEDA - ethnic  
(Spiritual/Church Songs)

DEE GOUDA HOAD  
 ("The Good Shepherd")

Mrs. Esther Horch - K/Am.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 July 12, 1978  
 PDL-7

Et vier e-mohl toh Tie-de, een rik-ka gou-da Hoad,  
 Dee haud opp zie-ne Vie-de, Dee Shohp-ches opp-ye-voad,  
 Dee ha-be zou free-lich ye-shprung-e,  
 On keent haft Mangel ye-shpeat,  
 Dee gou-da Hoad, dee gou-da Hoad,  
 Dee haft zou true ye-biat.

Translation:

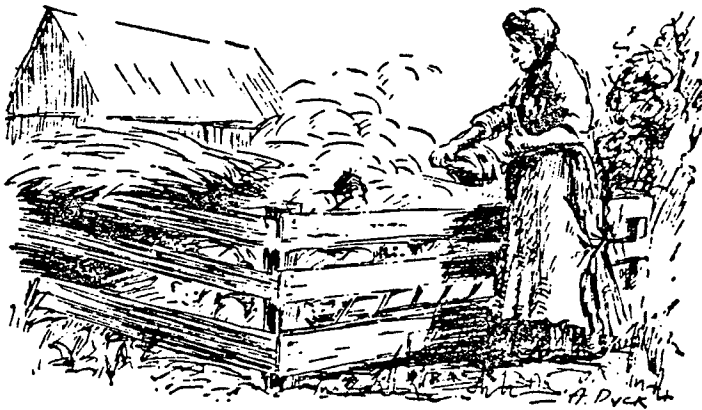
Once upon a time there was a rich, good shepherd.  
 In his pastures he had safely sheltered the sheep.  
 They sprang so joyfully, and none felt any lack,  
 The good shepherd, the good shepherd,  
 He has led so faithfully.



## Comments:

Mrs. Horch was the daughter of a well-known American Mennonite pastor and evangelist of the Mennonite Brethren Church who spent many years working in Winnipeg, Manitoba. (Horch, 1979:51) Her father insisted that they speak High German at home so that the children would be able to understand what was going on in church (ibid:33). However, Mrs. Horch had a grandmother whose Low German songs intrigued her. She says she "preferred Grandma Harms' low-German songs about animals to soothing harps" (ibid:26) because "having been brought up not to value material luxuries, heaven with its streets of gold and pearly gates did not impress me."

"*Dee Gouda Hoad*" is one of the Low German songs Mrs. Horch learned from her grandmother Harms. Although the song contains no specific religious terms, she always assumed that the references to the good shepherd were religious, referring to Jesus' statements about being the Good Shepherd (John 10).



## SINGT AHM LEEFLICH

Published in: *Veertien Platdietsche Leeda*  
(Neufeld, n.d.,:5-6).

## Translation:

1. We are gathered here today,  
Brothers, sisters, big and small,  
Let your heart be stirred with thanks,  
Praise the Lord for blessings all.  
Sing with joy to Him dear friends,  
Sing with love and beauty to Him,  
Sing with joy to Him dear friends,  
Sing with love and beauty to Him.
2. What good things He's done for us,  
Can you e'er His deeds forget?  
Can you understand His grace,  
Or His love which never ends?  
He who led from year to year,  
It is truly wonderful. (repeat last two lines)
3. Think of all the darkest times,  
How He helped us constantly,  
Did we suffer all alone?  
No, He helped us every day.  
Gracious hand, from heav'n above,  
Gave His blessing evermore.
4. Til today, He ne'r has failed,  
Led us with His faithful hand,  
Who would not give Him the thanks?  
Let us all sing joyfully.  
Joyfully sing hand in hand,  
In harmonious community.
5. No one ought withhold his thanks,  
All join in the jubilee,  
Keep our promises to Him,  
Just as He has done to us.  
Sing to Him in unity,  
Sing in love and peace to Him.

## Comments:

The origins of this song are obscure, but both "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" are credited with bringing the song from Russia. "Kanadier" who knew the song, learned it in Canada from "Russlaender".

"Kanadier" who knew the song thought they had heard it sung at one of the K. H. Neufeld "Saengerfests" (song festivals) in southern Manitoba. Dr. Neufeld, a Russian educated Mennonite musician, was instrumental in fostering an active musical climate in southern Manitoba communities through events like festivals, oratorio performances and community "Saengerfests" or song festivals. One of the purposes of these song festivals was to introduce choir members and conductors of various choirs in a given area to new repertoire. The festivals seem to have served this purpose.

The "Kanadier" who learned "Singt ahm Leeflich" at this festival sang the song both in their home and at church. At church, the song was sung in the less formal evening services, called "Jugendverein", because most of the program in this service was presented by the youth.

Song festivals in Russia were also the occasion for the spread of the song "Singt ahm Leeflich." People in the Chortitza village of Neuendorf remember hearing a visiting choir from the village of Gnadenfeld, under the direction of a Mr. Loewen sing the song at a "Saengerfest". A man from Neuendorf copied down the song so that people in his village could learn to sing it as well.

The song was also sung frequently in the WW II camps in which many of the Mennonites lived in Germany. Since there was minimal activity, people in the camps gathered almost every evening for worship services. This song, as well as many others which they had learned in Russia, was sung at these meetings. Having free time, some of the people hand-notated words and music of songs they remembered from Russia. Music was notated in "ziffern" a numerical sol-fa system, and words were written in gothic script. The sample which follows, contains the beginning of "Singt ahm Leeflich".

Fdur a=3

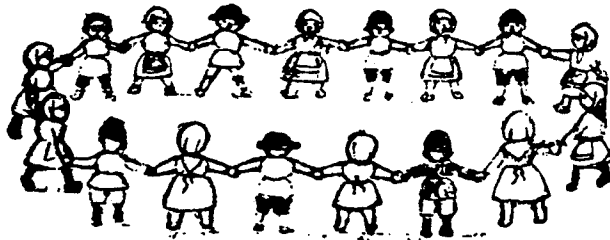
Singt am leeflich.

1	2	3	1	3	4	5	3	1	3	5	5	4	3	2
5	5	1	5	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	7	7
3	4	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	5	3	3	5	5	5
1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	

Roamst du fier sonderig künigum Guden, Tufst du gut an Klen  
 Morsel Gudest fust fu jndu an, Kommt du demt an girdi me  
 denk an and is dimle diti, felly fu vund nief nimen fu  
 with sonderig gont fu Galinge, fust vund den vum finni g  
 Kommt fill den demt mufoli, anler fust mull fust an

So far we have commented just on the contexts in which the song was learned and sung, but the words are also significant. The tone of the song reminds one of a Hebrew psalm of thanksgiving, or even some of the early Anabaptist hymns. There is a sense of peoplehood: a people who have suffered together and now want to praise together. There is also a strong sense of who God is and who His people ought to be. Though there is mention of dark times, there is no anger or hostility in the response to the situation. The song reflects the attitude of Menno Simons who wrote

We are people of God's peace in the new community,  
We are loving, living peace in the new humanity,  
We are daughters of His peace,  
We are sons who love His peace,  
Joined as one to covenant peace in the new community.  
(Hiebert, 1978:41)



YEISTLICHE/CHOIKE LEEDA - immigrant  
(Spiritual/Church Songs)

MIEN TUES ES EM HIMMEL  
 ("My home is in heaven")

Klippenstein family - A/Pa./Bo.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 June 24, 1978  
 PDL-7

Mien Tues es em Him-mel, vou frou eck doch zie,  
 Mien Tues es em Him-mel, Daut luat doa fea mie,  
 Mien Tues es em Him-mel, dee Pacht es frie,  
 Viels Yee-zus haft daut be-tohlt fea mie.

Translation:

My home is in heaven, how happy I am,  
 My home is in heaven, it's waiting for me,  
 My home is in heaven, the rent is free,  
 Since Jesus has paid it all for me.

Comments:

Sung as 'mien Tues' ('my home') in Bolivia, and 'mien Hues' ('my house') in Belize, this song is one of several Low German choruses translated from English<sup>1</sup> for children whose parents have been

<sup>1</sup>No specific English counterpart has been found for "Mien Tues..." but musically and lyrically it is similar to other English choruses, so it is assumed that it is one.

banned from Old Colony churches<sup>1</sup> in Latin America. Singing in these churches, like the Old Colony churches, is done in High German. The children, who generally do not attend regular church services until they are about 12, do not know High German. Instead, they know Low German, which they speak at home, and English, which they learn in school. For this reason, missionaries, usually of other Mennonite denominational backgrounds, have translated short English songs, called choruses, into Low German, the language most familiar to the children. These choruses can be easily learned even by pre-school aged children. The choruses are used in Sunday School, held Sunday mornings during the morning worship hour for the adults, or children also sing these choruses at school, or while they are playing by themselves.

The song contains a commonly used Anglicism. The word 'free', which most Low German speakers would translate as 'omzonst', is translated here as 'frie', showing that the song is a fairly recent translation.

Though the song expresses very other-worldly sentiments, the fact that it was sung in Low German, the language of the 'here and now', did not detract from the pleasure the three little Klippenstein girls derived from singing this song.

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<sup>1</sup>Banning, as a disciplinary measure, is used by Old Colony churches for members whose way of life has become too modern to be in agreement with the conservative community, or members who have found more evangelical terminology to express their faith.

ECK GOH NOCH HECHA FON HIA  
 ("I'm going higher than this")

Tune: "I'm going Higher  
 some Day"

Klippenstein family - A/Pa./Bo.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 June 24, 1978  
 PDL-7

Eck goh noch he-cha, noch he-cha fon hia,  
 Eck goh noch he-cha fon hia,  
 Eh-va dee Boi-yen, dee Vol-ken fe-bie,  
 Goh-ne vua Yee-zus es em-ma met mie,  
 Doa es cheen shtoa-ven chee-ne Krank-heit es doa,  
 Eck goh noch he-cha fon hia.

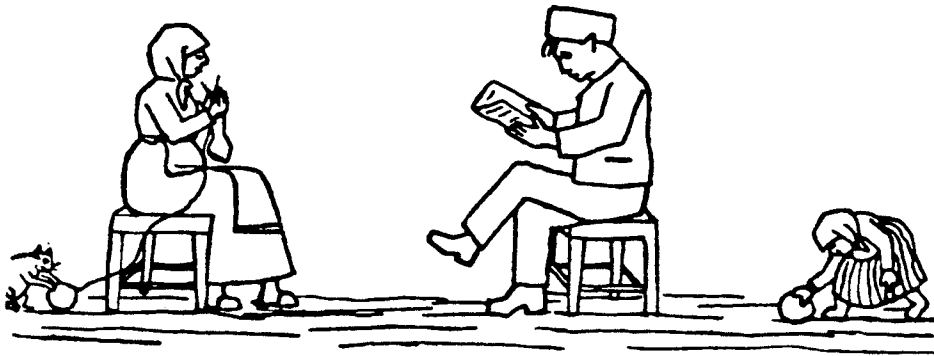
Translation:

I'm going higher, even higher than this (here),  
 I'm going higher than this.  
 Over the mountains, and far past the clouds,  
 Going where Jesus is always with me.  
 There is no death, and no sickness is there,  
 I'm going higher than this.



## Comments:

Like the preceding song, "Mien Tues es em Himmel," "Eck goh noch hecha", is an English chorus translated into Low German by Mennonite 'missionaries' to Old Colony Mennonites in Latin America.



## MIEN LEEVA GOTT

("My dear God")

Tune: "My Lord is Writing  
all the Time"Klippenstein family - A/Pa./Bo.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
June 24, 1978  
PDL-7

Gott hiat vault eck zei, en Hee zitt vault eck dou,  
Mien lee-va Gott schrift au-les opp, opp, opp, opp,  
En Hee hiat vault eck zei, en Hee zitt vault eck dou,  
Mien lee-va Gott schrift au-les opp.

## Translation:

God hears what I say, and He sees what I do,  
My dear God's writing all things down, down, down, down,  
He hears what I say, and He sees what I do,  
My dear God's writing all things down.

## Comments:

This translation of an English Sunday School chorus may have its origins in a Vacation Bible School in the village of Reinland in southern Manitoba, some 30 or 40 years ago. From here, the song has immigrated to Belize, according to Mary Ann Zacharias who has taught there. According to the Klippensteins, the song is also familiar to Mennonites living in Bolivia. The Mennonites in both Belize and Bolivia are descendants of the "Auswanderer" Mennonites who left Manitoba in the 1920's over the Manitoba Schools Act.

VUAROM VUARE VANN DUE BEHDE KAUST?

("Why worry when you can pray?")

Tune: "Why Worry when you  
can Pray?"

anon - K/Pa.  
Niverville, Manitoba

Vua-rom dua-re, vann due beh-de kaust,  
Fe-trua, Hee zacht, Hee yeft die Kraft,  
Zie die nich zou Tou-mast,  
en yleeft doch Gott ye-zacht haft,  
Vua-rom dua-re, dua-re, dua-re, dua-re,  
Vann due beh-de kaust?

Translation:

Why worry, when you can pray?  
Believe He says He'll give you strength.  
Don't be such a Thomas  
But believe that God has said  
Why worry, worry, worry, worry,  
When you can pray?

**Comments:**

The Klippenstein family, who had sung several other Low German choruses, were unable to recall this chorus, so they telephoned a relative in Niverville who sang it for me on the telephone. These relatives were also descendants of the "Auswanderer" who immigrated to Paraguay in the 1920's but have since returned to Canada. Several of these families get together Saturday nights in Niverville for a choir rehearsal. At these rehearsals, mostly religious songs are sung in High German, but the conversation is carried on in Low German.



DEE KLUAKA MAUN EN DEE TIER'CHTA MAUN  
 ("The Wise Man and the Foolish Man")

Tune: "The Wise Man and  
 the Foolish Man"

Mr. Isaac Rempel - K/Me.  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 April 17, 1978  
 PDL-4

Dée klua-ka Maun dee bued zien Hues opp en Shteen,\*1

Dée klua-ka Maun dee bued zien Hues opp en Shteen,\*1

Dée klua-ka Maun dee bued zien Hues opp en Shteen,\*1

En dee Raey-en dee cheem er-rauf.\*2

Chorus: Dée Rae-y'n dee cheem er-rauf\*2

En daut Voh-ta cheem opp,\*3

Dée Raey'n dee cheem er-rauf\*2

En daut Voh-ta cheem opp.\*3

Dēe Raey'n dee cheem er-rauf \*2

En daut Voh-ta cheem opp, \*3

En daut Hues opp en Shteen shtund faust. \*4

2. Dee tier'chta Maun dee bued zien Hues opp en  
 Zaunt \*1 (3 times)  
 En dee Raeyen dee cheem errauf. \*2  
 Chorus:  
 Dee Raey'n dee cheem errauf \*2 en daut Vohta cheem  
 opp \*3 (3 times)  
 En daut Hues opp en Zaunt februak. \*5
3. Zou bua dien Hues \*1 opp dehn Herrn Veesus Christ \*6  
 (3 times)  
 En de Zaeyen fon Gott chemt errauf. \*2  
 Chorus:  
 De Zaey'n dee chemt errauf \*2 en dee Yebeyda gohnen  
 opp \*7 (3 times)  
 Zou bua dien Hues \*1 opp dehn Herrn. \*6

Actions (to accompany the phrase preceding the starred number):

- \*1. placing fist on top of fist, as though building a tower
- \*2. hands up with palms facing outward, fingers wriggling as hands descend
- \*3. hands at waist level with palms up, moving up to eye level
- \*4. hold hands fist over fist on last word
- \*5. loud clap on last word of phrase
- \*6. pointing upward with index finger
- \*7. hands folded, as for prayer, moving upward.

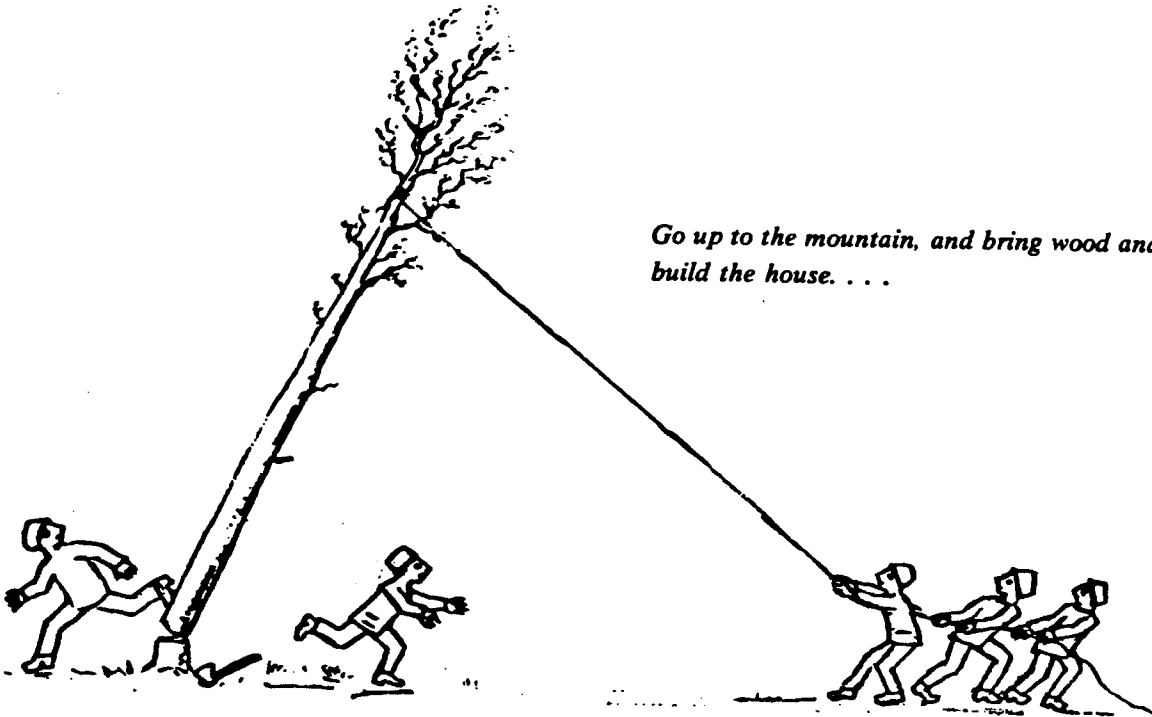
## Translation:

1. The wise man built his house upon a rock,  
And the rain came down.  
The rain came down and the water went up  
And the house on the rock stood firm (fast).
2. The foolish man built his house on the sand,  
And the rain came down.  
The rain came down and the water went up,  
And the house on the sand broke to pieces.
3. So build your house on the Lord Jesus Christ,  
And the blessings from God will come down.  
The blessing comes down as the prayers go up,  
So build your house on the Lord.

## Comments:

Mr. Rempel heard the English version of this song and thought it would be a good song to teach to the children in his church, so he translated it into Low German. Wherever he has lived, in Mexico, Ontario, or Manitoba, he has taught it to children to sing in their Sunday School song service. The song finds a ready participatory audience even among toddlers because they are captivated by the actions which accompany the song.

*Go up to the mountain, and bring wood and  
build the house. . . .*



DAUT ES VADA VIENACHT  
 ("It is Christmas again")

Tune: "Flow Gently Sweet Afton" Mr. Isaac Rempel - K/Me.  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 April 17, 1978  
 PDL-4

Daut es va-da Vie-nacht, vie frei-yen ons nue,  
 Viel Vee-zus ye-koh-men fea ons en fea yuent,  
 Hee cheem ons tou rad-den, zie-ne Leev via zou grout,  
 Hee kunn ons nicht loh-ten, em dun-klen en Nout.

Chorus: Kohmt au-la en horcht noh dee Vie-nachts-ye-shicht,  
 Kohmt au-la en chikt noh daut him-li-she Licht,  
 Reist met dee dree Vei-sen noh daut Mor-yen-laund,  
 En voat nue vom nie-yen, met Vee-zus be-kaunt.



2. *Dee Hoats bie Betlehhem dee bleeven doa Nacht,  
Oppe Shtap bie dee Shohpheed en hilden doa Vacht,  
Dee Kloarheit dee Herrn cheem,  
en zee engsten zich zeeya,  
Dan zehd dee doa tou eant,  
"Fercht yuent nue nich meeya."*
3. *Dee Engel cheem nohda en tou eaynt dan zehd,  
"Vie bringen yuent Nohrecht fon Yleck en fon Freud.  
Yuent es nue yeborren dee Heilaund dee Velt,  
En Betlehhem em Shtaul, doa licht nue yuen Held."*

Translation:

1. It is Christmas again, and we are happy now,  
Because Jesus has come for us and for you.  
He came to save us, His love was so great,  
He just could not leave us in darkness and pain.

Chorus:

- Come all and listen to the Christmas story,  
Come all and look at the heavenly light,  
Travel with the three wisemen to the morning land,  
And acquaint yourself anew with Jesus.
2. The shepherds of Bethlehem were spending the night,  
On the field by the sheep herd,  
and were keeping watch there,  
The Glory of the Lord came, and they were so afraid,  
But then he said to them "Do not be afraid."
  3. The angel came nearer, and he said to them,  
"We bring you some news of happiness and joy.  
To you is born the Savior of the world,  
In a stable in Bethlehem, there now lies your hero."

Comments:

Mr. Rempel, a former "Vorsaenger" or cantor in the Old Colony Church in Mexico,<sup>1</sup> learned this Christmas song from some Kleingemeinde<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>As a young child, Mr. Rempel moved to Mexico with his parents in 1923 for religious reasons. Several more moves followed: to Stratton, Ontario in 1956, back to Mexico in 1969, back to Stratton in 1973, and to Winkler, Manitoba in 1975.

<sup>2</sup>About 15 percent or 700 of the Manitoba "Kleine Gemeinde" people moved to Mexico in 1948-49 in an attempt to maintain their traditional lifestyle. The "Kleine Gemeinde" has also sent missionaries to Mexico.

people in Mexico. He speculated that the song had been translated/written for school children by their teacher, and then was sung at school Christmas programs. Children would also sing it for their grandparents as part of the traditional family Christmas celebration.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Rempel himself sang this song at a school Christmas program in the village of Schanzenfeld. The song was presented as a "freiwilliges" or voluntary contribution open to any audience member at an informal community program.

Shortly after I published an article entitled "*Daut es vada Vienacht*" (Klassen, 1979:19), the Mennonite Mirror received the following letter from one of its readers:

• This song originated with me. When I was teaching eight grades in Clover Plain School at McTavish, Manitoba, in 1947, I was looking for interesting, usable Christmas music. Not finding exactly what I wanted for my class, I decided to write my own. Rather than writing *both* words and music, I hummed several tunes, and picked "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton" as one that my students could easily learn. The first line of the song, "Daut es wara Weenacht, we fryi ons noo" quickly suggested itself, and the others followed. To involve the audience who would be at the Christmas program, the chorus began with: "Koamt aula en horcht no de Weenachtsgeschicht." The song, when initially presented by the students on December 23, 1947, proved a great surprise and delight to the parents and

friends of the school children, and was subsequently used in other schools where I taught.

How did the song get to Mexico? I would much like to know. One theory I have on this is: many Manitoba Mennonites from the Evangelical Mennonite Church near Morris moved to Mexico in 1948. Perhaps one of my former students from Clover Plain may even have taught school in some Mennonite village in Mexico? It is entirely possible. To find out would be interesting. At any rate, I am more than glad that this small item from my pen, created under a busy rural teacher's stress, has been a blessing to others who love my mother tongue  
— Low German.

Sincerely,  
Ben B. Dueck  
Steinbach

(Dueck, 1980:23)

<sup>1</sup>Christmas has always been a family centered celebration in Mennonite homes. There are usually three generations present at the celebration. In addition to a dinner, there is always a gift exchange. It used to be customary for grandchildren to present a *Vensh* or 'Christmas wish', in the form of a poem or song, to the grandparents before they would receive their gift from them.

My speculation as to how the song migrated to Mexico agreed with Mr. Dueck's. I would, however, have concluded that he chose that particular melody because it is often used for the Christmas carol, "Away in a Manger," rather than simply because it is a beautiful tune which is easy to learn. In any case, it was interesting to find such detailed information about the origin of a Low German song.

On the tape on which Mr. Rempel sings this song, there is an irregular dull thud in the background. This thud was produced by a visiting neighbor, who tapped the kitchen table with his fingers as we recorded.

The neighbor, a beekeeper, had brought with him several musical members of his hive whose humming, unfortunately, does not appear on the tape. When we listened to the recording of the first song, Mr. Rempel asked the neighbor to refrain from tapping again, "unless you tap in rhythm." Mr. Rempel, who comes from a church background in which no musical instruments are used, has a very keen sense of rhythm. He occasionally accompanied his singing with foot tapping, but the sense of rhythm was evident even without this percussive addition.



(Dyck, 1954a:85)

ECK VIA ZOU YIERN EN BETLEHEM  
 ("I wish I'd been in Bethlehem")

Lyrics: Mrs. Jacob Toews - N/Br.  
 rural Steinbach, Manitoba  
 July 21, 1978

Tune: Mrs. Abram K. Harder - K/ER  
 Grunthal, Manitoba  
 August 9, 1981

The musical score consists of nine staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: "Eck via zou yiern en Bet-leh-hem". The second staff continues the melody with the lyrics: "De iash-te Vie-nachts-nacht,". The third staff has the lyrics: "Vua You-seff en Ma-rie-a dunn". The fourth staff has the lyrics: "Daut Yee-zus-kind ye-vacht.". The fifth staff begins the chorus with the lyrics: "Chorus: Yee-zus-kind, Vie-nahchts-shtiern,". The sixth staff continues the chorus with the lyrics: "Moak on-ze Hoa-te rein,". The seventh staff has the lyrics: "Dann frei vie ons fom nie zou zee'a,". The eighth and final staff concludes the piece with the lyrics: "Tohm Vie-nachts-fast zou fein." and ends with a double bar line.

Eck via zou yiern en Bet-leh-hem

De iash-te Vie-nachts-nacht,

Vua You-seff en Ma-rie-a dunn

Daut Yee-zus-kind ye-vacht.

Chorus: Yee-zus-kind, Vie-nahchts-shtiern,

Moak on-ze Hoa-te rein,

Dann frei vie ons fom nie zou zee'a,

Tohm Vie-nachts-fast zou fein.

2. *Eck hiad zou yiern dee Engelzang  
Vaut dort fom Himmel kaum,  
Eeen vundasheena Yubelklang  
Dee hiade zee'a benaum.*
3. *Doch yleevde zee daut Vunda voat  
Gauns kindlich toh fetruat,  
Daut fing vie zou en Gottes Vuat,  
Enn Zehgen opp eant ruat.*
4. *Loht ons nue uck bet Betlehchem,  
De Hoade gohne noh,  
En behde aun daut heilge Kind,  
Yehft aulla frou yuen yoh.*

Translation:

1. I wish I'd been in Bethlehem that first Christmas  
night,  
Where Joseph and Maria watched o'er the Christchild.

Chorus:

- Jesus child, Christmas star, cleanse our hearts,  
Then we can once again rejoice at the lovely Christ-  
mas festival.
2. I gladly heard the angel's song which from the  
heavens came,  
A sweet and joyous ringing sound with beauty to me  
came.
  3. And yet they thought the wonder could with child-  
like faith be trust,  
We find it so in God's own Word, a blessing on them  
rests.
  4. Let us now go to Bethlehem, as did those shepherds  
then,  
All pray to that most holy child, a joyous true amen.

Comments:

This Christmas song was translated/written by Cornelius Friesen, a Chortitzer minister. It has been sung by children in Sunday School and at Christmas programs in Sommerfelder and Chortitzer churches in the East Reserve.

## FETALL MIE GESCHICHTE

("Tell me Stories")

Tune: "Tell me the old,  
old Story"Lyrics: Mrs. Jacob Toews - N/Br.  
rural Steinbach, Manitoba  
July 21, 1978Tune: Mrs. Abram K. Harder - K/ER  
Grunthal, Manitoba  
August 9, 1978

1. Fetall mie Geshichte fon Yeezus,  
Shriev yieda Vuat en mien Hoat.  
Fetall mie daut sheenste fon aulim,  
Vaut dort ziene Mutta bevoat.  
Fetall mie vou Engel dort zunge,  
Bie Behtlem met Himmlishe Viad,  
Uat yuenem Gott en dehm Himmel,  
En Friede helt emma opp Eiad.

## Chorus:

- Fetall mie Geshichte fon Yeezus,  
Shriev yieda Vuat en mien Hoat,  
Fetall mie daut sheenste fon aulim,  
Vaut dort ziene Mutta bevoat.
2. De Hoade die Behtlem dee yinge,  
Dann shvind noh dehm Shtaul enne Nacht.  
Zee funge Maria en Youseff,  
Dee hilde bie Yeezus doa Vacht.  
Zee haude daut Kind enyeveckelt  
Hee lach dort opp Hei en opp Shtrou,  
De Hoade dee deede aunbehde,  
Ea Heilaund dee muak eant zou frou.
  3. Zee yinge en zehde daut aundre,  
Daut groute, vaut Gott ons yebrocht,  
Fon Yeezus! dehm himmlishe Heilaund,  
Dee verklich aun ons haud yedocht.  
Dann vell vie uck noh am kohme,  
An zeije vaut ons Hoat bedreect,  
Hee haft Leev en Ruem fea een yeedem,  
Dee kindlich toh am zig blous sheckt.

## Translation:

1. Tell me stories of Jesus,  
Write on my heart every word,  
Tell me the loveliest of all things,  
Which his mother is caring for there.  
Tell me how angels sang there  
At Bethlehem, with heavenly words,  
From your God who is dwelling in heaven,  
And always keeps peace on this earth.

## Chorus:

- Tell me the story of Jesus,  
Write on my heart every word,  
Tell me the loveliest of all things,  
Which his mother is caring for there.
2. The shepherds of Bethlehem went  
quickly to the stable at night.  
They found Mary and Joseph  
keeping watch over Jesus.  
They had wrapped the child  
lying on hay and on straw,  
The shepherds, they prayed  
to the Savior who made them joyous.
  3. They went and told it to others  
The wonder that God had brought us,  
About Jesus, the heavenly savior,  
Who really had thought (cared) about us.  
We also want to come to Him,  
And tell him what burdens our hearts,  
He has love and room for everyone  
Who gives himself childlike to Him.

## Comments:

This Christmas song was translated/written by Cornelius Friesen, a Chortitzer minister. It has been sung by children in Sunday School and at Christmas programs in Sommerfelder and Chortitzer churches in the East Reserve.

VEERTIEN PLATDIETSCH E LEEDA

Translated by Rev. John J. Neufeld  
Musical arrangements by John C. Klassen  
Published by Gospel Light Hour, Winnipeg.

The songs in this book were published in the mid 60's for use in a Low German religious radio broadcast. The broadcast was begun by Rev. John J. Neufeld, in conjunction with the Gospel Light Hour, now known as Mennonite Brethren Communications, at the request of the Home Missions Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church Conference. The first weekly program was aired on September 20, 1959.<sup>1</sup>

John Klassen, a musician and radio technician pointed out the need for Low German songs, particularly for the theme and closing songs of the<sup>2</sup> program. At his suggestion, Rev. Neufeld translated a dozen songs.

The songs were translated rather than composed for practical reasons: there was no one to compose songs for the program. They were selected on the basis of content and familiarity. Since it is difficult to find songs on specific topics such as family or business relationships, gospel songs were used.

The gospel songs can be divided roughly into two groups: evangelistic songs inviting the listener to put his faith in God, and songs to encourage those who are already believers. Among the evangelistic songs one finds titles like "*De Himmel steit open*" ("The heavens stand open"), "*Eck weet eenen Strom*" ("I know of a stream"), "*Horch den Heiland di enladen*" ("Listen to the Savior inviting you"), "*Jesus nemmt noch Suenda an*" ("Jesus still receives sinners") and "*Steit mien Nomen all dor*" ("Is my name already there").

The songs encouraging the believer vary in emphasis. "*Eck weer mol wiet af von den Heiland*" ("I once was far away from the Savior") is the testimony of someone who came to faith. "*Solang as Jesus levt*"

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<sup>1</sup>This has now grown into four weekly fifteen minute programs, consisting of 2 songs; i.e., 4 minutes of music, an 8 minute Bible exegesis and a 6-10 second prayer. The program is currently aired on CKSW - Swift Current, Saskatchewan, CFAM - Altona, Manitoba, KGST - Kingsburg, Ca., and ZP-30 - Filadelfia, Paraguay.

<sup>2</sup>One song "*Singt am leeflich*" came from another source. This is discussed elsewhere.



("As long as Jesus lives") and "*Bie die Jesus well eck blieven*" ("I want to remain with you Jesus", i.e., continue believing in you") are affirmations by a believer who wants to continue trusting God. The last three songs, like the Negro spiritual look forward to a heavenly home: "*Jo all bold*" ("Yes, very soon"), "*O seet doch wo so schwind*" ("Oh see how quickly") and "*Am Jordan's Eewa stoh eck hier*" ("I stand here on Jordan's shore").

As already stated, the songs were translated for the radio program. The book containing the songs was published for another reason. In addition to the radio broadcasts, Rev. Neufeld has travelled extensively in Central America, southern California and southern Manitoba holding evangelistic campaigns. The book was published primarily for these campaigns but also made available to radio listeners. Demands for the book far exceeded expectations and it was soon sold out. Presently, they xerox copies of this book on which they hold the copyright.

Along with the book, they prepared a 7 inch 33 1/3 rpm recording containing four Low German songs from the book. The record is also sold out, and there is talk of making a 12 inch long play recording since there are enough Low German songs to fill the longer recording.

Cassettes containing the songs are available. A cassette on which Rev. Neufeld reads I and II Thessalonians contains two verses each of four of the Low German songs: "*Jo all bold*", "*Eck weet eenen Strom*", "*Steit mien Nomen all dor*" and "*O seet doch wo so schwind*". The quartet, accompanied by piano, sing the first and last verses of these songs as is commonly done in some Mennonite churches.

A cassette containing only Low German songs has also been released by Mennonite Brethren Communications. The cassette, #PD-1, contains thirteen of the songs from the book, plus "*Ellere nehmt doch yuene Chinga*", translated after the book was published. These cassettes have been sent to Mennonites in Mexico, Bolivia and the British Honduras.

One of the songs "*Jo all bold*" was sung at a Mennonite Centennial Hymn Sing held in Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall as a MCC famine relief fund raising event. The Domain Ladies Group who sang it at that occasion, also sing it on "*Gelobt Sei Gott*" ("God be Praised"), a long-play recording of the Hymn Sing. The ladies group are members of the church which Rev. Neufeld pastors.

Many people with whom I talked immediately mentioned these Low German songs when I enquired about what songs were familiar to them. Some people mentioned these because they presumed a researcher would be interested only in published materials. Others mentioned them because they have grown to love and appreciate these songs. One older man in a senior citizens home frequently sings these songs, some of which he has memorized, for his own or others' encouragement. There were also more critical comments from people who could not understand

why anyone would want to sing in Low German. But some, who speak Low German at home and in church, wondered why they didn't sing in Low German. "We speak Low German, but we always sing in High German in church. I don't know why that is."

# PLAT- DIETSCH LEEDA

John J. Neufeld

John C. Klassen

ELLERE NEHMT DOCH YUENE KINGA<sup>1</sup>

("Parents, why not take your children?")

Tune: "Sitting at the Feet of Jesus"

Arr. for male quartet by J. Klassen

Words: Rev. J. J. Neufeld

1. Du best opp dehn Vag nohm Himmel,  
Vuar zent diene Kinga nue?  
Vuarom nemst due dee nich met die,  
Dortend noh dee eevge Ruh?
2. Ellere, zacht doch yuene Kinga,  
Vou ze chene zeelich vor',  
Halpt ahn behiden om Feryehvung,  
Daut nich uet yue yeit ferlorn.

Chorus:

Ellere bringt doch yuene Kinga,  
Dee de Harr yue anfertruet,  
Noh dehn Heiland, Frind au Zinda,  
Dee dor keenem shtat erruet.

Translation:

1. You are on the way to heaven,  
Where are your children now?  
Why don't you take them with you,  
There to the eternal rest?
2. Parents, you must tell your children,  
How they can become blessed/happy,  
Help them pray for forgiveness,  
That no part of you is lost.

Chorus:

Parents, why not bring your children,  
Whom the Lord has entrusted you,  
To the Savior, friend of sinners,  
Who will not exclude anyone.

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<sup>1</sup>Transliterated from a xeroxed, handwritten copy, entitled "Oelleru Nehmt Doch June Kinga", received from The Gospel Light Hour, now called Mennonite Brethren Communications.

**Comments:**

Rev. Neufeld translated this song from High German for a Low German religious radio program on the topic of family responsibility. The song was sung on the program by the male quartet which regularly sings on the program.

Like the previous songs translated for this program, the song falls into the pietistic tradition which influenced particularly the Mennonite Brethren in Russia. There is an emphasis on conversion as the pivotal point of one's relationship to God. This is in contrast with the Anabaptist emphasis on discipleship and following Jesus as a daily, growing experience.



VANN DEE HEILAUND  
 ("When the Savior")

Tune: "When He cometh"

Mr. J. G. Sawatzky - K  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 July 17, 1978  
 PDL-8

1. Vann dee Heilaund, Vann dee Heilaund aus Cheenich  
 ershient,  
 On dee ziene aus erloeste em Himmel fereent.

Chorus:

Oh dann voare zee ylensen aus dee Shtiernches zou  
 sheen,  
 En dehn Heilaund ziene Krohne, aus Ehdelshteen.

2. Doarum groute, en uck chliene, yehft Yeesum daut Hoat.  
 Hee moakt zeelich, Hee moakt herrlich, Hee fiat  
 Himmelvoat.

Translation:

1. When the Savior, when the Savior appears as the king,  
 And takes his redeemed ones to Heaven,

Chorus:

Then they will shine as beautifully as the stars,  
 In the Savior's crown, as precious stones.

2. So big people, and also little ones, give Jesus your  
 heart,  
 He makes (you) holy, He makes (you) noble,  
 He takes (you) heavenward.

Comments:

When he heard I was coming to interview him, Mr. Sawatzky translated this song from High German, "to make it worth your while to come here." His graciousness was typical of the many people who shared freely whatever Low German folklore they knew.

The choice of this particular song is interesting. All of the folksongs which Mr. Sawatzky sang were lullabies or songs sung to entertain small children. This hymn is also classified as a children's song in many hymnals. The implication remains that Low German is a language in which one sings to the children.

GAUSSELEEDA - ethnic  
(Street Songs)

## EN LAMCHE HAUD EN KOBBELCHE

("A Mr. Lemke had a little mare")

Tune: "Fuchs du hast die Ganz  
Gestollen"  
"Oipied haiyem, haiyem"

Rev. Corny Martens - K/ER<sup>1</sup>  
Mitchell, Manitoba  
March 20, 1979

En Lam-che haud en Kob-bel-che

Daut via noch yungk fon Yoa-re,

Dann zehd hee toh zie-ne Mur-ra-che

Doa kun-ne ze noch lang met foa-re.

\*repeat is optional

2. Dan leid hee daut noh dee yreene Vehs  
Doa deed am daut fehinke,  
Dann hinkt am daut en Grohve nenn  
Doa deed am daut fedrinke.

<sup>1</sup>vs 4: Isaac Brown - K  
Winkler, Manitoba  
March 2, 1977  
PDC-1

vs 7: Mrs. G. G. H. Enns - R  
Reinland, Manitoba  
July 17, 1978  
PDL-7

3. *Dann yingk hee noh dehn Meista doa  
En vull am fehl fetalle,  
He zull am yehve twee en drie  
En feeya en fief Meyalle/Yezalle.*
4. *De Meyalle/Yezalle zehde ze haude nich Tiet  
Ze hauden noch fehl tou dounne,  
Daut via ye doch zoun drucka Dach,  
Vou vudd zig daut felounne.*
5. *Lamche via zien Kubbelche lous  
He durv zich doa'm nich moake,  
Daut Ladda via toh de Preesche gout  
Dout Fleesh kaun hee zig drehye/koake.*
6. *De Kopp via toh de Fiddle gout  
De Tehne toh de Shrueve,  
De Soagel via toh dehn Fiddle Boagen  
Enn de Knossen chenne zich zelvst begnoagen.*
7. *Oppe Vaik aun Donnedach  
Dann foa vie noh Austrechaunche,  
Vie fohren noch bie Hoadash aun  
Shpitsieren en behet met Aunche.*

## Translation:

1. A Mr. Lemke had a little mare  
which was still young of years,  
He said to his mother,  
they could still drive with it for a long time.
2. He led it into the green pasture  
and there it began to limp,  
It limped into the ditch,  
and there it drowned.
3. Then he went to the master there  
and wanted to tell him much,  
He should give him two and three  
and four and five young girls/companions.
4. The young girls/companions said they had no time,  
they still had much to do.  
It certainly was such a busy day,  
it just wouldn't be worthwhile.
5. Lemke was rid of his little mare,  
he needn't bother about it anymore.  
The leather was good for moccasins,  
the meat he could dry/cook.



6. The head was good for a fiddle,  
the teeth for screws,  
The tail for the fiddle bow,  
and the bones one could chew.
7. Next week on Thursday  
we're going to Astrakhan.  
We'll stop at Harder's place  
and visit a little with Annie.

Comments:

Most version of this song agree on the basic storyline. A young man, possibly a bachelor living with his mother, owns a mare which he presumes is dependable. As they begin to drive with it, however, the horse begins to limp, and dies. The mishap occurs either on a long bridge, under a bridge, or in a ditch, depending on which version one believes. In some versions the young man has an unsuccessful courting attempt. In other versions, this incident is omitted. All versions end with a colorful description of the disposal of the remains of the mare.

Though this song was known by "Kanadier", "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" alike, it was most familiar to "Kanadier". Several factors place it in the "Kanadier" tradition. First, the name Lemke was a common name in the Bergthal Colony, a daughter colony of the Old Colony. Ship passenger lists show that numerous families by the name of Lemke migrated to Canada in the 1870's.

And second, the "Kanadier" aspect of this song can be seen in certain vocabulary choices, and consequently in some of the humor. One example is the use of 'Knossen' (animal bones) for 'Knoaken' (bones) the term used for human bones, or animal bones with edible meat on them. Another example of a somewhat crude humor is found in a variant lyric. Here 'shietye Veay' (shitty ways/roads) is substituted for 'drucka Dach' (busy day).<sup>1</sup> Humor may lie in the ambiguity of the word 'Veay'. These vocabulary choices would be found more readily among certain groups of "Kanadier" than among other Mennonites.

Many people referred to this song as a *Gausseleet*, or 'street song'. In other words, they classified it as one of the bawdy street songs often sung by teenaged boys in Mennonite villages, most likely in the distant past! The only older lady who sang this song, had learned it from an uncle known for his sense of humor.

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<sup>1</sup>Phonological affinity between several pairs of words, 'Vach/Dach' (way/day) and 'drucka/dreckye' (busy/dirty or shitty) may account for the variation.

And what is the meaning of this song? Is it simply a nonsense song, or does it say something of social significance?

The ballad contains two stories: the story of Lemke's horse which goes lame and dies, and the story of Lemke's rejection by the daughters of an estate owner. Lemke is a born loser: he is a poor farmer, and he is unable to find a wife.

The daughters of the estate owner explain that they can't marry Lemke because 'they are too busy'. That reminds us of the Fritz Senn poem in which we are told that the herd blows his horn more loudly

*...bie de Aunwohnaohte*

*Wiels doa de Uere langsama gohne,*  
suggesting that the poor are poor because they are lazy. The theme of marriage as an opportunity for upward social mobility appears in several other Low German songs as well.

(Klassen, 1981:17)

And then there is the matter of the disposal of the remains of the horse. Is this a comment on Mennonite frugality? A Mennonite, after all, has often been defined as 'someone who can buy something from a Scotsman and sell it to a Jew at a profit'. No, it is more likely another type of comment: that the individual who is an inept farmer, will probably have to become a craftsman to support himself. And did you notice that the craftsman makes a fiddle? Does this mean that the individual who can't 'make it' in any other profession, becomes a musician?

A friend tells the following story, which illustrates the typical Mennonite attitude to being a musician:

...on a train...I heard a young couple in the same coach speaking "Low German", so we concluded they must be Mennonite and decided to introduce ourselves to them. The young man said he was a farmer in southern Manitoba and then asked my husband what he did. He told him he was a musician. The man replied, "That's nice, but what do you do for a living?" "Music," said my husband. The farmer looked baffled and replied, "Yes, yes, but how do you earn your bread and butter?"

Fifty years ago, practically everything done by Mennonites in Canada had to be measured in terms of a livelihood, and sometimes, I think, this attitude still prevails...

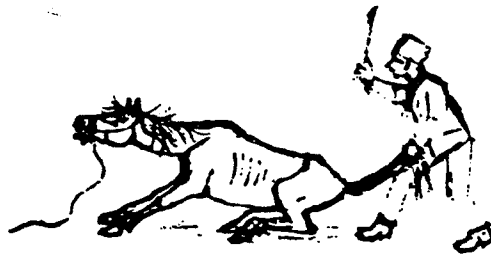
(Horch, 1979:11)

We need to return to the discussion of the name Lemke. Since the name Lemke is commonly found on ship passenger lists of immigrants from the Bergthal Colony in Russia, and not from any of the other daughter colonies of the Chortitza Colony, was this song used in the past to ridicule people from that colony? Whenever the Bergthal Colony is mentioned among Mennonite historians, there is likely to be some snickering, because 'as everyone knows', the people from Bergthal were very simple peasant farmers. (Fortunately, the reader has by now forgotten that the author is a descendant of these simple peasant folk!)

And lastly, among "Kanadier" under 40 years of age, to whom the name Lamke is unfamiliar, one finds alternative versions of the song. An "Auswanderer" factory worker, recently returned from Paraguay, substituted 'Shusta' (shoemaker) for 'Lemke', and a real estate agent sang "Yungkeche haud en Hieshache" ("A little Boy had a Pony"), while a young mother sang "Haunsche haud en Hieshache" ("Johnny had a Pony").

In other words, once the song is removed from its Russian context, where the horse was a domestic servant, and a good horse was a sign of prestige (Dyck, 1974:186-194), the horse becomes a 'recreational vehicle'. The song loses its courting incident, and the story of a bachelor riding with his mother, becomes the story of a little boy riding his hobby-horse.

But of course, the Mennonite elitest would like us to remember that these are 'just' Low German songs, and that songs in the peasant language could not possibly have anything 'meaningful' to say!



AUS DEE YUED  
("When the Jew")

Tune: "Hans du hast die Ganz  
gestollen"/  
"Oipied, haiyem, haiyem"  
Lyric 1:

Pete Kehler - K/ER  
Steinbach, Manitoba  
June 15, 1978

Aus dee Yued em Bor-em foll,  
don freiy-de zik dee Heis-ta,  
Aus a don e-rue-ta kaum,  
don vort a Ber-ga-meis-ta.

2. Zehd dee Taunte toh ea Maun,  
"Vaut es dehm Yued yevorde?  
Vou shteit dee Nehz en zien Yezecht?  
Daut es ye gauns fedorve."

Translation:

1. When the Jew fell into the well,  
the kingbirds rejoiced.  
And when he came out,  
he became the mayor.
2. Said the lady to her husband,  
"What has happened to the Jew?  
How is his nose placed on his face?  
It is completely spoiled!"

## Lyric 2:

Ken Klassen - K/ER  
 Steinbach, Manitoba  
 June 15, 1978

Aus dee Yued em Voh-ta foll,  
 don freiy-de zik de Hee-na,  
 Aus hee dann iasht rue-ta kaum,  
 don via zien Buck foll Shtee-na.  
 Foll Shtee-na, foll Shtee-na,  
 don via zien Buck foll Shtee-na.

## Translation:

1. When the Jew fell into the water,  
 the chickens rejoiced.  
 And when he first came out,  
 his stomach was full of stones.  
 Full of stones, full of stones,  
 Then his stomach was full of stones.

Many of the Jewish people with whom the Mennonites came in contact in Russia/Manitoba were merchants or peddlers. The peddlers were welcomed into many Mennonite homes both for their wares, and for the news they brought of relatives living in distant villages.

But the term 'Jew' had other connotations for many in the community. The Low German term for bartering was literally known as "Jewing". To call someone a Jew, was synonymous with calling him dishonest.

That this song refers to a Jew rather than a 'Mennonite Jew', is indicated by the derogatory comments about the Jew's nose in verse 2 of Lyric 1. The rejoicing of the kingbirds, the rulers of the skies, suggests that a competitor has been eliminated. The song may also be a comment on the way in which people rise to positions of power, like that of the mayor.

The story is told of a little boy who was taught Lyric 2 of "Aus dee Yued" by his older siblings. They substituted the word 'Noash' (ass) for 'Buck' (stomach) and suggested he go sing the song to his mother. Needless to say, the mother was upset and punished the boy - not for the anti-Semitic comments however, but for the crude term he had used.

There were varying reactions to this song. Some people found it highly amusing. Some were very surprised that a researcher would find a song like this, and others were embarrassed by it. There was one vehement comment that "It's not right to discriminate!" by a prominent member of a Mennonite community 'noted' for its discriminatory attitudes.

With the exception of a "Russlaender" woman who heard the song from her "Kanadier" in-laws, this song was familiar only to "Kanadier" of Chortitza Colony background.

The source of the melody for "Aus dee Yued", as well as "En Lamche..." and "Aus dee Bua", is enigmatic. Mennonites identify it as "Fuchs du hast die Gans gestohlen" ("Fox you have stolen the goose"), a High German folktune, while Ukrainians associate it with the Ukrainian folktune "Oipied haiyem, haiyem" ("In the grove"). Because the tune was already well known among "Kanadier" leaving Russia in the 1870's, at a time when the Mennonite orientation was still substantially Germanic, and before the Mennonites had had extensive exposure to either Russian or Ukrainian culture, it seems probable that the tune is of High German folk derivation. If, on the other hand, it could be substantiated that this is, in fact, a Ukrainian tune, the fact that it is used only for very negative songs of social criticism, would certainly be a very derogatory comment on Mennonite reaction to the Ukrainians.

AUS DEE SHEEPA  
 ("When the sheep herd")

Tune: "Fuchs du hast die Ganz gestollen"

R

Aus dee Shee-pa mal-ke yingk,  
 Chikt a noh de Vol-ke,  
 Ach du yeen vou rea-yent daut,  
 Haud eck iasht ye-mol-ke.

2. Aus a donn yemolke haud,  
 Zuach (lutsh) a zig op'm Duhme,  
 "Ach du Velt, vou sheen shmakt daut,  
 Aus dee Tsukka Pluhme."

Translation:

1. When the herd went milking  
 he looked at the clouds,  
 "Oh my goodness! How it's raining!  
 Wish I had already milked."
2. When he finished the milking,  
 he sucked his thumb.  
 "Oh my goodness! How good it tastes!  
 Just like sugar plums!"

Comments:

Consistently sung by "Russlaender", and not by "Kanadier" (who knew only "Aus dee Yued"), "Aus dee Sheepa" became a means of identifying a "Russlaender" informant in this study, and also a means of predicting other songs the informant was likely to know.

There were no melodic variants. All versions used the melody usually associated with the High German folksong "Fuchs du hast die Gnaz gestollen".<sup>1</sup> Even people who did not know the words, frequently commented on the familiarity of the melody.

There were minor variations, however, in the lyrics. Attempts were made to correlate the variations with Chortitz/Molotschna backgrounds, but no consistent patterns emerged. There was also no obvious correlation between variants and occupational backgrounds of informants, as many of the informants came from minister's and teacher's families.

One of the discrepancies was the expressions used for the exclamation, translated here as 'Oh my goodness!'. Low German expressions included: '*Vaut leeven tiet*', "Ach du Zeit", and "*Oi, yoi, yoi*". The first and last of these are mild, but common Low German expressions of surprise or frustration. The second, "Ach du Zeit", a High German expression, comes from a Molotschna version of the song. This is to be expected because of the more High German orientation of that colony.

The major discrepancy, however, centered around the identity of the individual doing the milking. According to some singers, it was 'Peeta' or a 'Bua' (peasant farmer), while others thought it was a 'Sheepa'. Most of those singing 'Sheepa' were of Chortitza background, while those singing 'Peeta' were divided equally between Chortitza and Molotschna background, and a single individual of Molotschna background sang "Aus dee Bua".

What are the implications of stating that 'Peeta' or the 'Bua' did the milking? Apparently, milking was a woman's and 'not' a man's job among Mennonites in Russia. In fact, if for some reason, the women of a particular household were unable to do the milking on a certain day, they would ask a neighboring woman, rather than a man, to do the milking for them. No self-respecting Mennonite men would do the milking. Obviously, both 'Peeta' and the 'Bua' would be breaking a social norm by doing the milking. And, if one remembers that a 'Sheepa' is a sheep herd, and that sheep were not milked by Mennonites in Russia, the behavior becomes even more ludicrous. Regardless of who has done the milking in this case, it is totally unacceptable social behavior, and this is probably the reason the individual is sucking his thumb.

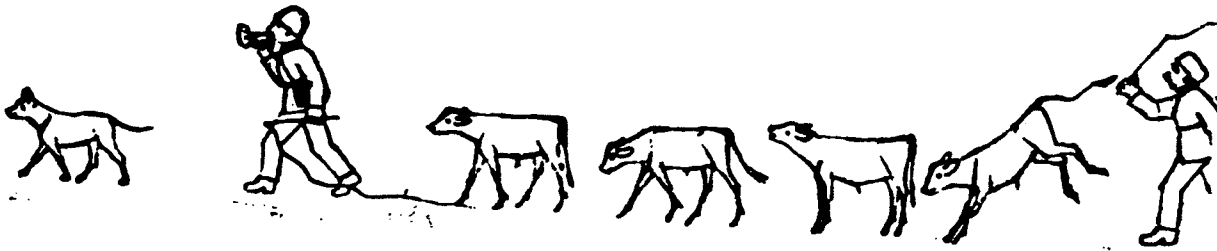
Although the reference to sucking his thumb may be an expression of self-satisfaction, it is more likely that this reference to infantile behavior is a way of ridiculing the individual who has over-stepped the bounds of social decorum.

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<sup>1</sup>See discussion on previous page.



Ridiculing adult social misdemeanors in the children's songs finds its parallel in the British nursery rhyme. It would be rather far-fetched to assume that the references to plums in both "*Aus dee Sheepa*" and "*Little Jack Horner*" support a claim for generic affinity. Instead, the common element is their poetic immortalization of socially unacceptable behavior. Although rhymes of this type were used by children simply for entertainment, they had an indirect teaching function, and as such, served as a means of social control.



EENE PIEP, EENE YACK  
 ("A pipe, a jacket")

Tune: Russian folksong

Elisabeth Peters - R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 June 28, 1978

Ee-ne Piep, ee-ne Yack, ee-ne hol-le Pos-ta-nack,  
 Duh-ye, Duh-ye, la-la-la, Duh-ye, duh-ye, la-la-la.

Translation:

A pipe, a jacket, a hollow parsnip,  
 Strum, strum, la-la-la,  
 Strum, strum, la-la-la.

Comments:

According to Mrs. Peters, the Russian servant girls in Grigoryevka, her home in Russia, used to sit on the village fences and sing Russian folksongs, accompanying themselves with accordians or harmonicas. The second part of "Eene Piep, Eene Yack" comes from one of these folksongs. The Mennonite young people picked up the tune and put their own Low German words to it. They may have liked the tilting tune, but may also have used it to tease the Russian servants. A parody of this song substitutes 'duhlya' an obscene Russian term for the Low German 'duhje'.

GAUSSELEEDA - immigrant

## ONS NOHBA KLOHSE HAUD NE KOA

Tune: "Mlle. from Armentières" K, K/ER, K/Mo., A/Me., R, N<sup>1</sup>

Ons Noh-ba Kloh-se koft zig ne Koa, Par-ley vous?

Ons Noh-ba Kloh-se koft zig ne Koa, Par-ley vous?

Ons Noh-ba Kloh-se koft zig ne Koa,

Dea latz-ten Doh-la leet a doa,

Hin-ky Din-ky Par-ley vous?

2. *Ons Nohba Klohse haud ne Koa...  
Dee haud zoun shrakelyet yefoa.  
-----  
Klohses Yuelyus haud ne Koa...  
Dee fua doamet hia en doa.* A/Me.
3. *Daut Shtiaraut via fom Biggeraut,  
De Aust de via fonne Buttafaut.  
-----  
Daut Stiaraut via fon Meskoaraut,  
Daut crankcase via fom Bottafaut.  
-----  
Daut Shtia via fon Ribbuezeshall,  
Daut bruak gauns tvei met zien yeprall.* K/Mo.
4. *Daut Shmea em crankcase via zou dick,  
Daut haud zoun zuerra Kommst yerick.*

<sup>1</sup>Verses collected from "Kanadier" are unmarked. Sources for other verses are indicated.

5. De Kab dee via fon Chickel/Heena Staul,  
Dee Deahandel via fom gumna Baul.
6. Dee Akzelerehta via ne oule Shou,  
Daut Body via ne doudye Kou.  
-----  
Dee Akzelerehta via fonne Gumshousohl,  
Daut Blohzingk [Dee Piston] via fonne Eiyashohl.
7. Dee Choke via fonne Briggeneul,  
De Crank dee via fonne Bolle Soayel.
8. Dee driveshaft via en Hydropole,  
Dee Reife viere fon Gumshouzohl. K/Mo.
9. Dee Clutch dee via fon Hohzenfall,  
De Gas Pedal via fonne Bananashall.  
-----  
Dee Clutch dee pengd am emma ruet,  
Ying am en beyt zous met ziene Bruet. K/Mo.
10. Dee Viashvengel via en veeden Shtock,  
De Zet dee via fon Frueyes/Mame ar, Rock.
11. Dee Bramze viere fon Bananashall,  
Dee Hinga-aust dee via gauns drall. K/Mo.  
-----  
De Brakes dee vieren ne oule Shou,  
Daut Body via ne doudye Kou.
12. De Fiakausten via ne Sheyveldouz,  
Van hea fua daut shtunk nich noh ne Rouz.
13. De Cylinda via ne blachne Douz,  
De Gascap via ne pinkne Rouz.
14. De Radiyehta via en radna Zack,  
Daut Vindshield via noch gauns bebackt.
15. De Headlights vieren fon Heenafeet,  
De Taillights vieren ne roude Beet.
16. De Arial via fon Hackeldroht,  
Dee horcht blous tiet en eent Knacksisht. K/Mo.
17. Daut Upholstery via fon Kuehnehuert,  
Viels GMC haud daut yebuet. K/Mo.  
-----  
Daut Upholstery via ne oule Barsht,  
Daut Chrome daut via ne Tveeback's Charshht.

18. Daut Frame via fon Knoakes yemoakt,  
De Bumper via fon Borsht yekoakt.
19. Daut Fensta via fon shtievet Papiea,  
Daut Transmission haud uck blous een Via. K/ER
20. Daut Via duat via zou e'yeshtallt,  
(sung very slowly) K/ER  
Klohse via meist em Sechreet neyeprrallt.  
(quickly)  
-----
- Dee Giers dee viere fon roudet Holt,  
Daut knoad en knostat met aula yevault. K/Mo.
21. De Deare viere fon roudet Holt,  
Em Gas Tank via daut Yreeveshmolt.
22. De Reifen viere fon Kossenladda,  
Dee shpinden doch noch han uck vadda.
23. Van ze dee nich brucken deeden,  
Dan muss Yuelyus Tires Leeden. A/Me.
24. De Dievel kaum fom Boum herauf,  
Tohm zeenen vaut Oumche Klohse shaufft. R
25. De Feareif via met Mest bechlest,  
Doa veay'n haud de Police am meist arrest. K/Mo.
26. De Fenstre viere gauns tou yebackt,  
De Chickel haude doa nop yekackt. K/ER  
-----  
De Fenstre viere met Shiet bebackt,  
Doa haude de Feayel nop yechlackt. N  
-----  
De Fenstre viere met Shiet bebackt,  
Doa haude de Chinga nop yekackt. K
27. Ons Nohba Klohse fua noh Shtaudt,  
Dee hauden doa cheen gumnet Raut.
28. Hee vist nich vaut daut Dink noch fraut,  
Zou yeef hee daut en yallet Kraut.
29. Warmen es de ieashte Staudt,  
Doa shmoingen de Hoing en de Kauten zich zaut. A/Me.
30. Osler es de neachste Shtaudt (twice)  
Doa brghden ze Eiya enne Lachakomm,  
En riaden dee mett'en Koufout om. A/Me.
31. Ons Nohba Klohse fua noh Shtaudt,  
Ons Leet daut es uck blous moh daut.

## Translation:

1. Our neighbor Klassen bought a car,  
He left his last dollar there.
2. Our neighbor Klassen had a car,  
It had such an awful way of driving.  
----  
Julius Klassen had a car,  
With it he drove here and there.
3. The steering wheel was a buggywheel,  
The axle was from a butter churn.  
----  
The steering wheel was a wheelbarrow wheel,  
The crankcase was from a butter churn.  
----  
The steer was from a watermelon rind,  
It broke completely with his fast, (reckless) driving.
4. The oil in the crankcase was so thick,  
It had such a sour cabbage smell.
5. The cab was from a chicken/hen barn,  
The door handle was from a rubber ball.
6. The accelerator was an old shoe,  
The body was a dead cow.  
----  
The accelerator was a rubber shoe sole,  
The horn (the piston) was an egg weighing scale.
7. The choke was from a bridge ?  
The crank was a bull's tail.
8. The driveshaft was a hydropole,  
The tires were from rubber boots.
9. The clutch was of rabbit fur,  
The gas pedal was from a banana peel.  
----  
The clutch always broke (with a pinging noise)  
Sort of like things went with his bride (wife).
10. The gearshift was a hoeing stick,  
The seat was from a/woman's/mother's skirt.
11. The brakes were from banana peel,  
The rear axle was completely mixed-up.  
----  
The brakes were an old shoe,  
The body was a dead cow.

12. The motor was a matchbox,  
When he drove, it didn't stink like a rose!
13. The cylinder was a metal box,  
The gascap was a pink rose.
14. The radiator was a gunny sack,  
The windshield was completely stuck closed.
15. The headlights were chicken feet,  
The taillights were a red beet.
16. The aerial was from barbed wire,  
It just always listened to "sunflower seeds".
17. The upholstery was from turkey skin,  
Because GMC had built it.  
-----  
The upholstery was an old brush,  
The chrome, it was a crusty bun.
18. The frame was made of bones,  
The bumper was cooked from Borscht.
19. The window was of stiff paper,  
The transmission had only one gear.
20. The gear was adjusted so that  
Klassen almost careened into the privy. (secret)  
-----  
The gears were of red wood  
It creaked and crackled with all its might.
21. The doors were of red wood,  
In the gas tank was the crackling lard.
22. The tires were of goat's leather,  
They even spinned here and there.
23. When they didn't use it,  
Julius had to mend tires.
24. The devil came down from the tree,  
To see what Mr. Klassen was doing.
25. The front tire was covered with manure,  
For that reason the police had almost arrested him.
26. The windows were completely stuck closed,  
The chickens had shit onto them.  
-----



The windows were covered with shit,  
The birds had leaked onto them,  
-----

The windows were stuck full of shit,  
The children had --- onto them.

27. Our neighbour Klassen drove to town,  
They had no rubber tires there.
28. He didn't know what else the thing devoured,  
So he gave it some yellow weeds.
29. Warman is the first town,  
There the dogs and cats neck to their satisfaction.
30. Osler is the next town,  
There they fry eggs in the strainer,  
And stir them with a cow's foot.
31. Our neighbour Klassen went to town,  
And our song is simply about that.

Comments:

"Ons Nohba Klohse..." borrows the tune of one of the most popular songs to come out of World War I, "Mlle. from Armentieres". This tune has a history of being linked with salty lyrics. The 32 verses found here are an amalgam from about ten different sources, primarily of "Kanadier" background, and contain even the so-called 'unprintable' verses.

The use of a tune commonly associated with World War I by an ethno-religious group like the Mennonites who claim to be pacifists, is certainly interesting. Mennonites may have heard this tune from their neighbors, but more likely, its liberal use is indicative of the extent to which Mennonites had relaxed their pacifist ideal by the early twentieth century.

Several factors place this song in the "Kanadier" tradition. The first is its familiarity among "Kanadier". Apart from the lullabies, "Zueza Petruvezha" and "Shokkel shokkel sheiya", no other song is as well known among "Kanadier". Secondly, the name Klassen is a distinctively "Kanadier" name. And thirdly, the earthy humor is characteristically "Kanadier" in contrast with the 'refined' sense of humor often found among strongly pro-High German Mennonites.

Like the ethnic joke, this song satirizes the immigrant's inability to cope with his new environment. The immigrant, i.e., the peasant farmer, is ridiculed because he uses the garbage such as turkey skin and watermelon rind from his agrarian background to reconstruct a product of a mechanized society. Rather than praising the farmer for his pioneer resourcefulness, the singer makes fun of his simple-mindedness and frugality.

Though this general theme is found in all the verses, I will comment more specifically on the versions of a few singers: Peter Goertzen (A/Me.), the "Heischraitje" (K/Mo.), and Ed Penner (K/ER, except vs. 26).

The Goertzen lyrics have been brought to Manitoba by Old Colony Mennonites who have lived successively in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mexico, the Peace River District in Alberta, and now in Manitoba. It seems that in Saskatchewan, neighbor Klassen acquired the name Julius. The song has also acquired a new dimension: that of commenting on the crude behavior in various towns and villages with Mennonite populations, possibly a continuation of the village nickname phenomenon in southern Russia. The comments about Osler, in Verse 30, are excerpted from a longer poem, known in southern Manitoba as "*Horndean es uck ne Shtaudt*", ("Horndean is also a town").

The "Heischraitje" verses were collected and composed by the group for a Low German evening of entertainment in Landmark in the spring of 1975. Several references in some of these verses suggest that they have been composed more recently than some of the other verses: *hydropole*, *arial*, *knacksocht*, GMC, and the police. Some of the other terms may be self-explanatory because they are anglicized, but the reference to *knacksocht* requires further comment.

When CFAM, the Mennonite radio station, first appeared on the air in the late 50's, it was introduced to the public as 'your Canadian Farm and Music station'. Young people who preferred popular music to the music they heard on this station, soon dubbed it as 'your Can't Find Any Music station'. An anonymous somebody added a Low German slogan: "*Knacksocht freyte aule Mennoniete*", or, 'all Mennonites devour sunflower seeds'. As a result, the expression '*Knacksocht horche*' or 'listening to sunflower seeds' became popular. The practice of eating sunflower seeds in public, especially of spitting the shells onto the floor, had by this time been classified by the community as uncouth behavior, so the reference to listening to '*Knacksocht*' had negative connotations.

Most singers of this ballad depend on the text to be the entire source of humor. One exception was Ed Penner's singing of verse 20. Here the singing style amplified the humor expressed in the text.

No doubt there are probably another 30 verses to this song here and there within the Mennonite community.



(Dyck, 1954a:95)

## DEE ROUSSEFELDSHE YUNGES

("The Boys of Rosenfeld")

Mr. Jacob Rempel - K  
Altona, Manitoba  
April 24, 1978

Dee Rou-ze-feld-she Yung-es dee zent zou kluak,  
Dee shteh-le Ehdmaun Sie-mes dee Vorsht ue-tem Ruak,  
Das tun sie zum ver-gnue-gen,  
Das tun sie zum ver-gnue-gen.

2. Y'haun Vieben Dohft dee shtund aun'ne Vaunt,  
Dee yefroarne Vorsht enn'e rachte Haunt,  
Er wollt sie eben verschlingen,  
Er wollt sie eben verschlingen.
3. Donn kaum dee oule Taunte Siemeshe,  
Hee yleevd daut via Siemes Leenche,  
Er nahm sie in seine Arme,  
Er nahm sie in seine Arme.
4. Er drueckte sie, er kuesste sie,  
Sagt sie, "Vaut vest due domma Yung fon mie?"  
Er lies sie eilend fahren,  
Er lies sie eilend fahren (fallen?).

## Translation:

1. The young boys of Rosenfeld are so clever,  
They steal Ed Siemens' sausage from the smokehouse,  
They do it for enjoyment,  
They do it for enjoyment.
2. John Wiebe's David stood by the wall,  
The frozen sausage in his right hand,  
He was about to devour it,  
He was about to devour it.
3. Then came the old Mrs. Siemens,  
He thought it was Lena Siemens,  
He took her in his arms,  
He took her in his arms.
4. He hugged her, he kissed her,  
She said, "What do you want with me, stupid boy?"  
He hastily let go of her,  
He hastily let go of her.

Tune 2: first two lines  
chanted

Peter Goertzen - A/Me.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
April 9, 1979  
PDL-9

Dee Blou-men-uat-she Yung-es dee zent zou dum,  
Dee shteh-len ou-le Sie-mes de Vorsht uat'e Trum,  
Daut dou-ne dee met fe-gnie-yen,  
Daut dou-ne dee met fe-gnie-yen.

2. *Don chemt dee oule Siemeshe ruat,  
En heift dee Yung met'em Shtock oppem Kopp,  
Daut deed zee met fegnieyen,  
Daut deed zee met fegnieyen.*

Translation:

1. The boys of Blumenfeld are so stupid,  
They steal old Siemens' sausage out of the culvert/  
barrel (?)  
They do it with great pleasure,  
They do it with great pleasure.
2. Then the old Mrs. Siemens comes out,  
And hits the boy on the head with a stick,  
She does it with great pleasure,  
She does it with great pleasure.

Comments:

Regardless of whether the song came from the East Reserve, the West Reserve, or was imported from Alberta, the singer of the song felt that it was talking about the boys in a local Blumenfeld or Rosenfeld. The song, then, must describe fairly typical behavior of village boys.

In both versions, the boy steals a sausage. In the first, he attempts to steal the affections of a woman as well. He fails at both attempts; in the end he gets neither the sausage nor the woman. The differences in details in the two songs is probably not as significant as the similarities. The theme remains basically the same: the wrongdoer will receive his 'just reward', either at his own hand, or someone else's, in this case with a stick attached to it.

Humor in the song comes from the ridiculous situation in which the boy finds himself as a result of his misdemeanor. The parallel description of the boy's and then the woman's pleasure in version 2, certainly add to the humor of the situation.

It was obvious that the singers of this song also sang it with great 'fegnieyen' and that it probably had been sung that way in villages in the past.

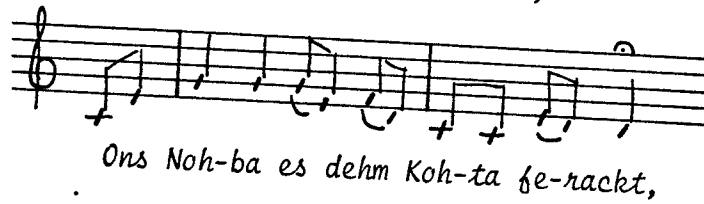
The mixture of Low and High German in the first version of the song is of interest. In this version, the local details are sung in Low German, while the universal details are sung in High German. This suggests that the song was probably translated from High German, though no comparable High German version was located in my literature search.

ONS NOHBA ES DEHM KOHTA FERACKT  
 ("Our neighbor's tomcat has died")

Tune: "Die Gnade sei mit Allen" Alvin Pauls - R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 July 12, 1978

"Vorsaenger":<sup>1</sup> Ons Nohba es dehm Kohta ferackt,

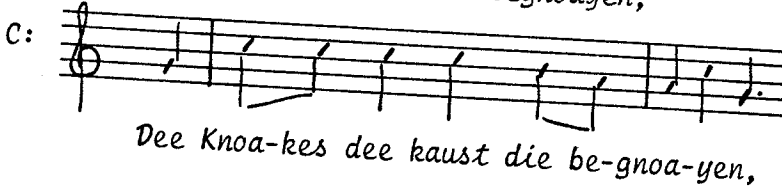
"Congregation":



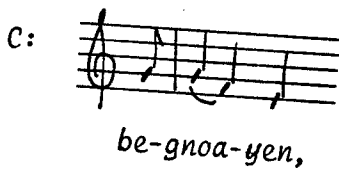
V: Dehm Soagel vull ah nich houlen,



V: Dee Knoakes dee kaust die begnoayen,



V: Begnoayen,



V: Begnoayen,



<sup>1</sup>Translated as cantor or precentor.

## Translation:

Our neighbor's tomcat has died (stretched out),  
 He didn't want to keep the tail,  
 The bones you can gnaw (chew off the meat),  
 Gnaw, gnaw.

## Comments:

This song was sung by the *Gausseshlinyels* (village rascals) in Winkler in the late 1950's. Though the words are similar to a Russian *Gausseleed* (street song), "*En Lamche haud en Kobbelche*" (verse 5), there is no known connection between the two. They may simply be characteristic of a universal tendency to use animal terminology for verbal humor.

The melody used for this song is that of a familiar German chorale, "The Grace of God be with you," which is frequently sung as the closing hymn in Mennonite church services.

The choice of singing style for this Low German song was definitely intentional. Frequently, when there was a larger Mennonite church gathering and there were not enough hymnals for everyone, one of the "Vorsaenger", or cantors, would line out the hymn. That is, he would recite one line, and then the congregation would sing it, repeating the process throughout the hymn. The 'Kohta' song mimics this practice, which annoyed young people because it often produced a dragging unrhythmic singing style. To imitate this aspect of the singing, the young man would sing the 'Kohta' song in a very slow, very affected manner.

The song was known by the local *Gausseshlinyels*, some of whom were ministers' sons intent on asserting their identity as individuals within the community. Needless to say, this song, with its colorful language and melodramatic text, was sung primarily in the confines of 'select' audiences.

VILLAGE SONGS - ethnic

Occupational Songs



## AUS ECK YINGK MET DE HOAK OPP'E DEHL

("When I went with my rake to the threshing grounds")

Lyric 1: R - Schoenfeld,  
Ekaterinslav

Mrs. Isaac Thiessen - R  
Winkler, Manitoba  
May 10, 1978  
PDL-5

Eck yingk met mie-ne Hoak opp'e Dehl,  
Trie-ya, die-ya, dumm,  
Doa fua-ren Sheen-hor-she Mea-kes noh de Meyl,  
Trie-ya, die-ya, dumm.

2. Dee eene dee haud ne dicke Hack...  
Daut via dee Meista fon Bobatback...
3. Dee bacht dehn Bobbat toh huach en toh rund...  
En nemmt dan noch tien kapieche fea't Pund...
4. En vea det baste backen kaun...  
Dea chricht Hauns Jaunsens Fritzen tohm Maun...

## Translation:

1. I went with my rake to the threshing grounds,<sup>1</sup>  
Tria, diea, dumm,  
Girls from Schoenhorst were driving to the mill,  
Tria, diea, dumm.
2. The one had a thick heel...  
That was the master of 'baking *bobbat*'<sup>2</sup>...
3. She baked the '*bubbat*' too high and too round...  
And still charged ten 'kopecks'<sup>3</sup> per pound...
4. And whoever can bake best...  
Will get John Janzen's Fred as a husband...

Lyric 2: R - Grigoryevka,  
Kharkov

Mrs. J. M. Pauls - R  
.Morden, Manitoba  
August 29, 1979<sup>4</sup>

Aus eck ee-mohl yingk met dee Hoak opp'e Dehl, Vie-yoh,  
Don ying-en drea Mae-kes met de Bul-che toh Moakt,  
Fol-la-rei, fol-la-ra, fol-la-roh.

<sup>1</sup>In the threshing process referred to here, a pair of horses pulled a threshing stone. As the straw fell beside the grinding stone, young men or girls raked it aside. The threshing area was called a *Deyl*".

<sup>2</sup>'*Bobbat*', a traditional Mennonite dish, was a stuffing for fowl, baked either inside the fowl, or in a cake pan.

<sup>3</sup>A kopeck, worth 1/100 of a rouble, or approximately 1¢, is a form of currency used in Russia.

<sup>4</sup>Transcribed from a cassette recorded and loaned to me by Mrs. Pauls.

2. *Dee hingashte via met dee groute Hacken...  
Daut via dee Meista fon Bulche backen...*
3. *Yie backen dee Bulche toh chlien on toh rund...  
On nehmen noch dree kapieck selva fea't Pund...*
4. *Yie Maekis yie habe yuen Velt aus Mest...  
Yie kunnen am uck yehven toh Eayd on toh Pluach...*
5. *Daut eck kunn pliyen en eayden hingaraun...  
Dann vensh eck yuent Gouden toh mush on toh mohn...*

## Translation:

1. As I was going with my rake to the threshing grounds...  
Three girls were going to market with loaves of bread...
2. The last one (behind one) had thick heels...  
She was the master of bread baking...
3. You bake the loaves too small and too round...  
And still take three kopecks silver per pound...
4. You girls have your money like manure...  
You could give to him (me) for a disk and a plow...
5. So that I could plow and disk behind...  
Then I wish you good luck...

Lyric 3: N - Schoenhorst,  
Ekaterinoslav

Mrs. Olga Rempel - N  
St. Catherines, Ontario/Winnipeg,  
Manitoba  
April 17, 1979  
PDC-3

Aus eck yingk met dee Hoak ehv-re Dehl,

Don kau-me Sheen-hors-ta Me-yal-le met Mehl,

Yoh-chei, Yoh-chei, Yoh-chei-ra-sa-sa,

Don kau-me Sheen-hors-ta Me-yal-le met Mehl.

2. *Dee iashte via en shmocket Bild,  
Dee Rock zou tohreten, dee Uagen zou vilt...*
3. *Dee tveede via een bunta Shteilits,  
Fon bohven bet ungen met Bobbat beylipst...*
4. *De dredde haud ne kromme Hack,  
Daut via dee Meista fon Bobbatsback...*
5. *Dee backt dehn Bobbat zou sheen en zou runt,  
En naum moh tien kapieche feat Punt...*
6. *En vea daut baste backen kaun,  
Dee chricht Frauns Janses Shmauntkopp tohm Maun...*

Translation:

1. As I was going with my rake over the threshing grounds,  
There came girls from Schoenhorst, with flour...
2. The first one was a pretty picture,  
Her skirt so torn, and her eyes so wild...
3. The second one was a colorful sight,  
Spattered with 'Bubbat' from head to toe...
4. The third one had a crooked heel,  
That was the master of 'Bubbat' baking...
5. The 'Bubbat' she baked was so luscious and round,  
And she only took ten kopecks per pound...
6. And whoever can bake the best,  
Gets Frank Janzen's 'creamhead'<sup>1</sup> as a husband...

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<sup>1</sup>  
All of Frank Janzen's sons had white-blond hair, so were known as 'creamheads'.

## Comments:

The geographical/historical distribution of these three versions is a point of interest. Lyrics 1 and 3 are separated historically, coming from the "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" traditions, respectively. Geographically, they both come from the Russian province of Ekaterinoslav, in which the village of Schoenhorst is located. Lyric 2, from the province of Kharkov, omits all references to Schoenhorst: both the actual name, as well as the 'Ieaknohme'<sup>1</sup> or village nickname<sup>2</sup> suggested by the references to Bubbat<sup>3</sup>. The references to Schoenhorst, and their expression of village rivalry were irrelevant when the song was sung in other geographical locations. And yet the song was sung because it also expressed other tensions among Mennonites.

In all three lyrics, the story begins near a threshing ground, with a comment about some girls in various stages of baking bread/bubbat. Lyric 3 is the only one which comments on all three girls, though they all refer to the girl with the deformed foot, who is noted, or perhaps ridiculed for her domestic skills. Depending on whether or not the bread/bubbat is up to standard, she charges too much/too little for it. According to Lyrics 1 and 3, the reward for domestic skills is a husband. Lyric 1 suggests that she is a loser, while the implication in Lyric 3 is that domestic skills can compensate for physical deformities.

Behind this literal reading of the story, there is another level of social comment. The deformed foot is a euphemism for dishonesty, since we are told that this girl bakes the bubbat too high and too round, or, in other words, so full of air that her customers are cheated. And according to Lyric 2, she is not only dishonest, she is also miserly, because she refuses to give 'him', either her father or her suitor, money for a new disk and plow.

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<sup>1</sup>The Low German 'Ieakenohme' is etymologically similar to 'neke-name' or 'ekename', the Middle English equivalent of the English nickname, literally meaning an "also name".

<sup>2</sup>Village nicknames among Mennonites in Russia were a distinctive aspect of Mennonite folklore used to express local allegiance or village rivalry. Sources of nicknames varied from aspects of village landscape to favorite foods, to corruption of the actual village name (Wiens, 1970:177-180).

<sup>3</sup>Inhabitants of Schoenhorst were known as 'Bobbatscharshhta met Fiasteena' or 'Bubbat crusts with flintstones'. According to one legend, inhabitants of this village ate so much bubbat that when one pressed a villager's stomach, fire would come shooting out of his ears.

The women who sang this song for me said they had sung it as village girls either while they were raking straw at thrashing time, or while they rode to and from the fields on hay racks. It is of particular interest that the girls sang this song, because most of the village folksongs, such as *Gausseleeda*, expressing village tensions were sung by the young fellows of the village.



Occupational Songs - immigrant

AULE LEEVE MORYEN  
 ("Every lovely morning")

Tune: Variant of "Alle  
 Jahre Wieder"

Mr. Isaac Brown - K  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 March 14, 1978

Aule lee-ve Mor-yen,  
 Zaut eck opp'et Eng Shien,  
 Vull nich fehl be-zor-yen,  
 Yeeß noch blous de Shvien.

Translation:

Every lovely morning,  
 I sat on the end of the shed,  
 Didn't want to do many chores,  
 Only fed the pigs.

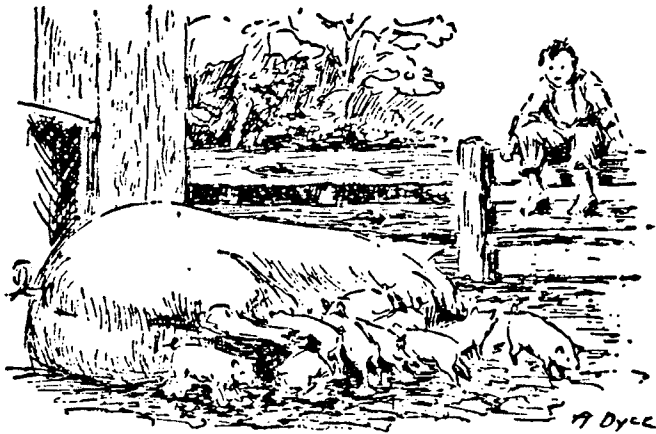
Comments:

For the writer of these words, the work ethic, which has historically characterized the Mennonite community, is certainly subservient to his personal feelings. The tone of the poem, especially the comment about sitting on the shed; i.e., probably on the roof of the shed, suggests that it is written by a young boy, possibly a farmer's son, or a hired hand, in southern Manitoba.

Mr. Brown, who sang this song, learned many humorous songs from an uncle with a lively sense of humor.



This song was 'discovered' in an interesting context. One day while shopping in Gladstone's Department Store in Winkler (i.e., in a Jewish department store in a predominantly Mennonite community), Mr. Brown approached me and asked, "Have you ever heard this song before?" Without giving me time to answer, he promptly sang the song, which I hastily notated on the back of a brown paper bag.



BIEM DRASHEN  
("While threshing")

Ike Froese - K  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
October 16, 1978

Hen-rick es dehn Kaus-ten-Maun

Fon dehn Kaus-ten veet heet nusht,

Oh daut voat em-ma trua-ya met dehn Maun.

2. Peeta es dee Enjin-Maun...

Translation:

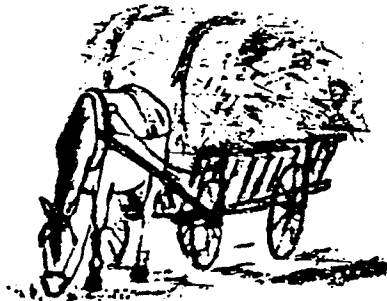
1. Henry is the machine-man.  
Of the machine, he knows nothing.  
Oh, it's getting continually more pitiful with that man.
2. Peter is the engine-man...

Comments:

This song dates back to at least the 1940's when the Mennonites were still threshing grain communally with steam engines. Specific tasks were assigned to certain individuals noted for their ability to perform these tasks.

The machine-man, mentioned in this song, had to control loading the threshing machine to ensure that it would not be halted by an overload, as well as oiling the machine to keep it operating smoothly. The engine-man had to maintain an adequate water supply for the steam engine. Both of these jobs were considered to be responsible positions.

This song was used by members of the threshing crew to tease or ridicule the behavior of others, in good humor. Other verses might be improvised as the 'need' arose. The song was usually sung in a melodramatic fashion.



BALLAD OF THE CHNACHTS  
 ("Ballad of the Chachts")

Mrs. Mary Epp - R  
 Winkler, Manitoba  
 June 8, 1978

Dee ee-nem via dee Youp be-lackht,  
 Dee ee-nem via de Youp be-lackht,  
 Daut haud am doch voll gout ye-shmackht.  
 Zei, dit, zei dit, zei daut, zei dit, zei dit, zei daut.

Translation:

The one had spilled on his jacket,  
 The one had spilled on his jacket,  
 He must have thought it tasted good,  
 Say this, say this, say that,  
 Say this, say this, say that.

Comments:

Mrs. Epp remembers hearing this song in her youth in the 1930s. It was sung by her 13 to 14 year old neighbors in rural southern Manitoba. She was able to recall only one of several improvised verses in which these teenagers ridiculed their Mennonite hired help. This particular verse satirizes the uncouth table manners of the servants.

## KOMMA KEI YEI YIPPIE YIPPIE YEH

Tune: "Chisholm Trail"

Arnold Brown - K  
Winkler, Manitoba  
June 30, 1978  
PDL-7

1. Hee fua rom-me Ack daut a meist um-dakt,  
Hee haud zick zou ye-shtat daut a haulf fe-rakt  
Kom-ma kei yei yip-pie yip-pie yeh, yip-pie yeh,  
Kom-ma kei yei yip-pie yip-pie yeh.

2. Don fuar a en beht vieda, bet enne Shtaudt,  
Doa vieren dee Veay zou shentlich glaut.  
Komma kei...
3. Don ylipst dee Shrug, en fluach am han,  
En bruak en tvei dee Feebashtang,  
Komma kei...

<sup>1</sup>Dr. J. Thiessen defines 'feebashtang' as "a forked tree used to pull a cutter in winter and a buggy in summer." He suggests that this term, a derivative of the Swedish 'Fehmerstang' or 'fimmelstang', may have been incorporated into Low German during the time when Mennonites in Russia purchased cutters from the Swedes (Thiessen, 1967:114).

## Translation:

1. He drove 'round the corner so that he almost tipped,  
He'd hurt himself so badly that he almost died  
(lit. stretched out),  
*Komma kei...*
2. Then he drove a little farther, into the town,  
The roads there were so horribly slippery.
3. Then his horse slipped and fell down with a thud,  
And broke to pieces the hitching rod.

## Comments:

The opening of the American West after the Civil War gave rise to a new genre of folksongs, namely, the cowboy song. These ballads, based on lumberjack songs, usually described trailblazing exploits, or the loneliness of the prairies. These songs, constantly accumulating newly improvised verses, spread rapidly throughout the West. The most popular of these songs, "The Old Chisholm Trail", is reported to have had as many as 69 verses. Apparently, "It was a dull day on the drive when one of the cowboys did not make a new verse to 'Old Chisholm Trail'." (Lomax, 1947:193).

The Low German version follows in this tradition of improvising new verses for the song. The three verses found here were composed by hired farm hands in southern Manitoba in the 1930's or 40's. Making up songs was one of the pasttimes of hired hands who would get together on their time off, Saturday evenings or Sunday afternoons. The songs might be sung unaccompanied, or with guitar.

The song has been adapted to fit the rural agrarian context. In the English version, the cowboy rode his horse; in the Low German version, the hired hand rides in a one-horse wagon. (The word '*Feeba-shtang*' indicates a two-pronged hitching apparatus placed on either side of a horse pulling a one-horse wagon.)

Humor in the song comes from two sources: the situation and the colorful language. Through his reckless driving, the man almost kills himself, and in the end, causes his horse to fall, breaking his wagon. This need not be a humorous incident, but the colorful language makes it such. The expression '*haulb ferakt*' (lit. 'half stretched out') for 'almost died', is an expression which was used only when animals died, and therefore would appear rather crude when referring to a person. Another term '*Shrug*', the term for horse, would never have found its way into the homes of wealthier, more educated members of the community. The language is consistently that of the landless peasant worker, and so would invariably come from a "Kanadier" hired hand.

## MIEN FOHDA VIA EN FORMASH MAUN

("My father was a farmer man")

Tune: "The Happy Wanderer"  
 Lyrics: G. G. H. Ens family

1. *Mien Fohda via en formash Maun,  
 En mie shtackt daut uck em Blout,  
 Dann nehm eck mie de Mest Sheffel,  
 En yehv de Shvien en beht Shrout.*

Chorus:

*Ne fatte Hahn, en moagra Hohn...*

Translation:

1. My father was a farmer-man,  
 And its also in my blood,  
 So I take the manure shovel,  
 And give the pigs some meal.

Chorus:

A fat hen, a skinny rooster...

Comments:

Laughter, poetry, and song are characteristic of family gatherings among the 'Enkelnde Ensen' (one 'n' Enses)<sup>1</sup> of the village of Reinland.

Werner, one of the younger members of the family, is credited with this humorous description of the joys of farm life. Humor in the song comes from such obvious inconsistencies as using the manure shovel to shovel meal for the pigs, or the juxtaposition of the fat hen and the skinny rooster. For anyone familiar with the English version of this song, hearing the 'fatte Hahn, moagra Hohn' chorus instead of the expected 'val-de-rie, val-de-roh', is humorous as well.

Another source of humor is a parody of this parody version. Sometimes the words 'en mie shtackt de Mig em Blout' (the mosquito bites me/sticks in my blood) are substituted for the second line. In this

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<sup>1</sup>The name Ens, is generally spelled Enns.

case, the author is playing with the ambiguity of the word '*shtackt*', which can mean either to stick/remain or to stick/prick like a pin.

As can be seen, the chorus is unfinished. No doubt various endings have been improvised for it, although they were probably lost in gales of laughter. As a song which has become a family joke, it needs no ending. It communicates as it stands.





Ballads - ethnic

## DE BUA ENN DE POHP

Published in Peacock, 1966:52.

## Comments:

Peacock summarizes this song as "an anti-clerical allegory with a domestic setting" (1966:49). A peasant, sitting and eating his porridge, hears a rattling noise. His wife attributes it to the wind. Looking up, the peasant sees the pope. He asks the pope what he is doing in his place, since he never invades the pope's den. Taking a broomstick, he chases the pope out of the house. The pope flees across the fields.

Peacock interprets this song as an attempt by the Roman church, represented by the pope, to persuade dissenting Mennonites, that is, the peasants, to return to the fold. Peacock concludes that "This is typically a Mennonite song in the 'Low German' dialect. No other culture could have produced it" (1966:49).

This interpretation seems highly unlikely when one compares the song with other Prussian Low German songs. The words of the chorus "Tsai-dieh, tsai-dah, tsai-doh" are commonly found in other Low German songs as well (Alpers, 1924:194; Frischbier, 1877:53). Likewise, there are other songs indicating tension between peasantry and clergy, such as "De Bu'r oen e Kerch" ("The peasant/farmer and the church") (Frischbier, 1877:36-38). And finally, a saltier version of the song Peacock collected, appears in another Prussian Low German song: "De Bicht verhoere" (Frischbier, 1877, 30-32). In this version, the pope arrives at the peasant's house early in the morning, while the peasant is working on his fields, supposedly to teach his wife the catechism.

Peacock's interpretation lacks credibility on another account. The lyrics of Low German songs such as "En Lamché haud en Kobbelche" and "Aus eck yingk met de Hoak oppe Dehl" changed when they were sung in new geographical or historical contexts, so one would not expect Mennonites to sing Low German songs about incidents which happened over two hundred years ago. Instead, one would expect to find a variant of the song adapted to the new cultural context. If Peacock had told us that this song refers to peasant/clergy conflicts among Mennonites in 19th century Ukraine, we could have believed him because, as historians tell us, the clergy sided with "wealth and oppression" (Toews, 1970:127). These tensions, however, were expressed in jokes about the clergy rather than in Low German song.

And, although this song could easily express tensions between peasants and clergy, it appears that Andrew Hamm, who sang the song for Peacock, learned the song while he lived in Prussia, prior to coming to Canada in 1890. Hamm knew Low German songs which were substantially different from those known by other Mennonites, and this song is one of those known only by Hamm.

## FEDREIDE VELT

Published in Peacock, 1966:54 K in Neu Bergthal

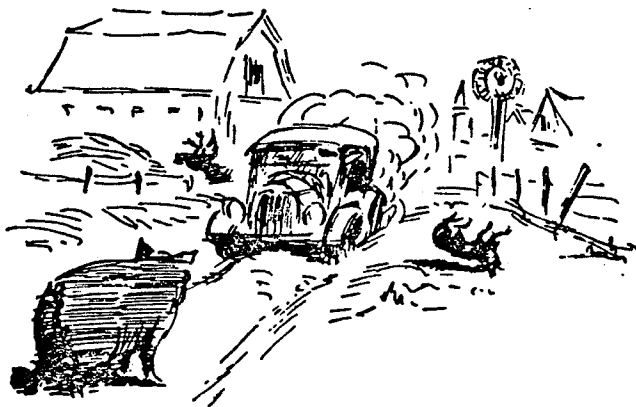
## Comments:

Kenneth Peacock of the National Museum in Ottawa, collected this song from the late Andrew Hamm of the village of Neu Bergthal near Altona in the summer of 1963.

It is a nonsense song about a Mennonite farmyard belonging to a legendary Mr. Hiebert. In the farmyard there are such bizarre goings on as a cow sitting in a crow's nest with her young goats. Mr. Peacock suggests this wild sense of humor may be "a compensation for the strict moral code their official culture imposes" (Peacock, 1966:49).

There is no known connection between this song and "Hey Diddle Diddle", though some of their lyrics are similar. However, like this British nursery rhyme, "*Fedreide Velt*" could very likely be a song of social comment rather than being only a nonsense song. The legendary Mr. Hiebert could well have had a counterpart in some "Kanadier" Mennonite village. Unfortunately, Peacock neglected to provide us with that kind of information.

The song is still in the active repertory of the community. Several villagers said they had learned the song from Mr. Hamm. Some of the younger girls in the community dressed up as farmers and sang the song at a variety concert held as part of the annual village picnic in June 1978. Villagers of all ages participated in the program, yet it was of interest that it was the younger folk who sang the Low German song.



(Dyck, 1954b:24)

## OHM BANYAMIEN

("Mr. Benjamin")

Tune: "Vaut sent mie daut fea Nushte?"

Text: Peter Penner (?) Mr. N. H. Unruh - R/Mo.

1. Ohm Banyamien es mien Liera  
En fehl gelohvda Maun,  
En eck zie zien Feiera,  
De viels eck goanusht kaun.
2. Hee deed en Bazel liere,  
En trig kaum hee befriet,  
Doch zou aus fehle zeije,  
Haft hee nich rick gefriet.
3. Hee es en shtrenga Liera,  
Bruckt cheenen aundren Shuts,  
Klungt gout mie opp de Lehva  
Doch blous toh mienem nuts.
4. Latzt fout hee mie aum Kroage:  
"Yung, duh best dom auls Blott,  
Fuatzt latzt daut domme Froage,  
En yleeft mie blous aun Gott."
5. Nue es ye hee fehl chlieka,  
Aus eck en mien Geshlacht,  
Auls aul dee zindye Bieka,  
Eck yleev mau vaut hee zacht.

## Translation:

1. Mr. Benjamin is my teacher, a very honored man,  
And I am the one who honors him, because I know almost  
nothing.
2. He studied in Basel and returned from there married,  
But, as many say, he hasn't married into money.
3. He is a very strict teacher who needs no other repu-  
tation.  
He is very stern with me (lit. 'steps firmly on my  
liver!)-  
But just for my own good.

4. Once he took hold of my collar, "Son, you are dumb as mud!  
Stop your foolish questioning, and simply trust in God."
5. Because he is much more clever than I, in my situation,  
Than all the sinful books, I just believe what he says.

Comments:

This song is a tribute to Kornelius Benjamin Unruh (1849-1910), a Mennonite educator and scholar, who was affectionately known by his students as 'Ohm Banyamien'. He was noted for his facility in French and Russian. As an educator, he made his contributions to the Mennonite community as a textbook author, administrator, and of course, teacher. His textbooks include three books to be used for religious instruction, and a German grammar for elementary schools in Russia. The text of the song probably refers to the 32 years he spent as principal and teacher at the Ohrloff Zentralschule in the Molotschna Colony (Krahn, 1959d:785).

As already stated, the song is considered by those who loved and respected Mr. Unruh as a teacher, to be a tribute to the man. It was published as such in Nachrichten-Blatt Des Concordia Vereins (1929, 2(2):10), a Concordia Hospital Bulletin put out by Canadian emigrants from the Molotschna. However, one wonders whether the references to the humble student are to be taken literally or as somewhat tongue-in-cheek.

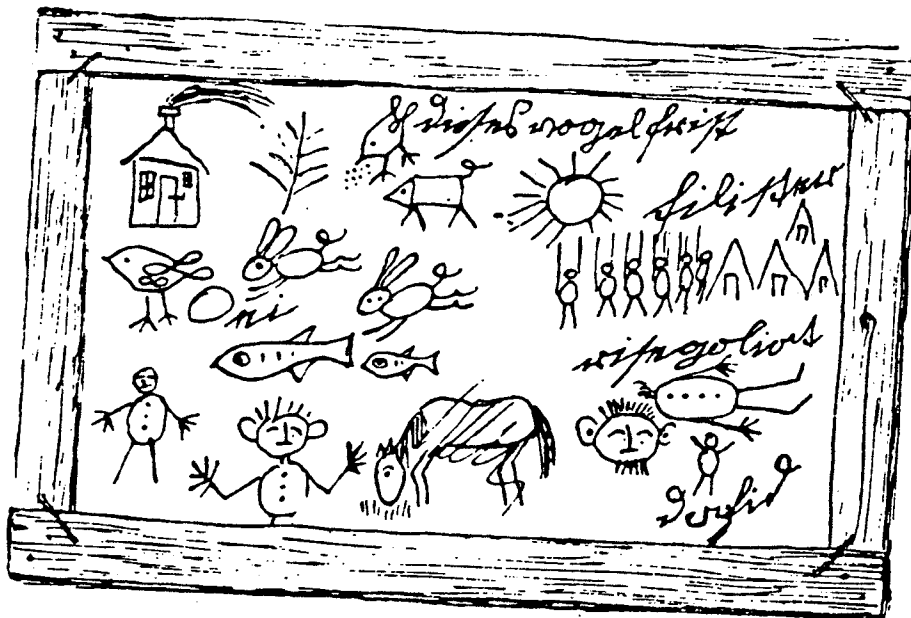
The reference to Mr. Unruh's marriage deserves further comment. The most noteworthy fact about his marriage appears to be the low socio-economic status of his wife. Socio-economic status has historically been an important factor in mate selection in the Mennonite community. One can look at the wealthy Mennonites in Prussia who maintained their ties with Holland for both business and marital reasons, or the Mennonites in Russia who discouraged or even forbade marriage between their children and their Russian servants.

A philosophy of education is also suggested in the song. The reference to the sinful modern books, suggests that the Bible, the "Gesangbuch" or Hymnal, and the Catechism book, all books which Mr. Unruh favored in his teaching, are really the only ones one need study in order to be educated. And yet, Mr. Unruh was known to be a well educated man. Again, is the reference literal or figurative?

One further point of interest is the tune title, which indicates the language question. Why would a student write a Low German song about a High German teacher? And why would a song from a colony noted

for its use of High German, be referred to by its Low German tune name?

It is not known in what contexts the song was used. Apparently Mr. Unruh knew about the song and approved of it. However, the use of Low German, it seems to me, indicates a song of social criticism rather than of approval. I rather think some of the "praise" expressed by these boys, is somewhat 'tongue-in-cheek'.



A. D. 11

BALLADS - immigrant

RELIEFTIET  
 ("Relieftime")

Peter Goertzen - A/Me.  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 April 9, 1979  
 PDL-9

Daut es noch goa-nich zee-ya lang,  
 Donn via vie shreck-lich oam,  
 Dee Bren-ning vort ons au-la,  
 daut Huas daut via nich voam.

2. Vie vorden aula ehleendich fon Shmagus en fon Brout,  
 Dehn Sierup vaut vie chreayen, dee via nich meeya  
 Rout.
3. Dee Shruggen vorden ehleendich dee Zeayen vorden denn,  
 Dee chriayen dann noch Foikel, dee vullen blous trig  
 nenn.
4. Dann vull'ck mie noch befrieyen, dee Oulla zehd,  
 "Oh shit!  
 Vaut ves du dann met aul dee Kids," Daut vist eck  
 zelst uck nich.
5. Det Relieftiet es nue ehva, Uns yeit'et vadda gout,  
 Dehn Sierup vaut vie chrieye, Dee es nue vadda Rout.
6. Vie han ne maussen Shruggen, En enne dartich Shvien,  
 Dee yeit et uck fehl beha, aus onze King en Queen.



7. *Eck deed mie noch befrieyen, Dee Oulla leet'et tou,  
Hee gauf mien en ouden Rumley, En eene ouble Kou.*
8. ...



Translation:

1. It's not very long since we were frightfully poor,  
The fuel ran out, the house wasn't warm.
2. We all became very needy/wretched from gravy and from  
bread,  
The syrup which we got, it was no longer red.
3. The horses became sickly, the sows became thin,  
We got little pigs, they just wanted to go back in.
4. Then I wanted to get married yet, but the old man  
said, "Oh shit!  
What do you want with all the kids?" I didn't know  
myself.
5. The depression (relieftime) is now over,  
Things are going well for us again,  
The syrup which we get, once again is red.
6. We have a lot of horses, and over thirty pigs,  
They're certainly much happier than are our King and  
Queen.
7. I also got married, the old man gave his consent,  
He gave me an old Rumley, and one old cow.
8. ...had children?  
They're all healthy, fat and happy.

Comments:

Peter Goertzen, the singer of this song, comes from a family who have lived in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mexico and the Peace River District of northern Alberta. Peter presently resides in Winnipeg.

There are several words and expressions in the song which indicate that it could have come only from a "Kanadier" background which has retained traditional values like minimal formal education in the public school system. In other contexts, calling a horse a "Shrug"

instead of a "*piat*", or calling one's father 'the old man', would have been considered crude. The assumption that one would have a large family (verse 4), is also part of this background. There is also the assumption that parental consent is required for marriage, which, in this case, seems to be defined as an economic union, though this latter assumption was common among other groups of Mennonites.

The craftsmanship of the lyrics is noteworthy. There are well-balanced parallels between the depression time problems and the post depression time situation: compare verse 2 with verse 5, vs. 3 with 6, and vs. 4 with 7 and 8. This poetic artistry is significant in a poem which Low German speakers with a High German orientation would consider 'crude' poetry because of the expressions used.

Although it appears that one 'lived happily ever after' the depression, there is a note of irony in verse seven. The father's consent for his child's marriage is somewhat reluctant: he gives the child an old Rumley, one of the earliest gasoline tractors, and an old cow. If the child was a daughter, she would expect to get a cow when she married. If, on the other hand, it was a son, he would have expected to get a good horse, probably a work horse. Since the 'old man's' primary concerns are economic, his gifts suggest that he is miserly.

This song was still being sung by Mennonites in the Peace River District of Alberta in the 1950's.



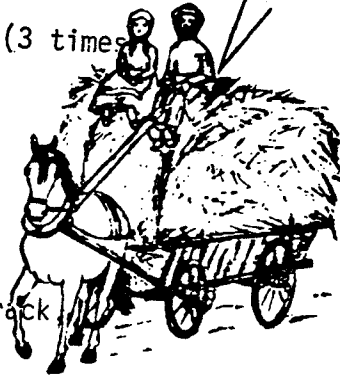
## MAME EN PAPE FUAREN

("Mother and father drove")

Tune: "For he's a Jolly Good  
Fellow"Peter Goertzen - A/Me.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

1. Mame en pape fuaren opp'm Heireck (3 times)  
En eck fua dannoch met (3 times)  
Mame en pape fuaren opp'm Heireck (3 times)  
En eck fua dannoch met.

2. Mame en pape fuaren opp'm Heireck,  
En Haunsche dee bleef Tues.



## Translation:

1. Mother and father drove with a hayrack,  
And I went along then.
2. Mother and father drove with a hayrack,  
And Johnny stayed at home.

## Comments:

Seeing a farmer driving with a hayrack during the week would be such a normal sight that one would scarcely think to mention it, though one would expect the farmer's children or hired hands, rather than his wife to be riding with him.

However, the farmer and his wife, in this song, are probably going visiting on a Sunday afternoon, and that is quite another matter. A farmer went visiting on his hayrack only in case of extreme emergency, such as getting home too late on a Saturday night to change wagons. Getting home too late might indicate poor planning on the part of the farmer. In any case, it was considered socially unacceptable to use one's work wagon for social purposes. The song then ridicules this non-conformist behavior within the community.

There is no obvious reason why the one child stays at home, but it was a practise for parents to take the baby with them, so the child who stays home may be an older child.

This song, probably dating back to the pre-1950's era, was sung among Sommerfelder Mennonites in the Peace River district in northern Alberta.

## DEE NOHBA ES MIE DOLL YEVORDE

("The Neighbor has become angry with me")

Tune: Leipzig, 1817  
"Mir ist Erbarmung Widerfahren"

Words: H. D. Friesen

Esther Wiebe - K  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
June 6, 1978  
PDL-7

Dee Noh-ba es mie doll ye-vor-de,

Eck lied am nich mien nie-yet Biel,

Hee liet fon mie blous au-le Zor-te,

En veet fom lie-yen goa cheen Tsiel,

Dee aun-dra Dach lieyd hee mien Voi-ye,

En buack mie fuats dehn Dies-tel tvei, tvei.

The musical score consists of six staves of music in G-clef, 4/4 time. The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style with quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words in German and some in a dialect. The piece ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

## Translation:

The neighbor has become angry with me,  
 I wouldn't lend him my new hatchet.  
 He borrows all kinds of things from me.  
 His borrowing has no end.  
 The other day he borrowed my wagon  
 And immediately broke the tongue (of a two-horse wagon).

## Comments:

The words of this song are taken from a longer unpublished poem by Henry D. Friesen, a former teacher in southern Manitoba.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to his High German poetry, which tends to be of a religious nature, Mr. Friesen's Low German poetry<sup>2</sup> deals with practical matters of everyday life. It is thought that these Low German poems may have been written during the depression years.

Though we find only the beginning of the original poem in this song, it summarizes the main idea of the entire poem: the indiscriminate, irresponsible borrowing habits of a neighbor are creating tension between him and the person from whom he is borrowing things.

This song was familiar to only a few "Kanadier" who grew up around Plum Coulee in southern Manitoba. Yet, anyone who heard the song identified with the sentiments expressed in it. Everyone, it seemed, had memories of an irresponsible neighbor. Some people commented on the additional pressure which such irresponsibility placed on a community in tough times like the depression years.

Possibly the most interesting comment on the song was made by whoever wedded, or more appropriately, welded together the words and melody. The melody of the hymn, called "Erbarmung", or "Mercy" was first published in J. G. Schicht's "Allgemeines Choral-Buch" in 1819, while the words were published by the author in his "Geistliches Lieder-Kaestlein" in 1767. The words of the hymn, in an English translation by Sister Frieda Kaufman, begin "What mercy and divine compassion has God in Christ revealed to me!" One cannot help but think that it was intentional that the words of a Low German song about a neighbor's exasperating behavior were mated with a tune associated with

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Friesen, whose family moved to Canada just prior to WW I, taught in the Gretna/Altona area for a number of years before moving to Saskatoon, where he became involved in a religious tract organization.

<sup>2</sup>Mr. Friesen's poetry collection has been deposited in the CMBC Archives by his nephew, Dan Rempel.

the concept of God's inexhaustible mercy and compassion. Though this song may appear to be a 'secular' Low German song, it asks a serious theological question. The question is the one which Peter asks Jesus in Matthew 18:21: How many times do I have to forgive a brother who has erred against me?

Invariably, the Mennonite listener laughs when he/she hears this song. The laughter reflects an intuitive grasp of the disparity between systematic and practical theology, or the cutting edge between belief and practice.



(Dyck, 1954b:10)

MIEN FOHDA ZEHD EEN SHEEN MORYEN  
 ("My father said one fine morning")

Ed Penner - K/ER  
 Niverville, Manitoba  
 July 12, 1978  
 PDL-7

Mien Foh-da zehd een sheen Mor-yen,  
 Be-frie-yen voasht due die nich chen-nen,  
 Zou-ne dom-me voat et nich yeh-ven,  
 En ne gou-de voasht due nich chrie-yen.

2. Ne goude hab eck yechreayen,  
 En nue zie eck tohfrehd,  
 Eck muht dit leefste nicht shaußen,  
 Dee Zonn dee febrennt mie den Rigger.
3. Eck voa ea daut uck noch zeiyen,  
 Eck drink en beht Beeya uck Vien,  
 Eck drink ohba nicht daut mie darshat,  
 Eck drink daut aus Medisien.
4. Onze Chinga goh'n boafout en hungrich,  
 Ons yeit et zou feemehsich oam,  
 Eck muht det leefste nicht shaußen,  
 Dee Zonn dee febrent mie den Rigger.

after last verse:

Dee Zonn dee shient mie toh vaum.

1. My father said one fine morning  
"You'll never be able to marry.  
Such a stupid one (woman) doesn't exist,  
And you won't get a good one."
2. I've gotten a good one,  
And I am satisfied.  
I'd rather not work,  
The sun burns my back.
3. I also will tell her,  
I drink a little beer and wine,  
But I don't drink because I'm thirsty,  
I drink it as medicine.
4. Our children are barefoot and hungry,  
We are so terribly poor (poor as cattle)  
I'd rather not work,  
The sun burns my back.

The sun shines too warmly for me.

## Comments:

The father in this song represents communal expectations. These expectations are that a man be hard-working, temperate and a good provider for his family.

The young man finds ways of rationalizing his refusal to accept the communal norms. Despite the fact that he does not subscribe to the work ethic, he manages to find a good wife. And, after all, how can he be expected to work if the sun disables him?

He explains his drinking as something he has to do for medical reasons, a common Mennonite rationalization by those who imbibe. In fact, one of the euphemisms for drinking was to call beer or wine by the name of some cure-all medicine like "Alpenkreuter". At a pig-killing, the men would talk about "Shpeck mehten" or 'measuring bacon' after the work was all done.

In a final attempt to gain the understanding and sympathy of the community, he points to his children. The poor dears are barefoot and hungry because of their poverty. Surely this deserves the sympathy of the community. The irony of this situation is reinforced by the reiteration of his assertion that he cannot work because the sun is too hot.

The humor of this song is derived partly from the tongue-in-cheek tone of the poetry, and partly from the fact that many Mennonites know real-life analogues to this song. There is no information concerning



the origins of this song, but its sentiments are authentically Mennonite, though they probably reflect attitudes in other ethnic communities as well.

The song also holds the unique distinction of being the only Low German song ever to be performed with puppets at a junior high Halloween Social in Plum Coulee! Quite a distinction! It has also had some more ordinary performances. Mr. Penner says that this is one of many songs which is frequently sung at their family gatherings.



(Dyck, 1954a:99)



BALLADS - contemporary

## OH DU LIEBER AUGUSTINE

("Oh you dear Augustine")

Tune: "Oh du Lieber Augustine"      Susie Brandt - N  
 Words: Justina Peters,              Blumenort, Manitoba  
           Wanda ?                              June 15, 1978

1. "Oh du lieber Augustine, Augustine, Augustine,  
    Oh du lieber Augustine," we're all back again.  
    We've seen lots of action, to our satisfaction,  
    "Oh ihr liebe Leute," it's been quite a year.
2. "Oh du lieber Augustine, Augustine, Augustine,  
    Oh du lieber Augustine," what a thrill it has been.  
    Nick Peetash dee zehde dan, "Vaut deist du doa Lyonel.  
    Feshteit goan'ch ta sheete, Daut yeft vada nusht."
3. ...  
    De Bear es fehl tou grout, Es foiken em Shtich,  
    Hee shteit goan'ch op de skates, licht foakna op'en  
    Ies.
4. ...  
    De Jakie de defenseman, Hee es goanich shiz,  
    Dan chikt hee zick rom, shet Greentohl eent nen.
5. ...  
    Dee chliena Braunt, daut zacht nusht em size,  
    De elbows zent gauns gesheckt, hee es en poa derch.
6. ...  
    Daut penalty box, Doa shteit hee zou foaken,  
    Daut yleicht hee doa zou, Daut es ye zien Tues.
7. ...  
    They said that BING was sick, He sure did fool them,  
    He scored a hat-trick, In Landmark that night.
8. Jules the captain, They sure picked at him,  
    De Frieyes yunges, dee yeeve nich opp.  
    Dee chliena Alvin, dee poikad dehn Marvin,  
    Dee Marvin vort zou doll, and shupst an doa fuat.
9. Vic and Ben, dee muste fehl nehme,  
    Dee skoute dee Puck, zou foaken doa ruht.  
    Dan neeme dee Ernie, and Shick dee Puck,  
    And fuare lengd dehm Ies, and Paul sheet daut nen.

10. ...  
Complain about our goalies, no way, no way,  
Without them there's no doubt that we would be here.
11. About the fans, the fans, the fans,  
We out-did Greenthal with screams and cheers,  
We won, the cup, it was no luck,  
It was a strong desire for Mitchell to win.
12. "Oh du lieber Augustine, Augustine, Augustine,  
Oh du lieber Augustine," we're glad you all came.  
To attend our fine dinner, which won't make you  
thinner,  
For fellowship and laughter, we all give our thanks.

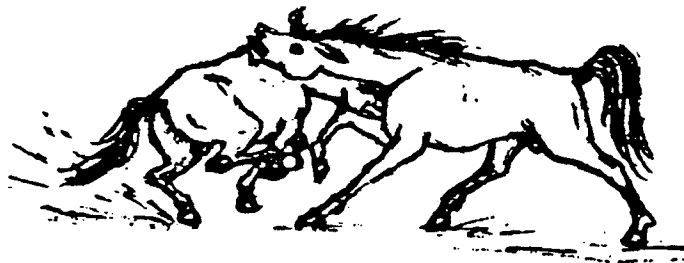
Translation: (of Low German verses only)

1. The Nick Peters said, "What are you doing there  
Lyona!?!?  
Doesn't know how to shoot. It's a total loss again!"
3. The bear is much too big, is often in the way,  
He never stands on his skates, more often lies on  
the ice.
4. Jakie the defenseman, he never gets scared.  
And takes a look around, and shoots into Greenthal  
(net).
5. The little Brandt, size doesn't say anything,  
The elbows are strongly built, he's through a pair  
(of elbow pads?).
6. The penalty box, he stands there so often,  
He really likes it there, after all, it's his home.
8. Jules the captain, They sure picked at him,  
The Friesen boys, they didn't give up,  
The little Alvin, he irritated Marvin,  
Marvin got angry, and pushed him away.
9. Vic and Ben, they had to take a lot,  
So often they shot the puck out of there,  
Then Ernie and Shick, they took the puck,  
And sailed (drove) along the ice, and Paul shot it in.

Comments:

This song, praising the local hockey team for winning the championship, was composed by several female fans of the team. These fans sang the song at a banquet celebrating the victory. The banquet honoring the Mitchell hockey team, was held in March 1978 at Lee's Village Inn in Steinbach.

The song celebrates the heroes on the team by mentioning a characteristic or incident peculiar to each of them. The text of the song is of local interest only. The song was probably sung only at this one occasion. Yet, there is something universal about the song; it is a praise song, similar to praise songs found in traditional African societies celebrating a hero's skills and bravery. One wonders how pacifists in the Mennonite community would react to a song praising individuals for their courage, bravery and fighting skills, or the fact that the tune is that of a High German beer-drinking song.



## LOHT MIE YUENT FETALLE

("Let me tell you")

Tune: from the Beverly Hill-  
billies TV program

Words: Don Voth

Don Voth - K  
Gretna, Manitoba  
October 11, 1977  
PDL-2

Loht mie yuent fe-tah-le fon een Maun named Fout,  
Oa-ma Men-no-niet dee haud et nich z ou gout.  
Een sheen'n Dach don fohnt de pub-lick Shoul,  
Hee nemt de Fruue en trakt noh Mex-i-co.

Guitar:

3va last verse

2. Nue vohnt hee en et chlienet yrieset Hues,  
En sien Yesecht es zeeya, zeeya kruus.  
Hee haft nusht fehl meeya aus ieasht,  
Butt de Nuada-Mennoniete habe Koare met dree Viers.
3. Don hiat hee daut en Manitohba via,  
Eeen Vellem Fea dee strakt aulem fea,  
Nue rohpt hee de Fruue en Chinga toup,  
En kohme nuade, met ne groute Shoup.
4. Dee publick Shoul es zeeya ehva foll,  
Vie veete nich vout dee Mexicauna vell,  
Hee veet nusht fon vout hee zaul liere,  
Vea yleeft betohlt daut, bott onse goude Reyierung!

## Translation:

1. Let me tell you about a man named Voth,  
 Poor Mennonite, things didn't go well for him,  
 (he had it not so good)  
 One fine day, the public school phones him,  
 He takes his wife, and moves to Mexico.
2. Now he lives in a little dirty house,  
 And his face is very, very furrowed,  
 He doesn't really have more than before,  
 But the North American Mennonites have cars with  
 three gears.
3. Then he hears that in Manitoba there was  
 A certain William Fehr (welfare) who finances everyone,  
 Now he gathers his wife and children together,  
 And they come north with a large scoop.
4. The public school is very over-crowded,  
 We don't know what the Mexican wants,  
 He knows nothing of what he shall learn,  
 And who do you think is paying for it, but our good  
 government?

## Comments:

This ballad was composed by a seventeen year old boy while he was shovelling manure on his grandfather's farm. Engaged in a mindless task, he began thinking about the glimpses of Mennonite history he had received from his grandfather. The boy, an organist and guitarist who enjoys improvising, soon formulated these ideas into the shape of a song. The melody was borrowed from the Beverly Hillbillies TV program. This melody, used to tell the story of a TV farm clan, he thought, would be equally as suitable for telling the story of some rural Mennonite folk. He polished up the lyrics with some help from his family.

The story of the song deals basically with the 1920's migration of the more conservative Mennonites in Manitoba to Mexico. They moved in protest of legislation making English language the compulsory language of instruction in public schools. This, they claimed, contradicted the promise of freedom of education they were given when they moved to Canada.

The move to Mexico, meant that they once again had to do pioneer agricultural work. They became established, yet, as a result of a severe drought in Mexico in the early 1950's, several hundred Mennonites moved back to Manitoba at that time.

Some curious inconsistencies point out the necessity of taking the figurative, rather than the literal reading of the story in this song. Firstly, Don uses his own family name, Voth. Voth was a common Prussian Mennonite name, which in Russia was found mostly in the

Molotschna Colony. The emigrees to Mexico would have been descendents of the Chortitza Colony in Russia, so it is unlikely that the name Voth would appear among them.

Secondly, the public school probably would not have 'phoned' these homes which would not have been serviced by telephones at this point in their history. Telephones would have been considered 'too modern' and 'too worldly', especially in the 1920's.

More significant are the inconsistencies between belief and practice highlighted in this song. There are several issues which are addressed or at least alluded to in this song: Mennonite church/state relations, the relationship between religious and economic aspects of an issue, and inter-Mennonite relations.

There are several comments in the song about church-state relations. As already stated, the move to Mexico was a response to apparent government encroachment on freedom of education via the English language legislation. The move back to Canada, on the other hand, was motivated by the promise of financial assistance, again from the government. The tone of the song suggests, that this inconsistency was ignored by the returnees who now place their children into the public school system funded by the government, hoping to benefit from the government from which they once tried to escape.

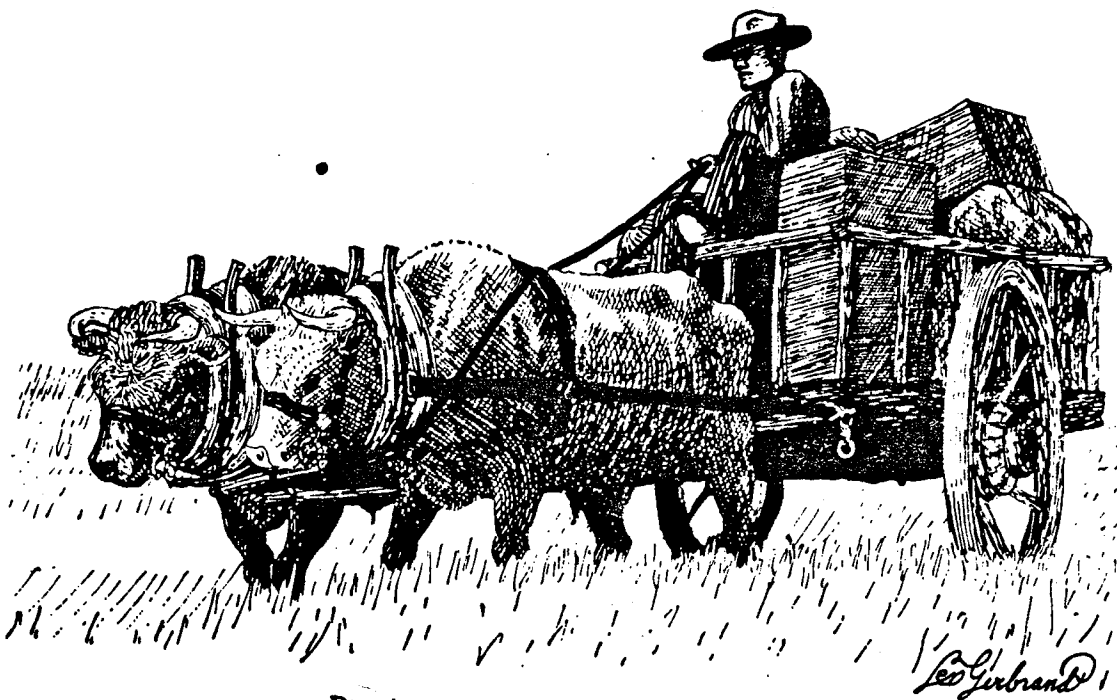
The relationship between religion and economics also comes under critical surveillance. It appears that though the motivation for the move to Mexico may have been religious, the motivation to return to Canada is economic only. Seeing the economic disparity between himself and his North American brothers, the 'Mexican Mennonite' returns to Canada to try to benefit from the system there.

One senses that the relationship between the Mexican Mennonite and his North American brothers may be the most critical of the issues because it is less explicitly stated than the other issues, yet pervades the entire song. The tone of the song reveals that it is written by a member of a dominant group which is critical of a poorer socio-economic group for selling out its religious values, while being uncritical of the fact that the dominant group has already lost some of these values. The last verse especially suggests that the immigrant is a drain on our educational and economic resources while contributing nothing of significance.

One must also mention a humorous note in verse 3. The Low German term for welfare, 'velfea' is simply borrowed from the English. The term 'velfea', to the Low German speaker, sounds like the name Will Fehr. Consequently, there has developed a legend about a kind old gentleman in southern Manitoba, named William Fehr, who helps anyone having financial problems. One simply applies at the Will Fehr office, and he sends one a cheque every month. The legend is repeated with relish because it is a well known fact that there are many people who do misuse the government social assistance program, and that these people are not only those who have misunderstood the Low German term for welfare!



This song has been sung by Don and his twin brother Dan for the entertainment of local youth groups.



Drawing by: Gemalt von: No. 1548 Leonard John Gerbrandt

(Doerksen, 1960:53)

"SCHLUESSELBUND" and "Liebes"*Leeda* - ethnic  
(Singing circle-game and love songs)

## ALLEMAL KANN ICH NICHT LUSTIG SEIN

("I can't be happy at all")

Tune: "Tanzlied aus Schwaben"  
 pub. as "Der Lustige Soldat",  
 (Erk, 1893:III,258).

K, R, N

Al-le-mal kann ich nicht lus-tig sein, lus-tig sein,  
 Al-le-mal hab ich kein Geld,  
 Und al-le-mal liebt mich mein Schät-zel nicht,  
 Schät-zel nicht,  
 Al-le-mal kann es nicht sein,  
 Al-le-mal kann es nicht sein.

2. Und wenn mir mein Schätzel nicht lieben will, lieben  
 will,  
 Lieben mir andre zwei drei,  
 Dann setz ich mein Hudel auf linke Ohr, linke Ohr,  
 Gehe mein Schätzel vorbei.

3. *Doa unga dee Brig doa licht Hohvashtrou, Hohvashtrou,  
En oppe Brig doa licht, Hei,  
Und wenn dann mein Schatzei vorüber geht, 'rüber geht,  
Bricht mir mein Herzei schon zwei.*
4. *Du brukst ye die goanich zou prautzich han, prautzich  
han,  
Chikt ye doch cheena noh die,  
En vann du vest gohne noh Russe/aundre Meyallen  
Dan brukst du nicht kohme noh mie.*
5. *Eck goh ye doch goanich noh Russe Meyallen,  
Eck kohm ye doch goanich noh die,  
En vann du mie vada vest gout zennen, gout zennen,  
Kohm eck uck vada noh die.*

Translation:

1. I can't be happy at all,  
I have no money at all,  
And my sweetheart doesn't love me at all,  
It simply can't be.
2. And if my sweetheart doesn't want to love me,  
Then two or three others love me,  
Then I cock my hat over my left ear,  
And walk right by my sweetheart (ignoring him/her).
3. Under the bridge there lies oat straw,  
And on the bridge there lies hay,  
And when my sweetheart goes over it,  
My heart breaks in two.
4. You don't have to act so snobbishly,  
Nobody is looking (romantically) at you.  
And if you want to go with Russian/other girls,  
You needn't bother coming to me.
5. I'm certainly not going to Russian girls,  
I'm also not coming to you,  
And if you want to be good to (care for) me again,  
I'll come to you again.

Comments:

This song is found in Erk and Boehme's Deutscher Liederhort (1893) under the title "Der lustige Soldat". His version comes from Swabia, but he indicates there are other versions of the song as well: a version from Prussia, and a version with a very crude text from northern Germany.

Three verses of "Der lustige Soldat" commonly appear in German folksong collections, but the Low German version uses only the first of these. Of the five verses in this collection, verses 1, 2, and 4 are the ones most often used by "Kanadier" and "Russlaender" alike. A few people reported singing verse 4 alone as a song in itself. Verses 3 and 5 were sung only by two "Neueingewanderte" women who learned the song in Neuendorf in the Chortitza colony, so the discussion will concern itself only with verses 1, 2, and 4, except where otherwise indicated.

"Allema1..." in its High German version was used as a "Schluesselbund Lied", i.e., as a part of the circle singing games which the youth in Russian and Canadian Mennonite villages used for entertainment Saturday or Sunday evenings. The High German verses describe the vicissitudes of romantic relationships. A young man, hurt by his sweetheart's rejection of him, proudly states he will ignore her. After all, he still has the attention of several other women.

Her reply is found in the Low German verse. The Canadian, and the 'laundered' Russian version state that she is refusing his advances because he is dating 'aundre' or other girls. The original version of the song referred to either Jewish or Russian girls, who were considered to be socially inferior by some Mennonites. The uneducated Russian girls in southern Russia frequently worked as domestic help in the homes of the wealthier Mennonites. Mennonites in Russia began substituting the word 'aundre' for 'Russe' through the influence of people in the community who reacted against this expression of racial discrimination. Mennonites in Manitoba used the term 'aundre' because there was no more contact with Russian people, but it was understood by many in the community that 'aundre' implied non-Mennonite girls, although the Canadian Mennonite term 'Englishe', the cover term for all non-Mennonites, never found its way into the song.

Though the term 'aundre' meant only 'other' girls for some singers, there were comments that the song had been used in southern Manitoba to encourage endogamy, or marriage within the group, and discourage marriage with persons outside of the Mennonite community. The song is no longer heard in public contexts, but the attitude persists in closely knit Mennonite communities.

## DAUT FESHTIADE RANDEVUE

("The disturbed rendezvous")

Mrs. J. J. Thiessen - R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 January 27, 1978  
 PDL-3

Hauns-che shteit fer Greet-ches Dea,

"Greet-che komm e-ruht!

Eck vell die vaut Nies fe-tal-le,

Duh best mie-ne Bruht."

2. Greetche zacht, "Daut yeit nich zou,  
 de Olshe dee paust op..."

## Translation:

1. Hansel stands before Gretel's door, "Gretel, come out!  
 I want to tell you some news: You are my bride."
2. Gretel says, "It won't work like this,  
 the old lady is keeping watch..."

## Comments:

The names Hansel and Gretel are commonly found in European collections of Low German folksongs (Meier, 1972:242; Alpers, 1924:104; Frischbier, 1877:14), namely, in courting songs.

The two verses sung by Mrs. Thiessen are a transliteration of the beginnings of a Prussian Low German song. The seven-verse song, entitled "Dat gestörde Rangdewu" (Frischbier, 1877:14), or the disturbed

rendezvous, tells the story of a young man, Hansel, who wants to 'make' a young woman, Gretel, 'his bride'. Gretel senses that something will go amiss, but Hansel climbs up the ladder into Gretel's room. Sure enough, they are discovered by the old lady who tells Hansel that the devil will get him. Hansel, terrified at the prospect, makes a hasty escape, losing his pants which he was carrying in his hand. "And that looked very ridiculous," ends the songwriter.

Mrs. Thiessen, who learned this song from her mother, knew several Prussian Low German songs not known to other Mennonites. She explained that she grew up on a large estate in a small family, so had little opportunity to socialize with the young people in the villages who knew other songs.

PEETACHE EN LEENACHE  
 ("Peter and Helena")

Tune: German folksong  
 (Diekmann, 1975:140)

Katy Unruh - R  
 Morden, Manitoba  
 July 18, 1978  
 PDL-8

The musical notation consists of seven staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes are written in a simple, handwritten style. The lyrics are written below each staff, aligned with the corresponding notes. The lyrics are in German and describe a scene where Peter and Helena are walking over a bridge, and Peter falls in, leading Helena to run away. The song ends with a double bar line.

Pee-ta-che en Lee-na-che dee ying-en eyv-rem Shtach,  
 Pee-ta-che foll nen, en Lee-na-che dee rand vach,  
 Lee-na-che, Lee-na-che halp mie ruet,  
 Best uck mie-ne sheen-ste Bruet,  
 Lee-na-che, Lee-na-che halp mie ruet,  
 Best uck mie-ne sheen-ste Bruet.

Translation:

Peter and Helena were walking over the bridge.  
 Peter fell in, and Helena ran away.  
 "Helena, Helena help me out, and you'll be my dearest  
 bride."  
 "Helena, Helena help me out, and you'll be my dearest  
 bride."



## Comments:

Here we have a Mennonite adaptation of a familiar German folk-song. The names 'Peetache' and 'Leenache'<sup>1</sup> have been substituted for Hansel and Gretel,<sup>2</sup> the names commonly found even in Prussian Low German songs. This song, familiar only to "Russlaender" was brought by them to Canada from Russia. The adaptation occurred in Russia.

Mrs. Unruh, who sang this song, would probably have classified it as a children's song because she and her siblings sang it as children, but I have included it with the love songs because of its topic. However, as in children's songs, the singer promises a reward for 'good behavior'!




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<sup>1</sup>Records show that from 1860-75 the names 'Peetache' and 'Leenache' were included in the three most popular male and female names among Mennonites in Russia (ME(III):810).

<sup>2</sup>This particular song appears in the Mennonitische Volkswarte as a poem with the names Hansel and Gretel (MV, 1935:(1)66).

ET VIER 'MOHL EN FRIEYA  
 ("There once was a suitor")

Judy Neufeld Urbonas - R, N

Et vier 'mohl en Frie-ya, oh yoh;

Et vier mohl en Frie-ya, en gauns hoa-gel nie-ya,

Oh yoh, yoh, yoh.

2. Ne Yack hauda ne yehle,...  
 Fer e Meakis tohm shpehile...
3. De Shou ohne Zohlen...  
 De Becksen yeshtohlen...
4. De Hout ohne Boddem,  
 Doa sheen am de Mohnd nen.
5. En dehm zull eck nehmen,  
 Eck musst ye mie shehmen..
6. En vier ah yekohmen,  
 Eck haud am yenohmen.

Translation:

1. There once was a suitor, oh yes,  
 There once was a suitor, a completely new one,  
 Oh yes, yes, yes.
2. He had a yellow jacket...  
 For the girls to play...
3. The shoes, without soles...  
 The pants were stolen...

4. The hat without a bottom,  
The moon shone in there.
5. And I was supposed to take him,  
I was very ashamed.
6. And if he had come,  
I would have taken him.

Comments:

This Prussian Low German folksong (Frischbier, 1877:16) was brought to Canada by Mennonite war refugees just after WW II. Mennonites who lived in refugee camps in Germany, often sang to pass the time. Each person contributed verses of songs he knew. The six verses found here were pieced together by the Mennonites in these camps, and brought to Canada.

Mr. Frank Neufeld has been associated with a number of performances of this song. The first of these was at a "Verlobung" or engagement party in North Kildonan. At this occasion, a male quartet sang the song.

In the fall on 1978, Mr. Neufeld taught the song to the Mennonite Male Voice Choir. He taught them the melody, helped with some of the parts, and conducted the performance of the song at the annual concert. The accompanist, Alice Funk, improvised her own piano accompaniment.

A third performance came about as a surprise. The Neufeld family had been asked to perform at a SPIKE (an association for the mentally handicapped) fund-raising event in North Kildonan. When the chairperson announced that they were going to sing two songs, rather than the one they had expected to sing, they hurriedly consulted and decided to sing the 'Frieiya' song.

The Mennonite Children's Choir, conducted by Helen Litz, became acquainted with the song through Mr. Neufeld's daughter, Judy, but have only sung the song informally at rehearsals.

In addition to the formal performances, the Neufeld family and the quartet enjoy singing the song just for entertainment anytime they get together.

The entertainment value of the song derives from the humorous content. A woman sings critically of a social misfit who comes as a suitor, then turns around and says she would have taken him had he come. The last verse, not found in Frischbier's Prussian version suggests either desperation or disdain.

VAUT ZENT MIE DAUT FEA NUSHTE?

("Oh dear, what can the matter be?")

Tune: "Mein Hut der hatt drei Ecken"

R, R/Mo.

Vaut zent mie daut fea nush-te,

Vua blift mien Hauns zou lang?

Hee shed-dat vad-da Krush-che,

En mie voat angst en bang.

2. Doa hinga yanne Iake,  
Feshtuak zee zig fea mie,  
Zee docht eck vudd ar ziake,  
On eck yingk ar febie.

Translation:

1. Oh dear, What can the matter be!  
Where is my John staying so long?  
He's shaking 'Krushche' again,  
And I'm getting scared and afraid.
2. There behind those oaks,  
She hid myself from me,  
She thought that I would seek her,  
But I went right past her.

## Comments:

Familiar to both Old Colony and Molotschna "Ruslaender", this song tells the story of a young girl concerned about the whereabouts of her lover. According to the first verse, he has climbed a tall 'Krushche boum' (sour pear-like fruit tree), and is shaking the tree to make the ripe fruit fall.

In a variant version, John 'shtahlt' or is stealing 'Krushche', giving his girlfriend just cause for anxiety. The variant is not the original reading and was probably altered to tease someone, since young Mennonite boys often 'stole' fruit, particularly watermelons, from their neighbors, 'because the neighbor's watermelons always tasted better than their own'. The variant thus points out an inconsistency in a community in which honesty and working for the fruits of ones labors are important values.

In the second verse, the young couple are playing hide-and-seek with each other, showing playfulness in their relationship, and the teasing character of this song which was used as a "Schluesselbund Lied" in the Molotschna Colony.

The teasing character of the song is certainly evident in an arrangement written by Esther Wiebe for a CBC "Prairie Choirs" radio program. In this arrangement, the first verse is sung by a female trio, and the second by a male quartet. This vocal dialogue highlights the fact that the girl is waiting for the fellow while he is hiding from her.

This is the only entirely Low German "Schluesselbund Lied" which was found in this study. The fact that it came from the Molotschna Colony, as well as the Chortitza, is of interest. None of the informants were able to provide an explanation for this anomaly.



YREENET GRAUS  
 ("Green Grass").

Tune: "Gruenes Gras"

Peter Vogt - R  
 Steinbach, Manitoba  
 May 19, 1978

Yree-net Graus, Yree-net Graus, ung-a mie-ne Feet-ches,  
 Hab fer-lor-en mie-nen Shats, Voar ea mot-te zia-ke,  
 Ziak ea hia, ziak ea doa, ziak ea hing-a au-lem,  
 Diz-ze hia em rou-det Chleet,  
 Dee moakt mie daut Hoat sou heet.

Translation:

Green grass, green grass,  
 underneath my feet,  
 I have lost my dearest one,  
 and will have to find her,  
 Search out here, Search out there,  
 search in every corner,  
 This one in the red dress here,  
 she does make my heart so hot.

Comments:

In Erk and Boehme's collection (1893(III):608), this song appears as a children's circle game. One child stood in the centre of a circle. The others walked around her singing the song. When they stopped singing, she chose one of them to be her partner.

Erk and Boehme note that about a hundred years before his collection in 1894, the game was played by the youth of the community.

Among "Russlaender" Mennonites in both Russia and Canada in the early 20th century, the game was also played by the youth. They played it after weddings or at village socials. The songs sung for these games were known as "Schluesselbund Lieder" or key ring songs, since they often rattled a set of keys to announce it was time to choose partners for a game. Invariably, the songs sung for these games were High German songs.

When Low German verses were added, it was always with a teasing function. In addition to the verse about the girl in the red dress, Mr. Vogt also recalled one about a girl in a green skirt, who was stubborn as a ram:

*Dizze hia em yreenem Rock,  
Daut es zou en Tsiegenbock,*

translated as

This one here in the green skirt,  
She is such a he-goat (ram).

According to Mr. Voth, teen-aged fellows sang these verses softly, but within earshot of girls who, they thought, ought to hear these verses!



## SHEEN ES DEE YUHGENT

("Youth is a beautiful time")

Tune: "Schoen ist die Jugend"

Mrs. Braun/Mrs. Knels - N  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 June 20, 1978  
 PDL-7

Sheen es dee Yuh-gent bie Pee-ta Vie-ben  
 En Chria-kash Tien, aun dee Bor-em Lien.  
 Drum zei eck noch ee-mohl, Sheen es dee Yuh-gent-tiet,  
 Sheen es dee Yuh-gent, dee chemt nich mee-ya.

## Translation:

Youth is a lovely time at Peter Wiebe's  
 and Tina Kroeker's, at the path to the well.  
 So I say again, Youth is a lovely time,  
 Youth is a lovely time, it comes no more.

## Comments:

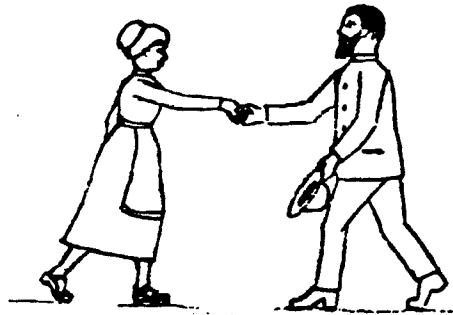
In its High German version, "Schoen ist die Jugend" was used by both "Russlaender" and "Neueingewanderte" for "Schluesselbund" evenings, i.e., for evenings of singing circle games, for several decades.

This Low German version was sung by some boys while playing "Schluesselbund" games one evening in the village of Neuendorf, in the Chortitza Colony, to tease some of the young people among them.

Families in Russian Mennonite villages like Neuendorf, in which this song was sung, who did not have their own wells, had to get water from a neighbor's well. Since Tina's family was without a well, she had



to get water from the Wiebe family's well. Getting water from a neighbor's well may have been a 'legitimate' excuse for some young couples to socialize in a society which frowned on any public display of affection. Although the song mentions two people by name, it probably talks about many more young people in the village. Teasing two people who probably were not going out with each other, may have been a way of covering up for others taking advantage of this system.



"SCHLUESSELBUND" and "LIEBES" LEEDA - immigrant

## EEN MAUNCHET POA

("Many a couple")

Tune: "Ich und mein Haus"/ Evelyn Dalke - K/Mo.  
 "Wie schoen leucht uns Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 der Morgenstern" July 16, 1979

*Dit Leed voat toh de bekaunte melodie  
 "Kranke Heena shtoave nie" gezunge.*

1. Een maunchet Poa voat toup yetruet,  
 Maun denkt blous aun dee shtraume Bruet,  
 En lat dehm Briegaum shtohne.  
 Vie veete daut zee es am gout,  
 Zest vudd zee doch nich met am toup,  
 Zou lang iasht zen yegohne.  
 Zee beid, en fried,  
 Toup vel' vaundre  
 Eena biem aundre  
 Niemohls zorye,  
 En zig aul daut Yelt toup borye.
2. Dee Briegaum denkt blous aun dee Tiet,  
 "Yoh, hiat vann vie iasht zeen befriet,  
 Dee Frue dee voat mie hiere."  
 Zee ohba haft en aundren Zenn,  
 Zee kloppat am en beht unga de Chen,  
 "Du voasht die noch fefiere."  
 Vann eck, die sheck,  
 Ohne Shupse,  
 Voasht du hupse,  
 Aulles hohle,  
 Vaut eck mie en Leev befohle.
3. Doch es daut nich de rachta Vach,  
 Dann es yuhn' Leev zou shlaup aus Blach,  
 Dann voa yie yuhnt noch shteete,  
 Dann voa yie en dee Ehestaunt,  
 Nich shaftich vaundre Haunt en Haunt,  
 Daut zull yie uck aul veete.  
 Vann hee, en zee,  
 Zig beid velle  
 Ohne shelle,  
 Tou een aundra shecke,  
 Dann sull an daut em Leyve ylecke.

Spoken introduction: This song is sung to the well-known melody:  
"Sick Hens never die!"

1. Many a couple gets married,  
One thinks only of the lovely bride,  
And leaves the bridegroom standing.  
We know that she loves him,  
Else she'd not have gone with him,  
For such a long time before.  
They two, in peace,  
Want to journey together,  
Each with the other,  
Never worry,  
And borrow all of their money.
2. The bridegroom just thinks about the time,  
"Yes, (if only we were finally married,)   
when we are finally married,  
The wife will certainly hear (listen to) me."  
She, though, has a different idea,  
She raps him a little, under his chin,  
"You are going to surprise yourself,  
When I, send you  
Without pushes,  
You will jump,  
Getting everything,  
Which I in 'love' command."
3. But that is certainly not the right way,  
Then your love is as flimsy as tin,  
Then you will hurt yourselves.  
Then you will not wander happily  
Hand in hand in your marriage.  
You should already know that.  
If he, and she,  
Without scolding,  
Both want to  
Adjust to each other,  
Then they should be happy/prosperous in life.

Comments:

I first came across this wedding song aboard a North West Orient flight between Chicago and Miami, Florida, the afternoon of July 16, 1979, and heard it performed at an anniversary celebration for a couple in our tour group to Paraguay sometime after midnight the next morning - in the Miami International Airport.

The singer, impersonating a little old lady, wore a kerchief, walked stoop-shouldered, and sang with a shaky voice, frequently swooping up to reach high notes. The nasal, gliding style of singing

along with the absolute seriousness with which she sang the song, added to the humor of the dramatic presentation. Further humor arose from deliberate mis-timing, such as a long pause on the word 'lang' (long), to accentuate the inordinate length of the courtship.

This song appears to be a parody of the hymn "Ich und mein Haus" ("I and my household"), which was customarily sung at weddings held in "Kirchliche" or General Conference churches til the mid-twentieth century. The hymn, sung during the wedding ceremony, describes the ideal of Christian marriage: a relationship in which two individuals live in harmony through mutual submission to God and each other.

The Low German version, by comparison, was sung at the reception held in the church basement after the ceremony. In contrast to the High German version, which discussed the ideals, this version reveals the realities of domestic tensions between husband and wife, with each trying to dominate the other. They are, however, chastised, and told that their relationship will be happy only if it is based on a principle of unselfish giving.

The song was brought to Manitoba by Ms. Dalke's aunt, a descendant of the Molotschna Colony who emigrated to Canada from the central United States after the first World War because of anti-German, anti-pacifist feelings in the States.



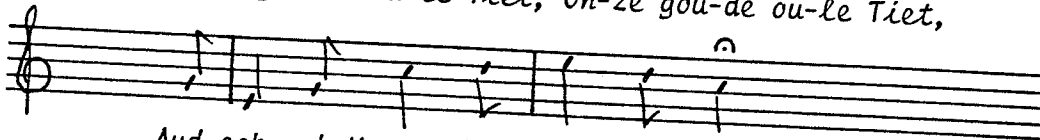
## ONZE GOUDE OULE TIET

("Our good old time")

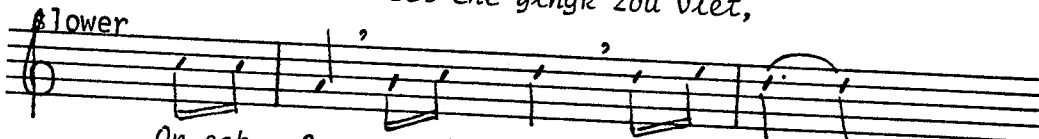
Tune: "In the good old Summer-time"

Sung by Andrew Hamm.  
Recorded in 1963 by  
Kenneth Peacock, PEA-224.

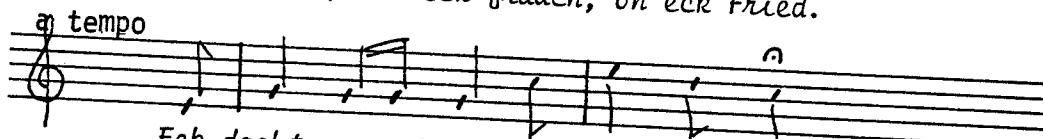
On-ze gou-de ou-le Tiet, On-ze gou-de ou-le Tiet,



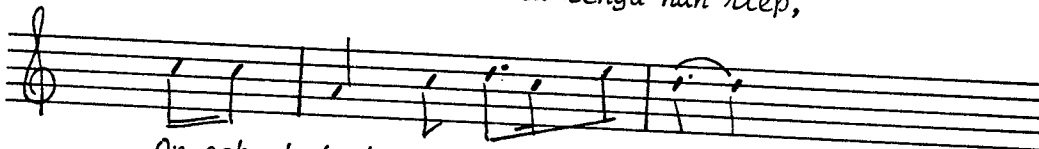
Aud eck noh Yreet-che yingk zou viet,



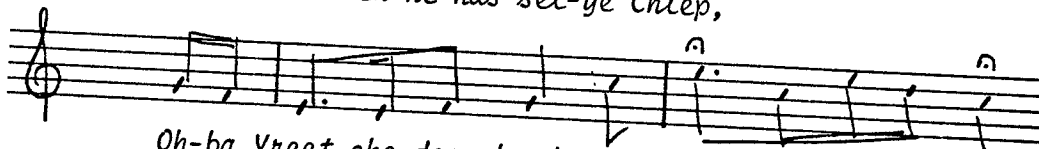
On eck ?, on eck fruach, on eck Fried.



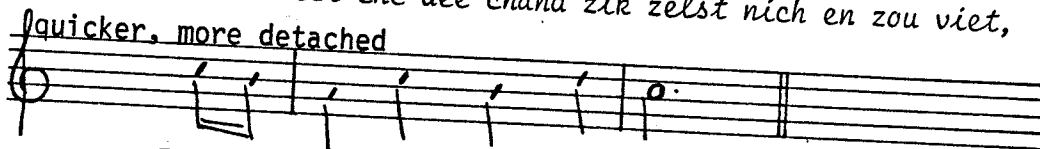
Eck docht on-ze Leev via lengd-han riep,



On eck chriach ne has-sel-ye Chiep,



Oh-ba Yreet-che dee chand zik zelst nich en zou viet,



Zee vie zent aul lengst be-friet.

## Translation:

Our good old time, our good old, time,  
 When I was going to Margaret, so far (away),  
 I ? , and I asked, and I courted,  
 I thought our love had long matured (was ripe),  
 But I got an angry rejection (got the basket),  
 But, Margaret didn't know herself, insofar that  
 As you can see, we've already been married for a long  
 time.

## Comments:

Though this song is part of Kenneth Peacock's recorded collection of Mennonite folksongs, it was not published in his Twenty Ethnic Songs of Western Canada. One finds this strange. The songs published in the book have older melodies which come from a High German folksong tradition. The age of the melodies may have given these songs 'publishable' significance' in Peacock's study.

While "*Onze goude oule Tiet*", a more recent melody, the lyric content is nevertheless typically Mennonite. The story of the young man courting the young lady describes the traditional courting pattern in Mennonite society. A young man would visit a young lady with the intention of marriage. When the relationship had had time to mature, he would propose. She would accept, or reject. A rejection was always described as 'giving him the basket', presumably an empty wicker basket. There are reports that some young girls actually tied an empty basket to a rejected suitor's buggy.

Mr. Hamm, whom Peacock describes as "one of the liveliest and most witty informants I have met anywhere" (Peacock, 1966:49), lived in the village of Neu Bergthal, and, after his retirement, in Altona, til the time of his death. Villagers agree with Mr. Peacock's assessment of Mr. Hamm's character; he was noted in the village for his sense of humor and keen interest in folklore. His dramatic story telling abilities are evident in his rendition of this song. He takes liberties with rhythm (ms. 3, 8, and 14), and with tempo (lines 3, 4 and 7) to heighten the drama of the story.

It is possible that Mr. Hamm himself composed the words of this song to retell the story of his courtship with his wife, Margaret, or *Yreetche* as he calls her in the song. (There are some barely distinguishable comments followed by lively laughter on Peacock's tape which suggest this.)<sup>1</sup> In any event, Mr. Hamm says that the song was

<sup>1</sup> Peacock makes no mention of this fact in the mimeographed report which accompanies his tapes, so I presume that he missed these comments because he was working through an interpreter.

composed in Neu Bergthal in the 1930's and that he first sang it at that time. One suspects he may have sung the song to tease his wife.





## ZICK ZACK HACK-EN-TEE

Tune: square dance melody

Peter Goertzen - A/Me.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
April 9, 1979  
PDL-9

Lyric 1:

Lang-é Me-yal-les met kor-te Rack

Váút nich gauns de Velt be-dackt.

Chorus: Zick zäck Mur-ra-che, Zick, zäck Foh-da-che,

Zick zäck Hack-en-tee, Mur-ra-che déit de Buck zou vee.

2. Onze Chinga yeit'et shlacht  
Murrache es em Bor'm yedackt.

Translation:

1. Long girls with short skirts,  
Which don't quite cover the world.

Chorus:

- Zick zack mother, Zick zack father,  
Zick zack heel and toe,  
Mother's stomach aches so much.
2. Our children are sad,  
Mother has fallen into the well.

## Lyric 2:

Ken Klassen - K/ER  
Steinbach, Manitoba  
June 15, 1978

Vell vie en dehn Chal-la krue-pe,  
Vell vie aul de Vien uet-zue-pe.  
Chorus: Vest due dann vell 'eck uck,  
Vest due dann vell vie fluck.

## Translation:

Let's crawl into the cellar,  
Let's drink all the wine,  
If you want to, I will too,  
If you want to, let's go hastily.

## Comments:

Both sets of lyrics to the square dance tune were found among Mennonites originally of an Old Colony Church background.

In Lyric 1, we have only two of many improvised verses. Though the emphasis was supposedly on rhythm rather than content, one notes the male analysis of world affairs!

The question I asked when I first heard this song was "What is the relationship between the girls' short skirts and mother's stomach ache?" To answer this question, we need to look at the Low German word for stomach ache, or *buckveedoag*, meaning literally, "days of pain" (Rempel, 1979:33). If *buckveedoag*, as some informants suggested, is a euphemism for menstruation or perhaps even pregnancy, the girls in the short skirts are being given a sound warning. Whether or not 'falling into the well' is another euphemism, is not known.

This lyric was used for square dances among Mennonites<sup>1</sup> in the Peace River district of Alberta in the late 1950's. These dances and couple or circle games like 'Bingo', 'Last Couple Out' and 'In and Out the Window' were a significant aspect of youth social activities Sunday evenings or after weddings.<sup>2</sup> The dance tunes were accompanied by accordeon, guitar, violin, or mouth organs.<sup>3</sup>

The second lyric was also used for square dances in southern Manitoba many years ago, but now is sung only for entertainment. Since drinking was not universally acceptable among Mennonites, euphemisms for drinking were used in conversation. This song does not use these euphemisms but preserves an atmosphere of secrecy: crawling or sneaking into the cellar to avoid detection, possibly from their elders, if the singers were youths.

Both of these lyrics could have come only from an Old Colony or Sommerfelder Church background. This is so not only because of the incidence of drinking or dancing, but because of the distinctive quality of honesty about 'how things really are' among these people, who in the past were usually of lower socio-economic status than their brothers and sisters in other denominations.

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<sup>1</sup>The early settlers in northern Alberta were returnees from the 1920's migrations to Chihuahua, Mexico over the public school education/religious liberty controversy. By the 1950's, Old Colony, Sommerfelder and Bergthaler people in the Peace River district had close associations with each other as evidenced by considerable intermarriage between the groups.

<sup>2</sup>These evenings were a socially acceptable way for young people to become acquainted with each other and begin courting.

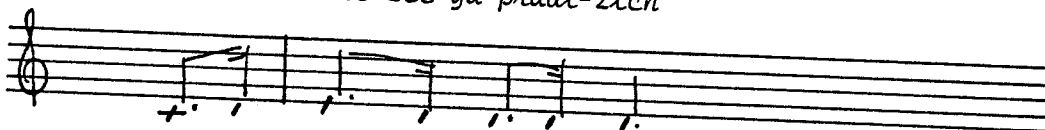
<sup>3</sup>Young people usually sold their instruments when they joined the church, partially because this was a rite of passage into adulthood, and partially because they were getting married and would be concerned with domestic affairs with minimal time for the social activities of youth.

## TELL ME WHY BABY WHY

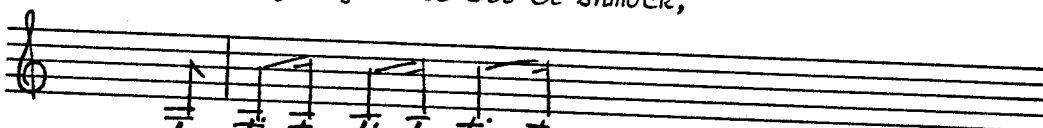
Tune: "Tell me Why, Baby Why"

Peter Goertzen - A/Me.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
April 9, 1979  
PDL-9

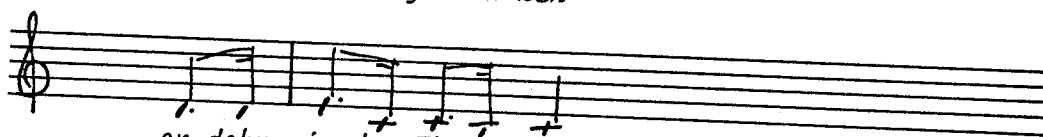
Doe deist die zee-ya praut-zich



en doe yleeft die zit'et shmock,



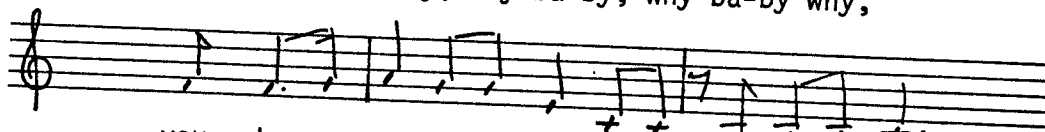
Mét zou-ne hua-ye Hak-ken



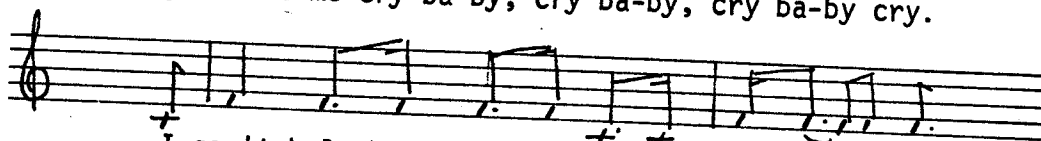
en dehn vie-den Eh-vá-rock,



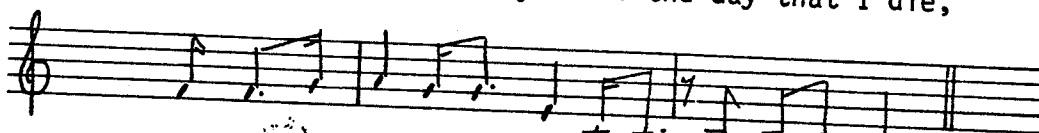
Chorus: Tell me why ba-by, why ba-by, why ba-by why,



you make me cry ba-by, cry ba-by, cry ba-by cry.



I can't help but love you til the day that I die,



So tell me why ba-by, why ba-by, why ba-by why.

2. ...daut voat zich nich vadda 'hack-e-ziaren'.  
Fondoag bliev eck Tues  
en nue kaun Dohft met die shpatsieren.
3. Vistren hiad eck zeiyen  
viasht met Dohft eruert yegohnen,  
Fondoag bliffts Tues, nue zaul eck vadda kohmen.
4. Eck yleev vie nehmen Aufsheet  
dann et yeit nich meeya gout,  
Eck bliev feyl leeve Tues  
en foudda de Piad en besye Shrout.

Translation:

1. You act very sophisticated  
and you think you're looking good,  
With such high heels and that wide overcoat.
2. ...it won't happen again  
Today I'll stay home and Dave can visit with you.
3. Yesterday I heard say you'd gone out with Dave,  
Today you'll stay at home,  
and I'm supposed to come again.
4. I think we'll say farewell  
because things aren't going well anymore,  
I'd much rather stay at home  
and feed the horses some meal.

Comments:

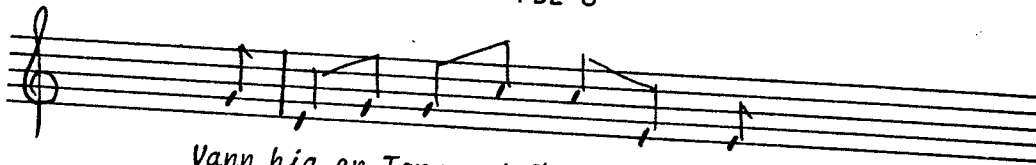
Sung by Peter Goertzen, presently living in Winnipeg, this song was originally brought to his home in the Peace River District of Alberta by Mennonites from Osler, Saskatchewan, visiting their relatives in Alberta.

As a parody of a popular English song by the same name, "Tell Me Why Baby" was sung only during the summer of 1956, while the English version was popular. The song was sung exclusively by the single young people at various social occasions.

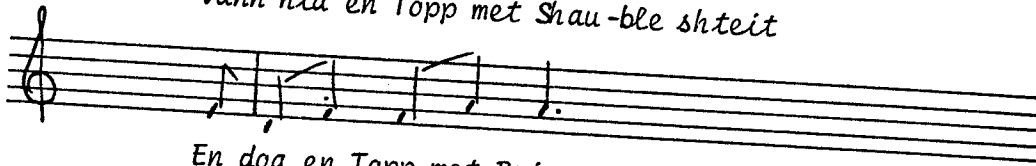
The theme of the cheating lover is a familiar one in folklore, but the young man's comment about turning his energies to agricultural pursuits such as feeding the horses is certainly a unique 'threat' coming from a rejected suitor. It may also be a comment on the social gap he feels between his rural way of life and the girl's sophisticated manners, which she has acquired through 'working in the city'.

## MARIE MAREI MARUSHKAKA

("Marie, Marei, Marie my love")

Tune: "Bohnenpott"/  
Kreuzpolka"  
(Krentzlin, n.d.:11)Rudy Schellenberg - K/Mo.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
March 1979  
PDL-8

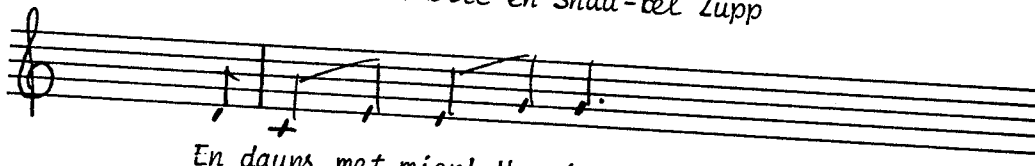
Vann hia en Topp met Shau-ble shteit



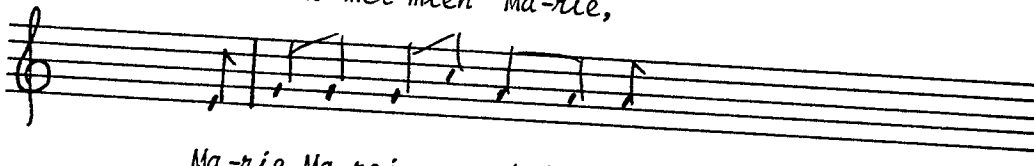
En doa en Topp met Brie,



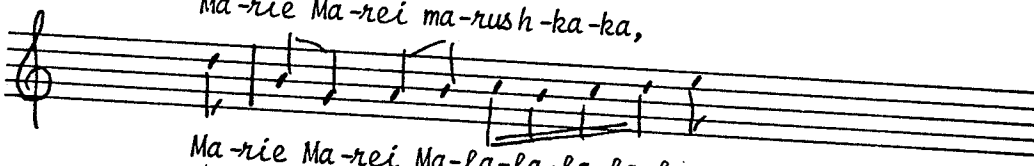
Dann moak eck Brie en Shau-bel Zupp



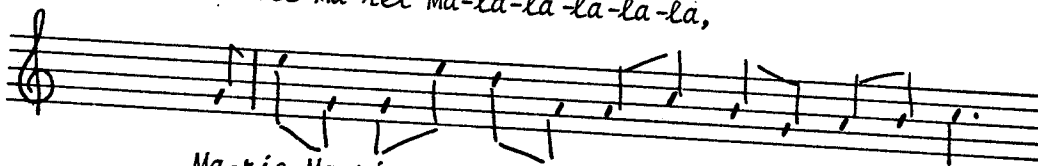
En dauns met mien' Ma-rie,



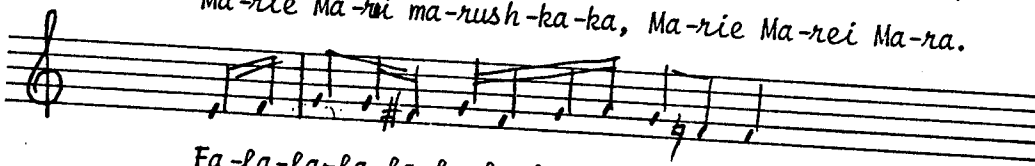
Ma-rie Ma-rei ma-rush-ka-ka,



Ma-rie Ma-rei Ma-la-la-la-la-la,



Ma-rie Ma-rei ma-rush-ka-ka, Ma-rie Ma-rei Ma-ra.



Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la,

Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la,  
 Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la,  
 Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la.

2. En vann Marie nich daunsen vell  
 Dann yeft daut sheeve Been;  
 Dann track vie ea en Shlohpkleet aun,  
 Dann es daut nich toh zeen'n.
3. Vann mien' Marie nich daunsen vell  
 Dann veet eck vaut eck dou;  
 Dann shtopp eck ea em Hohvazack,  
 En bing dehm tohve tou.
4. Vann zee mie dann noch prachre deit  
 "Ach leeva Maun moak ohp!"  
 Dann bing eck dehm noch fausta tou,  
 En zat mie bohve nopp.

Translation:

1. If there's a pot of beans here,  
 and there a pot of broth,  
 Then I'll make broth and bean soup,  
 and dance with my Marie.
2. And if Marie doesn't want to dance,  
 Then she'll get crooked legs.  
 Then we'll put a nightgown on her,  
 So it can't be seen anymore.
3. If my Marie doesn't want to dance,  
 I know what I'll do,  
 I'll put her into an oat sack,  
 And tie it closed (on top).
4. And if she tries to beg me,  
 "Oh dear man, Please open it!"  
 I'll tie it even more tightly closed,  
 And seat myself on top of it.

## Comments:

Hearing this lively little song on a Bielefelder Kinderchor recording, a young school teacher decided to translate it from Dutch to Low German for his students. The teacher, Ernest Dyck, thought that since he was teaching in a Low German speaking community, it would be interesting to sing the song at the evening program of the annual school picnic. The program, a variety concert held on the school grounds, would be attended by virtually everyone in the village. The students, a grade five or six class, sang the song, but there was little response from the audience. This may have been due to poor acoustics. Or, was it a sign of disapproval of the lyrics? Perhaps the references to dancing offended some members of the community in which dancing was not acceptable for religious reasons. The children, however, enjoyed the tuneful, rhythmic folksong.

A High German parody of the third verse appears in Arnold Dyck's Low German drama "*De boasje Hiebat en'e Soadeltiet*" ("The 'industrious' Hiebert at Harvest-Time") (Dyck, 1952:13). In this short drama, a lazy farmer attempts to place the blame for his procrastination on external circumstances. Just as he is finally about to go to work, he begins to sing in High German:

Und wenn mein Weib nicht folgen will,  
So weiss ich, was ich tu:  
Ich steck sie in den Habersack  
Und bind ihn oben zu

which is translated as:

And if my wife won't follow,  
I know what I will do,  
I'll put her in an oat sack,  
And tie it closed on top.

The irony is obvious. His wife has been busily bringing his messages to the hired man, getting his boots, chasing the calf out of the garden, and preparing his lunch. Note, that he sings in High German, in a Low German drama.

The school teacher who translated the song presumed the original lyrics dealt with a little girl and perhaps her father. There is, however, enough ambiguity in the song to suggest that it may refer to a relationship between a young man and a young woman, with the references to dancing euphemistically suggesting a sensuous relationship or some form of coercion. Literary parallels can be found in collections of medieval goliard poetry like "*Carmina Burana*".

The song has not remained in the active repertoire of the community.



DAUT DUH MIEN LEEFSTA BEST  
 ("That you are my dearest one")

Tune/Lyrics: Schneider,  
 1958:40

Betty Kehler - K  
 Gnadenfeld, Manitoba  
 July 1, 1978  
 PDL-7

Daut du mien Leef-sta best, Daut du voll veetst,  
 Komm bie dee Nacht, Komm bie dee Nacht,  
 Zei mie vaut Leefst, vaut Leefst.

2. Komm duh om meeda Nacht, Komm du Klock een,  
 Fohda shlapt, Mutta shlapt, Eck shlohp auleen.
3. Klopp aun dee Kohma Dea, Foht aun dee Chlink,  
 Fohda meent, Mutta meent, Daut deit dee Vint.
4. Kohmt dan dee Moryeshtund, Kreiht dee oul Hohn,  
 Leefsta mien, Leefsta mien, Dan motst duh gohn.
5. Zach aun dehn gangk entlang, Leiz opp dee Chlink,  
 Fohda meent, Mutta meent, Daut deit dee Vint.

Translation:

1. That you are my dearest one, That you already know.  
 Come at night, Come at night, Tell me my dearest.
2. Come in the middle of the night, come at one o'clock,  
 Father is sleeping, Mother is sleeping, I sleep alone.
3. Knock on the pantry door, Touch the latch,  
 Father thinks, Mother thinks, "The wind did that."
4. When the morning hour comes, and the old rooster crows,  
 Dearest mine, dearest mine, then you must go.

5. Carefully along the hallway, Softly on the latch,  
Father thinks, Mother thinks, "The wind did that."

Comments:

According to Schneider,<sup>1</sup> this song comes from Schleswig-Holstein, the northern-most province of Germany (1958:40). The Low German dialect used in his version differs from that spoken by Mennonites whose home in northern Germany (then called Prussia) lay further East.

However, dialectical differences are not the main reason for assuming that this song is not part of the Russian Mennonite tradition. The song was sung exclusively by fourth generation Canadians, so probably was not imported from Russia, but learned by the younger generation from folksong books. Ms. Kehler learned the song from a "Russlaender" Mennonite college friend in the 1960's.

The content is also atypical of Mennonite Low German songs. According to hearsay, hired hands living in southern Manitoba in the earlier part of this century, sang colorful songs about their 'women'. The words of a song which a young Saskatchewan girl learned from her grandfather may be similar to these songs,<sup>2</sup> though people claim they 'cannot remember' any of these songs.

*Oh miene Marie<sup>3</sup>  
Fondaog shlohp eck met die,  
Un vann et dann en chlienet yeft,  
Dann es daut fon mie un die.  
Oh miene Marie.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1</sup>Compare with Firmenich (1854:150), Meyer (1927:43-44) and Tardell (1928:6-7).

<sup>2</sup>Once again we have an example of a girl learning a 'naughty' song from a male relative at least one generation older than she.

<sup>3</sup>The name Maria, the most popular female name among Mennonites in late 19th century Russia (Krahn, 1959c:810), is not found in other Low German songs, though it is used in northern European folksongs like "Marie, Marei, Marushkaka." This leaves ambiguity concerning the origin of this song.

<sup>4</sup>Translation:

Oh my Marie, Today I'll sleep with you.  
And if it gives a little one,  
Then it's from you and me.  
Oh my Marie.

Traditionally, Mennonite women did not sing about illicit relationships. The fact that "Oh miene Marie" and "Daut duh mien Leefsta best" were sung by women, may be indicative of the extent to which some Mennonites have been influenced by a permissive society.



PLAUTDIETSHA OHVENT LEEDA - contemporary  
(Low German Evening Songs)

## OULA SHVOATA YOUSEFF

("Old black Joe")

Tune: "Old Black Joe"

John Bestvater  
Steinbach, Manitoba  
June 1, 1978

Vach zen de Doag aus mien Hoat via yungken frou,

Vach zen de Frind, fon de Boum-voll Flek-ka vach,

Vach fon de Iiad, noh en beh-tritt Laund eck veit,

Eck hia de zaunf-te Shtem-me roup-pe(n),

"Ou-la Shvoo-ta You-seff,"

Eck kohm, eck kohm, viels mien Kopp dea hengt zou leach,

Eck hia de zaunf-te Shtem-me roup-pe(n),

"Ou-la Shvoo-ta You-seff."

## Translation:

standard text of "Old Black Joe".

## Comments:

Originally sung at a community Low German evening in Steinbach in the summer of 1964, "*Oula shvoata Youseff*" has been used to entertain people in a variety of community events: Teacher's Local, car dealer opening, chamber of commerce banquet, German society meeting, Gretna Mennonite Collegiate Institute fund raising event, and even at coffeetime in church basements after religious meetings.

The song was translated by four Steinbach administrators who comprise a local church male quartet.

Although the Low German version remains true to the English text, there is humor in the translation. The change from the monosyllabic "Old Black Joe" to the bi-syllabic "*Oula shvoata Youseff*" creates an awkward, syncopated rhythm in otherwise smoothly flowing poetry. The ungainly rhythm supports the suspicion of some Mennonites that Low German is a 'crude' language, incapable of refined poetic expression.

Another source of humor is found in the manner of performance. At some events, the quartet dresses in traditional barbershop quartet style, and sing in a melodramatic manner.

When the song is performed on '*Yantsied*', 'the other side' (of the Red River), the quartet emphasize their differences with people from '*Yantsied*', by exaggerating one of the Low German dialectal differences, namely the 'n' ending on the word '*rouppe(n)*'.

Mennonites on both the East and West sides of the Red River have traditionally referred to Mennonites living on the 'other side', as '*Yantsiedash*' (other siders).

At family or community gatherings, where Mennonites from both sides of the river are present, there is bound to be some expression of this rivalry, usually in a good-natured humorous vein. The attitude of suspicion toward people on the other side of the river probably arose in the days when travel between the two reserves was still fairly restricted because of poor roads, few bridges, and inefficient vehicles. Improved travel and increased intermarriage between reserves has helped to modify many of these suspicions.

That increased knowledge of 'the other side' has not obliterated all of the rivalry, is evident in a recently composed poem, in which a young fellow, talking about his girl says,

She was Mennonite...  
She was refreshingly elegant...  
But she was a bit of a snob about *Jahnt Sied*.<sup>1</sup>  
So being the backwoods bearded bush boy I  
essentially am, I told her that I looked  
forward to seeing Winkler, and if I liked  
it, I though I might bring it over to *Dit*  
*Sied*<sup>2</sup> and use it for fertilizer.

(Braun, 1979:20)

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<sup>1</sup>Trans. 'that/the other side'.

<sup>2</sup>Trans. 'this side'.

ACHT MEYALLES  
 ("Eight Girls")

Tune: "On Top of Old Smokey"

Mary Kehler Isaac - K/ER  
 female clerks at Steinbach's  
 Five to a Dollar Store.

1. *Vie zent acht Meyalles  
 Ons yeit daut zou schlacht  
 Vie hahn keene Mahna  
 Daut ess doch nicht racht.*
2. *Vie fashtohni toh koake  
 Plautz, Kielke enn Borsht  
 En vann yie daut nicht gleiche  
 Dann Fohrma Vorsht.*
3. *Nehye keh vie uck aulla  
 Deh Neimeshien ruhsh  
 Mauns Bekze enn Klehda  
 Daut es ons zoh nusht.*
4. *Oulle Menshe dee zeie  
 Foarma moak vie aul nicht  
 Vie zent gauns fedorve  
 Ohba gleeft daut mau nicht.*
5. *Vie kehne bezorye  
 Eiya nehm vie uht  
 Fee foudre enn malki  
 Uhtmeste vann daut mott.*
6. *Ons zitt et doch aulla  
 Zou gauns gruhlich shmok  
 Enn bunte Klehda  
 Met dehm langen Rock.*
7. *Vie zent ye gaunz niemohdsh  
 Soppe bruck vie aul nicht  
 Ohba gleich ye daut oultmoutsh  
 Dann doh vie uck daut.*
8. *Vie zent emma gauns frintlich  
 Enn gleiche fehl shpohs  
 Ohba Velt bruck vie veinich  
 Viels vie zent aul beht oult.*



9. *Daut's meist tohm fasoage  
Daut kehna ons vell  
Viels koash ze vie aulla  
Tohm oprieme yuhn Prell.*
10. *Vann yie ons noch nicht velle  
Dann fehlt yuhnt ne Brell  
Vaut ha yie toh kloage  
Ohda mott vie yuent kroage?*

Translation:

1. We're eight eingle girls and,  
Unhappy are we,  
For we have no husbands  
And that isn't right.
2. We know how to cook well,  
Squares, noodles and soup  
And if you don't like those  
Then farmer's sausage.
3. We also all sew well,  
The sewing machine hums  
Men's trousers and dresses  
That's nothing to us.
4. Old people, they say that  
We're too old to farm,  
We're totally spoiled  
But just don't believe that.
5. We can do farm chores  
And gather the eggs  
Feed cattle and milk them,  
Shovel manure if need be.
6. We certainly all look  
So exceptionally fine  
In colorful dresses  
With their floor-length skirts.
7. We're certainly very modern  
We're quit wearing braids,  
But if you'd prefer us old-fashioned  
We'd also do that.
8. We're always so friendly  
And enjoy lots of fun  
But use little money  
Because we're already a bit old.

10. If you still don't want us  
Then you need some specks,  
Why do you complain  
Or do we have to beg you?

Comments:

This song was composed in the early 1970's by a group of female clerks working in the 'Five to a Dollar Store' in Steinbach. It was first performed at a Talent Night held in conjunction with the Hanover Fair. The women, in old-time costume, won first prize for their rendition of "*Acht Meyalles*".

In 1974, the song was part of the entertainment during the Mennonite Village Museum Week at Steinbach. Ed Krahn, curator of the Museum at that time, writes

Not having a Low German program ready, I called for any "freiwilliges" (voluntary selections). A Low German song was presented. Then I called for two singers. Two men volunteered: Henry Fast of Headingly, and Jake Peters of Morris. These two men had never met before. A guitar was obtained for them and with the help of the audience, they sang the following song. (Krahn, 1974:1)

The publication of the words of "*Acht Meyalles*" in this newspaper account may explain why it is now the most frequently performed and cited Low German song written in the past two decades. In 1978 it was performed at such varied functions as a Low German fund raising evening sponsored by the Ladies Auxiliary of the Stanley Agricultural Fair in Winkler, the Horndean Reunion, the Shannon Festival in Lowe Farm, and a Singles Retreat held at Red Rock Camp.

Audiences, consistently amused by the song, responded to both the lyrics and the manner of performance.

The song is the lament of eight domestically skilled single women. They exhibit all the ideals traditionally expected of a marriageable young woman in a rural community: they are tidy, economical housekeepers who can cook and sew as well as do farm chores. They are friendly and fashionable, yet modest and accomodating. But, possessing all these virtues has not granted them their just reward - a husband.

The irony, and consequently, the humor of the song arises from the fact that no self-respecting woman with all these qualities would bemoan her fate in public. Well-meaning friends and neighbors might wonder audibly about her singleness, but she would discreetly refrain from expressing any desire for a husband.

This idea is reflected in the manner of performance. When the song is performed, especially by single women, they are invariably costumed to hide their identity. At the Stanley Fair program, for example, the song was sung by a group of women, attired like 'typical old maids' of the 1940's or 50's, some looking skinny and frumpy, others rather buxom. Evidently the ideas in this song can be acceptably be expressed within the community only with the anonymity provided by a dramatic presentation.

Frequently certain lines of the text are dramatized for additional humor. At the Stanley Fair presentation, the singers, all seamstresses by profession, held up a pair of grossly over-sized men's trousers at the appropriate spot in the text (vs. 3).

The manner of vocal performance has also been used for humorous effect. One style of vocal performance imitates the "Vorsaenger" or song-leader tradition which is still in use in some Mennonite churches. In this tradition, a male singer(s), with a good voice and upright character, 'lines out' the song; i.e., he sings one line, to be followed by the congregation singing that line of the song. Singing in this style is often done at a very slow tempo with a nasal vocal quality. This slow nasal singing adds poignancy, and consequently irony to the "*Acht Meyalles*" lament.

The lyric content of "*Acht Meyalles*" precludes that the song must be sung by women. Yet, it is of interest to note that women sing this secular lament in a traditionally male religious vocal idiom. The sacred-secular dichotomy is of interest, of course, but it may also be an indirect comment on the lack of traditional channels for female, particularly single female self-expression within certain Mennonite churches. There are still numerous southern Manitoba churches in which only men attend the business meetings. It is presumed that women are not interested in these mundane matters, and that if they were, they would probably agree with their husband's point of view. In a church community in which a woman's only voice is through her husband, the single woman has no voice. The expression of this sexual inequality may not have been the intent of the singers imitating the "Vorsaenger" tradition, but it may be an explanation of an unintended result.

## MEYALLEN GRUPP LEEDA

## (Girls Group Songs)

R

A short newspaper article in February of 1973 announced to the public of southern Manitoba that

*De Junges enn Mejalles von dee Hoch School raeknen opp eene Reis noam Wasten to foaren... On Jeld to vadeenen, stallen dee twee plautdietsche Jespraecke opp, dee noch neenig eha vaejedraecht' (RRVE, 1973:5).*

Because the dramas chosen were not long enough to provide an entire evenings' entertainment, the drama director, Tina Kehler, asked a *Meyallen Grupp* or group of girls to sing several songs to round out the program. The group was a double trio consisting of Rhona Sawatzky, Audrey Dick, Eleanor Bueckert, Adela Sawatzky, Donna Fast and Kathy Hiebert. These girls had sung together in the past at school and church functions.

Together with Mrs. Kehler and Adela's mother, the girls set about finding and translating songs for the Low German evening. They chose Reuben Epp's "*O Begrowt mie Nich*" and decided to write their own versions of several other songs. Since nobody appears to have kept the words, we can only comment on the general impression left by the songs.

The first song "*Mien Ola*" or "My old Man" is probably a translation of "My Bonnie lies over the Ocean", although this has not been verified.

"*Polly Volley Duhdel a ll de Day*" is similar enough to its English counterpart to remove all doubt. Rather than translating this song, the girls sang it in English with a Low German immigrant accent.

The final song "*Oh Zusche Auna*" was translated into Low German imitating the technique Rueben Epp used in "*O begrowt mie Nich*", or "Oh bury me not on the lone prairie". Epp used successively more colorful terms for the word 'bury'. The girls translating "*Oh Susannah!*" used successively more dramatic expressions for the word 'cry'. Beginning with the usual word for cry, '*hiel*', they moved to '*roa*' meaning howling like an animal. The verbal humor, reinforced by a melodramatic singing style caused some of the audience to laugh until tears began trickling down their cheeks.

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<sup>1</sup>Trans. "The boys and girls of the high school intend to go on a trip to the west... In order to earn money, (they) are presenting two Low German dramas which have never before been presented."

The performance of the *Meyallen Grupp*, or lovely ladies, as they were called (Martens, 1973:1) was enhanced by their costuming! They were attired like frumpy old maids: ill-fitting dresses, long crumpled skirts with uneven hemlines - during the mini-skirt days, hats in an era when it was unfashionable to wear them, and tattered shopping bags and handbags. In addition, some of them wore spectacles in order to read the words of the songs, written on large crumpled sheets of looseleaf paper.

The final touch of humor came at the end of their performance, when one of the *Meyalles* leaned toward the audience and said, "*Vie zent noch aulla nich befriet.*" (We are still all single.) Immediately there was a sound of stamping feet as several of the stage hands ran the length of the centre aisle of the auditorium, jumped up on stage, and pursued the screaming *Meyalles*. These Low German evenings do provide the opportunity for the expression of a unique dramatic aspect of the community.



O BEGROWT MIE NICH OPP'E WIEDE STAPP

("Oh bury me not on the wide open field")

Tune: "Oh bury me not on the lone prairie"

Lyrics: Reuben Epp

Published in Epp, 1972:100

Translation:

"Oh bury me not on the wide open field,  
For it it rains there, I'll get soaked through."  
From lips so pale, did come these words,  
As an old, old guy (crack) lay down to die.

Oh, don't cover (push over) men, near the donkey's pool,  
Or they will howl, the whole night through.  
And don't cover (claw dirt over) me,  
where the wind just blows,  
For if its drafty, I'll come tearing (run fast) out.

And don't heave lumps (of mud over me) near our little  
creek,  
When it snows in winter, they go sliding there.  
Oh, dig dirt o'er me, in a quiet place,  
Under our oak, near our blacksmith shed.

Comments:

Thou some of the sentiments of the dying cowboy are retained in this Low German version of the song, new dimensions have been added. There is a change of scene from the lone prairie with its howling coyotes, to the farm with its howling donkeys.

The biggest change is in the tone of the song. By beginning with the usual, respectable term for bury, and moving through several progressively less-refined terms for the burial of a person, Epp adds a humorous twist to the song of the dying old fellow. In fact, by the end of the song, one can almost envision the dead coming back to life to defend himself against the onslaught.

In March 1973, six high school girls sang this song along with several others as part of a Low German fund raising event for an educational tour by Garden Valley Collegiate Institute students of Winkler. One of the other Low German songs, a translation of "Oh Susannah", was modelled on Epp's translation of "Oh bury me not", with the words for 'cry' like the words for 'bury' becoming progressively more colorful.

## MIEN HEEYA

("My bonnie")

Tune: "My Bonnie Lies Over  
the Ocean"Joan Sudermann  
Winkler, Manitoba  
February 1979

1. *Mien Heeya licht ehva dehm Riefa,  
Mien Heeya licht ehva dee Zee,  
Mien Heeya licht ehva dehm Riefa,  
Oh bring trig mien Heeya noh mie.*

## Chorus:

*Bring trig, Bring trig,  
Oh bring trig mien Heeya noh mie, noh mie,  
Bring trig, Bring trig,  
Oh bring trig mien Heeya noh mie.*

2. *Oh puest dee Vint ehva dehm Riefa,  
Oh puest due Vint ehva dehm Zee,  
Oh puest due Vint ehva dehm Riefa,  
En bring trig mien Heeya noh mie.*
3. *Feaye Nacht aus eck lag opp mien Chesse,  
Feaye Nacht aus eck lag opp mien Bad,  
Feaye Nacht aus eck lag opp mien Chesse,  
Dann dreemd eck mien Heeya via dout.*

## Translation:

First three verses and chorus of "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean," except that ocean is translated first as 'river' (Riefa) and then as 'Sea' (Zee).

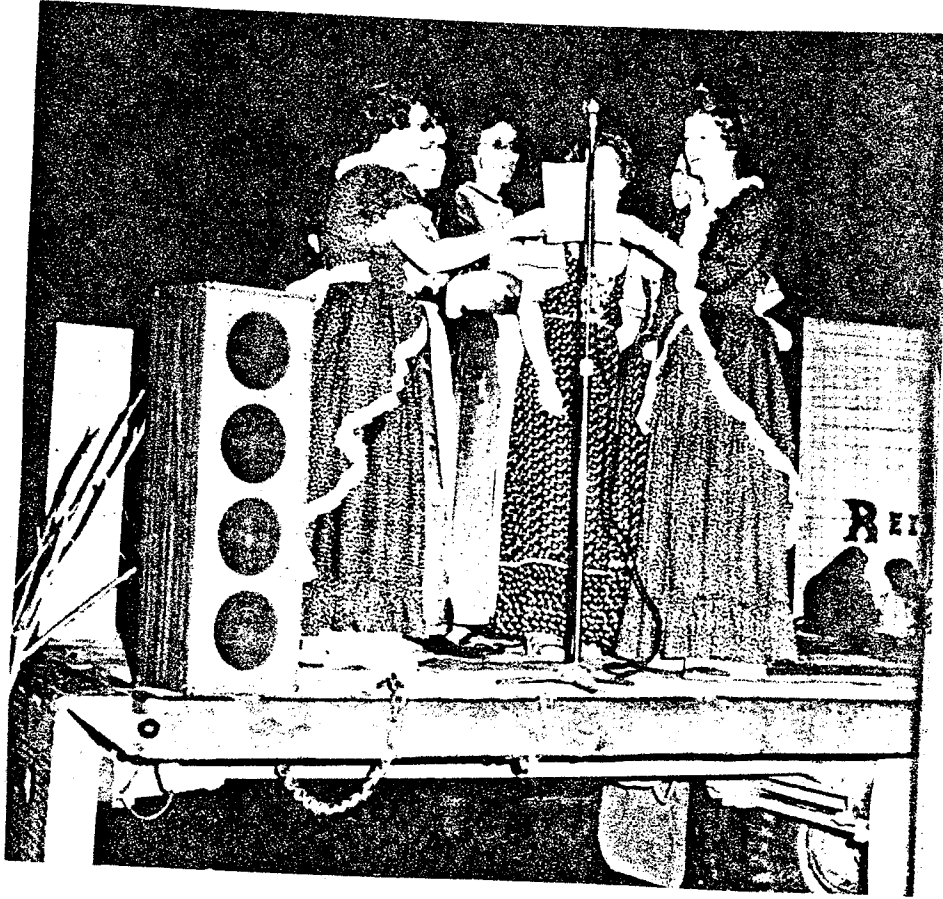
## Comments:

Along with "Nea'yn Meyalles"<sup>1</sup> and "O Begrowft mie nich",<sup>2</sup> "Mien Heeya" was part of the entertainment at a Low German fund raising event in Winkler in 1976-77 schoolyear. The girls who sang the song

<sup>1</sup>There were nine girls in the group, so they changed the wording from "Acht" (eight) to "Nea'yn Meyalles" ("Nine Girls").

<sup>2</sup>"Oh bury me not on the lone prairier" by Rueben Epp, (Epp, 1972:100).

were helping to raise funds for the annual high school tour, so translated this song to sing along with the other two.



Female singing group in 'old-time' costume, performing at the Reinland Centennial Celebration.

(Zacharias, 1976:314)



ALL YOU ETTA  
 ("All you ate")

Tune: "Alouette"

Neu Bergthal Community Picnic - K  
 Neu Bergthal, Manitoba  
 July 1, 1978

Chorus: All you et-ta, Think of all you et-ta,  
 All you et-ta, Think of all you ett.

1. Shin-ke-fleesh en Plue-me-mous,  
 Shin-ke-fleesh en Plue-me-mous,  
 Shin-ke-fleesh, Shin-ke fleesh,  
 Plue-me-mous, Plue-me-mous, Oh!

2. Kommstborsht met Bottabrout
3. V'reneke met Shmaundfat
4. Portzelche met Sierop
5. Bobbat en Heenabrohde.

## Translation:

## Chorus:

All you ate, think of all you ate,  
 All you ate, think of all you ate.

1. Ham and plum (fruit) soup,  
    Ham and plum soup,  
    Ham, ham,  
    Plum soup, plum soup, oh.
2. Cabbage borsch with buttered bread
3. Cheese pockets with cream gravy
4. New Year's cookies (deep fried) with syrup
5. Stuffing with roast chicken.

## Comments:

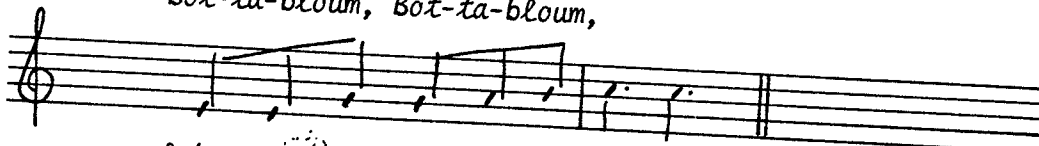
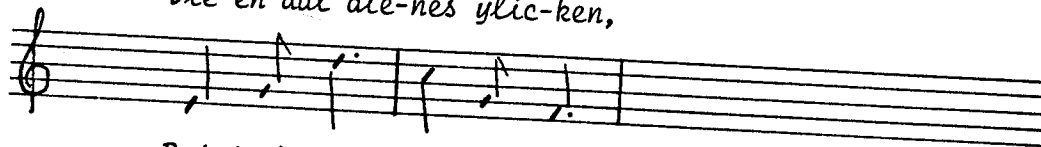
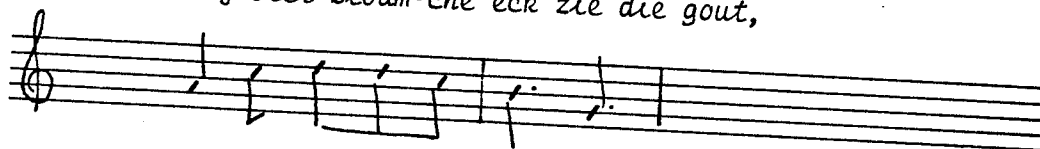
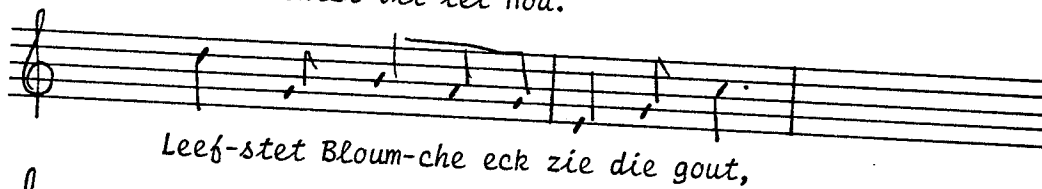
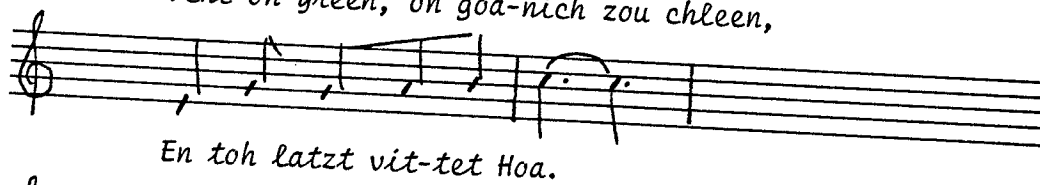
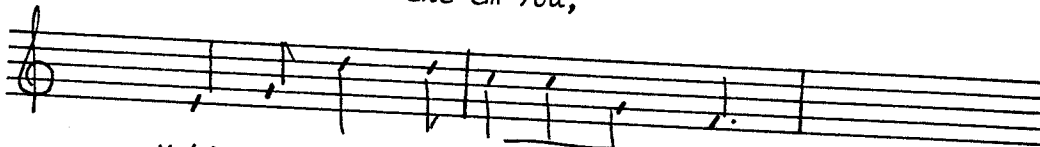
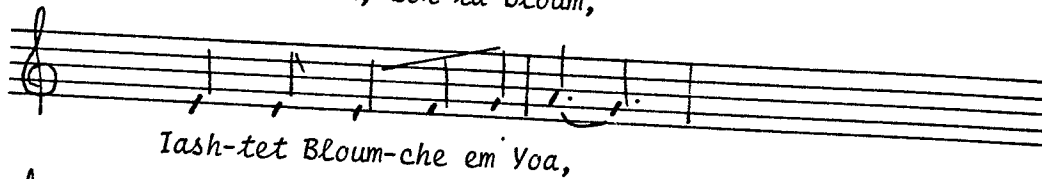
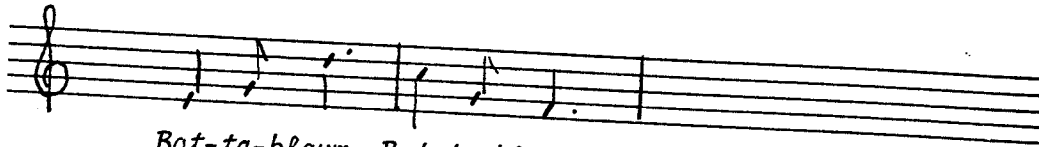
This song was sung in sing-a-long style, with the leader singing the underlined parts and the choir and audience the other parts, at the annual Neu Bergthal Community Picnic in June, 1978. The choir consisted of singers from Neu Bergthal, Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld, small Mennonite villages near Altona. The leader was a member of the choir who had happened to run across the song, but also had a fine voice.

The song deals with a favorite Mennonite pasttime: eating, or, perhaps, even overeating. (After the final verse, the choir, groaning audibly, said "*O Buckveedoag*", or "oh my aching stomach".) The foods listed are traditional Mennonite dishes, some of which they adopted in the Ukraine. It appears that there are no social restrictions on overeating as there are on the use of alcohol or tobacco, for example.

BOTTABLOUM  
 ("Dandelion")

Tune: "Edelweiss"  
 Lyrics: Gerhard Ens

by Gerhard Enns - R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 November 1978



## Translation:

Dandelion, Dandelion, first little flower of the year,  
Yellow and green, and not so small,  
And at the end, white hair.  
Dearest flower I love you so,  
You and all those like you,  
Dandelion, Dandelion, please don't let me smell you any-  
more.

## Comments:

This parody of "Edelweiss" received its premiere performance at the Mennonite Festival of Art and Music, an annual fund raising event sponsored by the women's auxiliary of Westgate Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg. It was sung by several nieces of the author, Gerhard Ens, Mennonite educator and writer, who hosts a weekly Low German radio program, entitled "Gerhard Ens Commentary" on CFAM, a southern Manitoba radio station. "*Bottabloum*" is Ens' reaction to the pernicious dandelion which annually invades Manitoba lawns.

GOUN OHVENT MIEN FRINT  
 ("Good evening my friend")

round song

CMBC faculty - K, R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba

Goun Oh-vent mien Frint, vou shteit et met die?

Goun Oh-vent, Goun Oh-vent, Goun Oh-vent.

Eck vensh die fehl vleck, en Mack-lich-keit uck,

Goun Oh-vent, Goun Oh-vent, Goun Oh-vent.

Translation:

Good evening my friend, How are things with you?  
 Good evening, good evening, good evening.  
 I wish you much luck, and also comfort.  
 Good evening, good evening, good evening.

Comments:

Canadian Mennonite Bible College faculty and their families learned this song at the annual faculty retreat one September several years ago. It supposedly came to the faculty through Neil Matthies, brother-in-law of the George Wiebe's of the Music Department at CMBC.

GOLDEN OHVENT  
("Good Evening")

Tune: "Good Night Ladies"

Mrs. Susie Penner - R  
Winkler, Manitoba  
November 1978

1. *Gouden Ohvent Mumches, Gouden Ohvent Oumches,  
Gouden Ohvent aulla,  
Vie bringen nuh ons Fast.  
Vie zent ons aulla velkohm hia,  
velkohm hia, velkohm hia,  
Vie zent ons aulla velkohm hia,  
hohpt yuhnt yeit daut gout.*
2. *Goude Nacht Mumches, Goude Nacht Oumches,  
Goude Nacht aulla,  
Ons Fast es nuh toh Eng.  
Shaftig foa vie nuh noh Huhs,  
nuh, noh Huhs, nuh noh Huhs,  
Shaftig foa vie nuh noh Huhs,  
Shlohpt aulla sheen yezunt.*

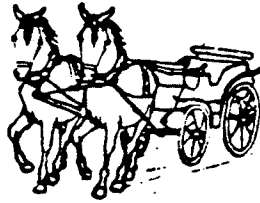
Translation:

1. Good evening ladies (wives), good evening men  
(husbands),  
Good evening to all,  
We now present our celebration.  
We bid you all a welcome here,  
welcome here, welcome here,  
We bid you all a welcome here,  
we hope you have a good time.
2. Good night ladies, good night gentlemen,  
Good night everyone,  
Our celebration's over.  
Happily we now go home,  
now go home, now go home,  
Happily we now go home,  
Sleep well (healthily) all of you.

Comments:

This parody of "Good Night Ladies" was sung at a Low German program presented by the Ladies of the Stanley Agricultural Society in Winkler, October 23, 1978. A group of women, directed by Susie Penner

who wrote the song, sang it at this annual fund raising event. The first verse introduced the program of Low German skits, poems and dramas, and the second verse concluded the program.



REUNION SONGS - contemporary



## THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

Tune: "This Land is Your Land", Landmark, Manitoba  
 by Woody Guthrie June 1, 1978  
 Lyrics: Heischratije, 1974 WPH/PDL-6<sup>1</sup>

1. *Don kaume Mennoniete, es nich toh beyriepe,  
 Ziedelde opp'm Launt, Naume Ehvahaunt,  
 Trock dee Shpeckeldroht, Fraut daut Knacksot,  
 Dit Launt, daut es fea die en mie.*
2. *Dit Launt es dien Launt, Dit Launt es mien Launt,  
 Pra'Rohs bet Rousenuat, Just about uhtyebuat,  
 Nuh ha vie hundat Yoa, Nuh's aules ohpen Boa,  
 Dit Launt daut es fea die en mie.*

## Translation:

1. Then came the Mennonite, can hardly be fathomed,  
 He settled on the land, soon took overhand,  
 Fenced with barbed wire, devoured sunflower seeds,  
 This land, its made for you and me.
2. This land is your land, this land is my land,  
 Prairie Rose til Rosenort, Almost gone bankrupt,  
 Now we have hundred years, now everything's open plain,  
 This land, its made for you and me.

## Comments:

"Kanadier" Mennonites on the East Reserve celebrated the centennial of their migration to Canada in 1974. One of these celebrations was held in the village of Landmark in June of that year. Pioneer history was recalled through speeches and song.

One of these songs was a political satire entitled "This Land Ain't Your Land." It describes how Canada has been successively claimed by Norsemen, French, Native people, English and finally U.S. investors. The two Low German verses found here were added to this parody by a group called "De Heischraitje en de Villa Honig" (The Locusts and Wild Honey), a male vocal group accompanied by electric guitar, at that time (The Carillon, 1974c:8). For their rendition of this song at the annual Landmark Collegiate Variety night that same month, they were awarded the talent trophy (The Carillon, 1974b:7).

<sup>1</sup>Also recorded on "Sprie", 1978 as "Dit Laund".

Several symbolic references in the song capture one's interest. The barbed wire fences may reflect land claims in general, or Mennonite exclusiveness in particular. Sunflower seeds, a Russian Mennonite distinctive, may be taken to represent the 'peculiar' customs Mennonites brought with them. The reference to 'Prairie Rose til Rosenort' informs us that we are talking of only a small segment of the Manitoba Mennonite population here. These towns are the boundary of the "Kleine Gemeinde" (Little Church) now known as the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC). Finally, the 'open plain' reminds us of the impact of pioneer agriculture on a once wooded area of the country.

Another version of "This Land is your Land" was composed by a "Russlaender" male singing group for the Reinland Centennial Celebrations in the West Reserve in the summer of 1975.

*Dit Darp es Reinlaunt, dit Darp es Reinlaunt,  
Von ne oule Feefers, bet de lange Dveagus,  
Fon Vielash Yoikob, bet Verner Ensen, (Henrick  
Jauns en)*

*Dit Darp es Tues fea die en mie.*

Translation:

This village is Reinland, This village is Reinland,  
From the old cattle pasture, til the long cross-  
roads,  
From Jacob Wielers', til Verner Enses' (Henry  
Janzens')

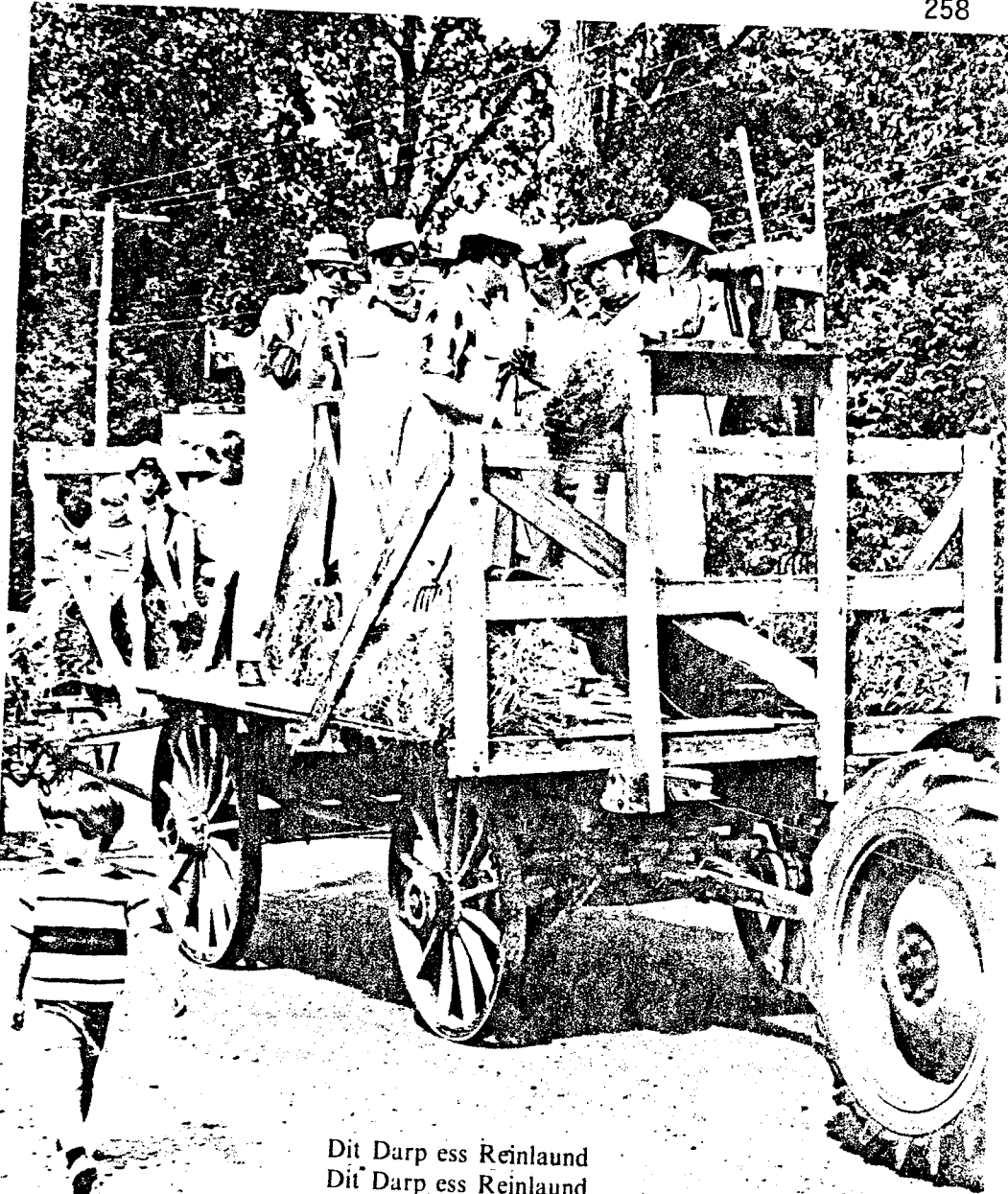
This village is home for you and me.

Comments:

Here we have yet another way of saying 'this land is my land', and this particular place is my home.

The original 1975 version reads "from Jacob Wielers'. til Henry Janzens' place.' By the time the song was sung at the 1978 Ens family reunion in Reinland, Verner Ens had moved into the Janzen residence, so the words were changed to fit the facts.

The reference to the old cattle pasture confirms that Reinland is a fairly old village, since the custom of having a common pasture in the village was a custom brought by the Mennonites from Russia, but was discontinued in the villages of more recent origin.



Dit Darp ess Reinlaund  
 Dit Darp ess Reinlaund  
 Von'e oole Veehsenz  
 Bott de lange Dwäagauss  
 Von-Wielasch Joakob,  
 Bott Hendrik Jaunzen  
 Dit Darp ess tūs se die' enn mie.

(Zacharias, 1976:319)

Hearing this song about Reinland, inspired my father, Mr. A. C. Klassen, to write a similar poem about his home, the town of Winkler. He composed the song while driving along his school bus route.

*Disse Shtaudt es Vinkla, Disse Shtaudt es Vinkla,  
Fom Vach twee'n-dartich, bettem Kloppenshehlgrunt,  
Fom Vohtatohrem, bette achte Gaus zieden,  
Disse Shtaudt es Tues fea die en mie.*

Translation:

This town is Winkler, This town is Winkler,  
From Highway 32, til the golf course, (knocking-play-  
ground)  
From the water tower, til eighth street south,  
This town is home for you and me.

Not to be outdone by his father, my teenaged brother, Arnold, decided to write his own version based on his rather limited knowledge of Low German.

*Dis Darp est Vinkla, Dis Darp est Vinkla,  
Fom Busfoara Siemens, Tohm zued Zied Shell,  
Fom Yuk Yuk Eelies, tohm Monarch Machinery,  
Dis Darp ist Tues for you und mie.*

Translation:

This village is Winkler, This village is Winkler,  
From busdriver Siemens, to the south side Shell,  
From Yuck Yuck Elias, to the Monarch Machinery,  
This village is home for you and me.

Comments:

There is both intended and unintended humor in this version. The mixture of Low German, High German and English in itself is amusing. The use of Low German by an English speaking teenager usually signals social criticism.

Inhabitants of small towns often take great pains to distinguish their town from a village. Calling a small town a village, then is certainly a derogatory comment on the town, and reflects the critical attitude of teenagers in the community, especially to ethnocentrism.

Two examples of unintended humor must be noted. The first is the fact that the boundaries of the town are taken along the diagonal rather than from east to west and north to south as one would expect.

The second is the reference to Mr. Elias. No negative comment on Mr. Elias is intended. In fact, Arnold has great respect for his former

Spanish teacher. Rather, the comment is on Arnold's knowledge of the language, and his attitude towards it. Rendering the initial 'J' as *Yuck*, rather than *Yutt*, is a matter of misunderstanding. It just so happens that the misunderstanding suggests a totally different meaning, adding a touch of humor.

These family contributions were unsolicited, but may have been fostered by the total immersion program in Low German songs to which my poor family have been subjected as a result of my research.



(Klippenstein and Toews, 1977:311)

## BALLAD OF PETER HARMS

Tune: "Stenka Razin"  
 Lyrics: Menno Wiebe, July  
 1975  
 (first verse by  
 H. G. Ens)

Menno Wiebe - R  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 RCC/PDL-4

Hoa-rem's Pee-ta shpehlt em Zaunt-hock,  
 En dehm fien ye-zehv-dem Graund,  
 Hoa-rem's Pee-ta shpehlt em Zaunt-hock,  
 En dehm fien ye-zehv-dem Graund.

2. Enmohl yingk hee Shtapmiez shlenyen,  
 Met en langen Bingabaunt,  
 Teckt dehn Baunt, de Shtapmiez piepten,  
 Riehd de Shtapmiez fon daut Launt.
3. Hoarems Peeta shmeet en curve Baul,  
 Ehva home base shmeet he dehn,  
 Cheena kunn dehn curve Baul traffen,  
 Cheena kaum opp first base nopp.
4. Hoarems Peeta yingk noh Zuesche,  
 Peetash Zues fon Gnohdentohl,  
 Hoarems Peeta naum zich Zuesche,  
 Fried zich Zues fon Gnohdentohl.
5. Hoarems Peeta vort en Prehdya,  
 Liad de Menshen grout en chleen,  
 Vort en gauns ernoarya Rehdna,  
 Liad de Menshen grout en chleen.

## Translation:

1. Peter Harms played in the sandbox,  
In the finely sifted ground,  
Peter Harms played in the sandbox,  
In the finely sifted sand.
2. Once he went catching (slinging) gophers,  
With a long piece of bindertwine,  
Pulled the string, the gophers squeaked,  
Cleaned the gophers off the land.
3. Peter Harms threw a curve ball,  
Over home base he threw it,  
No one could hit (meet) the curve ball,  
No one got onto first base.
4. Peter Harms went to (courted) Susie,  
Susie Peters from Gnadenthal,  
Peter Harms took (himself) Susie,  
Married Susie from Gnadenthal.
5. Peter Harms became a preacher,  
Taught the people big and small,  
Became a rather outstanding speaker,  
Taught the people big and small.

## Comments:

The "Ballad of Peter Harms", a historical ballad, is the story of any boy who has lived in a Manitoban Mennonite village: playing, catching gophers, youth, romance and choosing a vocation.

The one activity which dates this song is that of catching gophers. For young boys growing up in the 1920's and 30's, this was a favorite pasttime. They would go to fairly high lying land, which seemed to be favored by gophers. The boys would lay a bindertwine noose over the gopher's hole, run the remaining twine along the ground, and lie down flat on the ground holding the twine while awaiting a curious gopher. When a gopher popped his head out of his hole, the boy pulled the string, strangling the gopher. The gopher's tail would be cut off and brought to the municipal office. The municipalities, attempting to reduce the gopher population, paid a bounty of 1¢ per tail, considered as a substantial allowance by the boys. Eye witnesses report catching a number of tailless gophers!

One other custom deserves comment: inter-village romances. These appear to have been fairly common and at times were blamed for some of the rivalry between villages.

The melody used for this ballad is a Russian tune, familiar to most "Russlaender". Informants report two different sets of lyrics for this tune. The one is the story of an abandoned orphan who searches for shelter on a cold winter's night. The other is a ballad about a Cossack king, courting a Persian princess aboard ship. Tiring of her company, he throws her overboard. In any case, the melody was well known among "Russlaender", giving the song an added historical depth for "Russlaender" listeners and singers.

The song was one of several Low German songs sung at the Village of Reinland Centennial Celebration in 1975. These songs were sung by a male octet, in unison and harmony, accompanied by guitar. Included in this group were the lyricists Henry Ens and Menno Wiebe. Included in the audience, was Peter Harms, the subject of the song.





## LEGEND OF THE GAUSSESHLINVELS

Tune: "Es lebe Gott allein  
in mir"

Lyrics: Menno Wiebe,  
July 1975

(Refrain by H. G. Ens)

Menno Wiebe - R  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
RCC/PDL-4

## Refrain:

Fe fief Sent han,  
Fe Fief Sent trig,  
Fe tien Sent han en trig. (repeat refrain 4 times)

1. Em Darp fon Reinlaunt gauf 'ne Moud,  
En Reinlaunt gauf 'ne Moud.<sup>1</sup>  
Rom drieven via dee darpshe Moud,  
En Reinlaunt gauf 'ne Moud.<sup>2</sup>
2. Pete Jerry Rolston,<sup>3</sup> Freasen Dohft,  
Zachariesen Jake<sup>3</sup> en Hein.<sup>1</sup>  
Ze drieven rom, en hauden zich dom,  
En Reinlaunt drieven ze rom.  
Ensen Ohbraun en Klohs Letkemaun,  
Hoarems Yash en Thiesses Yehaun.
3. De Gausseshlینگels knackten Zoht,  
Ze knackten Zoht bet loht.<sup>1</sup>  
Ze knackten Zoht bet zeeya loht,  
Ze knackten Zoht bet loht.  
De Gausseshlینگels knackten Zoht,  
Ze knackten Zoht bet loht.
4. Pete Yurchuck<sup>3</sup> haud 'ne oule Koa,  
Pete Yurchuck haud 'ne Koa.<sup>1</sup>  
'Ne oule Koa, met en dommet yefoa  
Pete Yurchuk haud 'ne Koa,  
Pete Yurchuk haud 'ne oule Koa,  
Pete Yurchuk haud 'ne Koa.
5. De Gausseshlینگels vullen met  
Noh Haskett fuaren ze.<sup>1</sup>  
De oule Koa, met en dommet yefoa  
Noh Haskett fuaren ze.  
Vaut kost de ride?  
Yunges zieht yesheit!  
Pete Yurchuck shtallt den Pries.

Repeat Refrain.

<sup>1</sup> Repeat first two lines.

<sup>2</sup> Repeat last two lines.

<sup>3</sup> The names, Pete Jerry Rolston, Jake and Pete Yurchuck retain their English spelling and pronunciation.

## Translation:

## Refrain:

For five cents there,  
 For five cents back,  
 For ten cents there and back.

1. In the village of Reinland there was a custom (mode),  
 In Reinland there was a mode.  
 Driving (fooling) around was the village custom,  
 In Reinland there was a mode.
2. Pete Jerry Rolston, David Froese,  
 Zachariases Jake and Henry.  
 They drove around, and acted dumb,  
 In Reinland they drove around.  
 Abram Ens and Klaus Letkemann,  
 Jake Harms and John Thiessen.
3. The village rascals cracked seeds,<sup>1</sup>  
 They cracked seeds til late (at night),  
 They cracked seeds very late,  
 They cracked seeds til late.  
 The village rascals cracked seeds,  
 They cracked seeds til late.
4. Pete Yurchuck had an old car,  
 Pete Yurchuck had a car.  
 An old car, with a crazy drive (way of driving)  
 Pete Yurchuck had a car.  
 Pete Yurchuck had an old car,  
 Pete Yurchuck had a car.
5. The village rascals wanted (to go) along,  
 To Haskett they would drive.  
 The old car, with a crazy drive,  
 To Haskett they would drive.  
 'What costs the ride?'  
 Boys behave yourselves,  
 Pete Yurchuck sets the price.

---

<sup>1</sup>An anonymous High German poem in Heinrich Friesen's Russian Mennonite folklore collection describes how the Mennonites adopted the custom of eating sunflower seeds in Russia. At first they were critical of the Russian peasants who sat and ate sunflower seeds all day long. Then they tried it. By the time the Mennonite men went away for government service, sunflower seeds were such a Mennonite institution, that eating them made them think of their loved ones at home (Friesen micro-film).

## Comments:

At one time, Pete Yurchuck, an older bachelor in the village of Reinland, operated a little store in which he sold seeds, candy, cigarettes and the occasional case of beer. This store became the hang-out for the local *Gausseshlinyels*, male youths known for their *rom drieven* or 'fooling around'. According to the song, the *Gausseshlinyels* cracked seeds when they gathered at the store evenings. The spoken introduction preceding the performance of this song at the Reinland Centennial Celebrations, indicates this is a euphemism for more colorful forms of entertainment, like telling jokes or playing pranks.

Pete Yurchuck, one of the few villagers who had his own car, would take other village boys with him to Haskett, which had a bigger store. However, as the song says, he would charge for the ride: five cents there, and five cents, back, or ten cents there and back. One can safely assume that this song dates back several decades, to a time when it was unusual for a village boy to own a car, and to a time when gas was a little cheaper than it is today.

Although village life was endemic to the Mennonite way of life both in Russia and in southern Manitoba, the references to the car, place the song within the Canadian context. A song composed in Russia probably would have referred to horses, rather than to cars.

There are several sources of humor in the song. One is the colorful expressions like *Gausseshlinyels*, who *hauden zich domm*, in the old car *met en dommet yefoa*. Though one hears these expressions in ordinary conversation, one would not expect to hear them in poetry or song.

The refrain too is humorous in several ways. The four-fold repetition of the words suggests a parallel with the often aimless behavior referred to in the verses of the song. Also, the ambiguity of the refrain when sung preceding the verses, provides occasion for humor. To the uninitiated listener, the first singing of the refrain, makes little sense. This listener, however, appreciates the refrain when it is repeated after the last verse.

This humorous song also contains comments on social structure in a village context. The individual who had an economic advantage, a car, also had a political advantage, the right to set the price. With this right came the right to regulate behavior as well. The other significant aspect of social structure described in the song is the solidarity provided by the seemingly loosely structured *Gausseshlinyels* group. Participation in this group appears to have been a significant rite of passage from childhood to adulthood in the community, gauging from the comments about 'cracking seeds'.

Some of the *Gausseshlinyels* referred to in the song were among the singers when this song was first performed in Reinland in 1975. Like the other Reinland songs, it was also sung at the G. G. H. Ens family reunion in 1978.

## BALLAD OF THE DUEVENMEISTA

Tune: "For He's a Jolly Good  
Fellow"

Menno Wiebe - R  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
RCC/PDL-4

Lyrics: Menno Wiebe,  
July 1975

1. *Bie yunge Ohbraum Pehkkaevs (repeat 3 times)  
Doa gauf 'ne Dueveyacht.*
2. *Vieben Art de kaum noh Dueven  
Bie Pehkkaevs enne Shien.*
3. *Doa huckt de fussy Deffat  
Dort huach oppen Behn.*
4. *Ons Art dee yreep dehn Deffat  
En shtopt dehn en een Zack.*
5. *Hee muack en Duevenklohtche  
En poad dehn Deffat op.*
6. *Daut gauf boult fussye Duefches  
Dee fluaghen enne Loft.*

## Translation:

1. At young Abram Paetkau's  
There was a pigeon hunt.
2. Art Wiebe, he came for pigeons  
To the shed at Paetkau's.
3. There sits the beige male pigeon  
Up high near the roof.
4. Our Art, he caught the male pigeon  
And put it into a sack.
5. He made a pigeon cage  
And paired up the male pigeon.
6. There soon were small beige pigeons  
Who flew up into the air.

## Comments:

When this song was sung at the Reinland Centennial Celebration in 1975, it was dedicated to the *yunge Ohbraum Peythaevs* or 'the young Abram Paetkaus!' The lyricist, who introduced the song, said that

Mr. Paetkau was an excellent farmer. He lived just north of the village. Later on he moved to the city, became urbanized, the city of Reinland. He had this excellent flock of pigeons which he willed over to us (Wiebe family). We got the king of the crop and that was '*de fussy Deffat.*'

In some Mennonite families, pigeons were raised either as a hobby or sometimes for food. This was probably more common among the less well-to-do families.

Many of the men who sang this song at the Centennial Celebration, are teachers or businessmen. For this occasion, they were attired in striped overalls - traditional farmer's garb. To accentuate their role, they rode into the village on a hayrack, holding pitch forks. On stage, the male octet was accompanied by a guitar, as they sang both unison and an improvised four part harmony. Most of those singing in the octet are well known in their communities for their musical abilities.

In addition to its performance at the Reinland Centennial, the song was also sung at the G. G. H. Ens family reunion in July 1978. Several of the sons of this family who have been long time residents in the village, sang in the initial performance of the song, and repeated it at the reunion as part of the entertainment, recalling their history.



The former Reinland *Gauss eshlinjels* .

(Klippenstein and Toews, 1977:311)

MIEN DARP - BLOUMENFELT  
 ("My Village - Blumenfeld")

Tune: "Something to Sing About" Peter G. Elias - K  
 by Oscar Brand  
 Lyrics: Peter G. Elias, 1978  
 Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 August 1978  
 BCC-III

Introduction:

Vie zing-en fon een Darp, Vie zing-en fon een Darp,  
 Vie zing-en fon een Darp, Daut Blou-men-felt!  
 (3 part harmony)

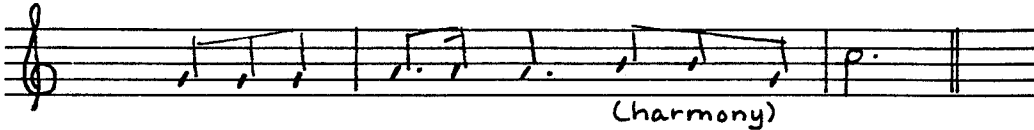
1. Onse Fohdash de kaumen fon yantzied daut groute Mea,  
 Zochten noh Frieheit en noh meeya Launt.  
 En de Pembina Dree-ack - doa lehden ze Darpa uet,  
 Doa licht daut Bloumenfelt, doa zie eck Tues.

Chorus:

- Fon de Leacht bat de Dveagaus,  
 fon de Viedshtap bat dehn Choikenhoff,  
 Nicht viet fon de Rie vua daut Faryoash Vohta rant.  
 Vua daut Graus zou fehl yreena zit,  
 Vohta fehl sheena schmact,  
 Hia en dit Bloumenfelt, hia feel eck Tues.
2. En daut Darp Bloumenfelt vaussen Papell en Socka Beem,  
 Pluemen en Choashen Beem, Ohlbasse Shtued;  
 Uck Reboabah en Zuaromp Shtued  
 Chresbea en Himbea Shtruck,  
 Vaust en daut Bloumenfelt, Dit ess mien Tues.
  3. En daut Darp Bloumentfelt  
 vua de Trua-Doov en Routbuck zingt,  
 Buat hia met Shpoalingk en Shvaulem zien Nast.  
 Vua dee Bie sheene Blumen fingt,  
 Em Fahryoa de Amzel zingt,  
 Hia en daut Bloumenfelt, hia es mien Tues.

4. En daut Darp Bloumenfelt,  
 vua de Envohna frindlich zent,  
 Hia yeit de Yasst daut Shpa tsieren zou sheen,  
 Vua daut Faspa fehl sheena shmackt,  
 De Nohba zien Nohba chant,  
 Hia en daut Bloumenfelt, Dit blift mien Tues.

Coda:



Hia en daut Blou-men-felt, Hia feel eck Tues!

Translation:

Introduction:

We sing of a village, we sing of a village,  
 We sing of a village, That Blumenfeld!

1. Our fathers came from the other side of the great waters  
 Looking for freedom and for more land.  
 In the Pembina Triangle, they laid out villages,  
 There lies Blumenfeld, there I'm at home.

Chorus:

From the vale to the crossroads,  
 From the wide fields to the cemetery (churchyard),  
 Not far from the brook where the spring waters flow.  
 Where the grass looks so much greener,  
 And the water tastes much better,  
 Here in this Blumenfeld, here I feel at home.

2. In that village of Blumenfeld grow poplars and maples,  
 Plum and cherry trees, and currant bushes,  
 Also rhubarb and sorrel plants,  
 Gooseberry and raspberry bushes,  
 Grow in that Blumenfeld, this is my home.
3. In that village of Blumenfeld  
 where the mourning dove and red-breast sing,  
 And builds his nest with sparrows and swallows,  
 Where the bee finds lovely flowers,  
 And the meadowlark sings in spring,  
 Here in that Blumenfeld, this is my home.

4. In that village of Blumenfeld,  
 Where the inhabitants are friendly,  
 Here where visitors enjoy visiting so much,  
 Where the 'f<sup>1</sup>aspa'<sup>1</sup> tastes so much better,  
 The neighbor knows his neighbor,  
 Here in Blumenfeld, this remains my home.

Coda:

Here in Blumenfeld, Here I feel at home.

Comments:

In an attempt to recapture "how it felt, how it looked, and what grew there", Mr. Elias wrote this song about the village of Blumenfeld - his home for many years. The song was occasioned by the Blumenfeld Centennial Celebration held July 22-23, 1978 in Blumenfeld.

When Mr. Elias, whose family are noted for their musical abilities, was asked to present several musical items at the Centennial program, he decided to put his abilities as a poet to use. The result was this lovely poem about an idyllic village past, when harmony existed in nature among birds who built their nests together and among people who enjoyed visiting together.

In looking for a suitable melody, Mr. Elias decided not to use familiar church tunes to avoid offending anyone, and not to use familiar High German folktunes, but instead to use a Canadian folktune, "Something to Sing About". He modified the tune somewhat and then set the words and phrases, which had been running through his head evenings as he was falling asleep, to this tune.

The initial rehearsal of this song took place on the roof of Mr. Elias' home in Winnipeg, while he and his sons, Peter of Altona, and Frank of Miami, were shingling the roof. The first audience were the English speaking neighbors. Apparently one of the sons generally remembered the words of the first part of the phrase, and the other remembered the last part, so between the two they managed to piece together most of the song, re-checking their accuracy when they went down into the house at coffeebreak.

The song was greeted with enthusiastic applause by those who heard it sung at the Centennial Celebrations in Blumenfeld.

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<sup>1</sup>'Faspa' was an early afternoon lunch generally consisting of 'Tveeback' a sweet double bun, jam, cheese and coffee. Sunday 'Faspa' was generally a time of socializing with one's friends and relatives.



## DEE HORNDIENSHE MEYALLES

("The Horndean Girls")

Tune: Cleo Heinrichs, Marie  
Friesen, Anne Wiebe  
Lyrics: Cleo Heinrichs, etc.

Cleo Heinrichs - K  
Horndean, Manitoba  
June 23, 1978  
HR-4

De Horn-dien-she Me-yal-les zou dick en zou denn,  
Dee goh-nen shpa-tsie-ren, daut es nich zou shlem,  
De Horn-dien-she Me-yal-les daut zent zou-ne Spuhrts,  
Vann de Yun-ges koh-men dan ran-ne ze fuat.  
En Horn-dean, doa es vaut pe-siat,  
Doa han ze dehn Dick-buck zien Pans up-a-riat.

2. Dee Horndienshe Yunges zou grout en zou chlien,  
Eey' ze yingen shpatsieren, bezorgden dee Shvien.  
Zee ylipsten zich auf, en trocken zich um,  
Zee yinge noh Shtaut, en hauden zich dom.  
En Horndien, doa es vaut pesiat,  
Doa han dee Menschen zich zeeya yetiat.

3. *Dee Horndienshe Menshen daut zent Dietshe Lied,  
Gohnen beht langsam (sung very slowly)  
Ohba foaren "top speed" (sung very quickly)  
Dee Horndienshe Menshen fon tiadich bet loht,  
Puckaden rum en knackden Zoot.  
Aunne achte sehventich, es vaut pesiat,  
Vie han Reunion, en daut es fehl viat.*

Translation:

1. The Horndean girls, so fat and so thin,  
They go round visiting, that's not so bad.  
The Horndean girls, they are such sports,  
When the young men come, they all run away.  
In Horndean, something has occurred,  
The paunchy man has had abdominal surgery.
2. The Horndean boys, so big and so small,  
Before they go visiting, they feed the pigs,  
They cleaned (slipped) themselves off,  
and changed their clothes.  
They went to town, and acted dumb.  
In Horndean, something has occurred,  
The people there have been greatly surprised.
3. The Horndean people, are German folk,  
Walk sort of slowly, but drive at top speed.  
The Horndean people, from early til late,  
Puttered around and cracked sunflower seeds.  
In seventy-eight, something occurred,  
We had a reunion, and that was worthwhile.

Comments:

After the singing of this song at the Horndean Reunion, the chairperson commented, "*Zoun Plaudietsh hab eck veens nich fon Mame yeliat.*"<sup>1</sup>

Like the other Horndean reunion songs, this song was sung by a mixed volunteer choir, accompanied by piano. In this song, the men sang the first verse about the Horndean girls, the women sang the second verse about the boys, and they all sang the third verse about the older villagers.

The melody, unlike the other songs, is original. This is unusual when one notes that the vast majority of Low German songs are sung to

<sup>1</sup>Trans. "I certainly never learned that kind of Low German from mother!"

borrowed tunes. Some of the singers in the choir, improvised an obligato for this song.

The words of the song suggest a very easy going entertainment oriented village life style.



DEE HORNDIENA  
 ("The Horndeaners")

Tune: "Im Wald und auf der  
 Heide"  
 Lyrics: Cleo Heinrichs,  
 Marie Friesen,  
 Anne Wiebe

Cleo Heinrichs - K  
 Horndean, Manitoba  
 June 23, 1978  
 HR-4

Boi-yes, Boik-mauns Block-en  
 uck Brueh-nen, Bick-ats, Derk-ses,  
 Del-len, Dried-yash, Dick-en Enns.  
 Uck Ee-lies, Faul-ken, Fea.  
 En Flau-mings, Frie-ses Free-sen,  
 Funk-en, Vin-tash, Viat-ses,  
 Vree-nings, Hau-men, Hoa-dash, Hei-den, Heints,  
 Hein-richs, Hie-bats en Hil'braunts.

Chorus: *Hi-lie' hi-loh, Hi-lie hi-loh,*  
*fon Horn-dien koh-men vie.*

2. *Happnash, Yaunses, Cheylash, Karlensig, Klohses, Chleppeshteens, Kornelson, Letkemaun, Krohn. Leuzinger, en Lepche. Uck Lewis, Leeven, Moates, Niedarps, Niefelds, Nekkels, Panash, Peetash, Chvierings, Reimash, Port, Radekopps, Rampels en Regiers.*
3. *Savautshes, Sheebe, Shreedash, uck Shultsen Shvoartsen, Siemes, Shallenboachs, Shteesen, Thiessen, Teefs. uck Ungash, Underdown. En Orreifs, Foutten, Vaullen, Vieben, Viensen, Volfen, uck Sack'riesen, Es yuen Nohmen aundash, beyreesen vell vie yuent doch aulla.*

Chorus for verse 3:  
*Hi-lie hi-loh, Hi-lie hi-loh,*  
*fon Horn-dien koh-men vie.*  
*Hi-lie hi-loh, hi-lie hi-loh,*  
*Mien Frünt chanst due mie nich?*

Hi-lie, Hi-loh, Hi-lie, Hi-loh,  
zou framd laht mie doch nich.

Translation:

1. Bergens, Bergmans, Blocks and Brauns, Bueckerts, Derksens, Doells, Driedgers, Dycks and Ennses. And Elias', Falks and Fehrs. And Flemings, Friesens, Froeses, Funks, Ginters, Goertzens, Groenings, Hamms, Harders, Heides, Heintz, Heinrichs, Hieberts and Hildebrands.
2. Hoepners, Janzens, Kehlers, Karlenzig, Klassens, Klippensteins, Kornelson, Letkemann, Krahn. Leuzinger and Loepky. And Lewis, Loewen, Martens, Neudorfs, Neufelds, Nickels, Penners, Peters, Quirings, Reimers, Porte, Redekopps, Rempels and Riedigers.
3. Sawatzkys, Scheibe, Schroeders, and Schultzes, Schrtzes, Siemens, Schellenbergs, Stoeszes, Thiessen, Toews, and Ungers, Underdown. And Unraus, Voths, Walls, Wiebes, Wienses, Wolfes, and Zachariases. Even if your name is different, we still want to greet all of you.

Comments:

Alphabetical lists of names are commonly found in the Mennonite Low German folklore tradition. Arnold Dyck included a 'Mennonite names ABC' in his *Mennonitische Volkswarte*, (1935:244). In this ABC, given names, using each successive letter of the alphabet, are used.

Some "Kanadier" ladies recalled parts of a rhyme using Mennonite family names:

App zet oppe Shtap,  
 Bruen zet oppem Tuen,  
 ...  
 Ens zet oppe Fens...<sup>1</sup>

In that respect, this song follows in the Low German Mennonite tradition. It may, however, have been inspired by a Low German poem containing numerous family names. The first verse of this 21 verse poem brought to Manitoba from Saskatchewan, follows:

Eck fuar emohl noh Holt,  
 Noh disseem ullen Bolt,  
 Dann troff eck doa een Klohsen,  
 Dee hilt zou fehl fon shpohsen.<sup>2</sup>

This poem was given to me by one of the authors of "De Horndiena".

As can be seen, the song contains only a few Anglo-Saxon and German names among the list of Mennonite names, indicating the ethnic composition of the community of Horndean. Songs of this nature are becoming rare in a society which constructs archival buildings to house its so-called oral traditions. Yet, this song serves the same function it would in a pre-literate society: it commemorates history, reflecting particularly Mennonite interest in genealogy.

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<sup>1</sup>Epp sat on the field,  
 Brown sat on the wire fence,  
 ...  
 Ens sat on the fence.

<sup>2</sup>I once went for wood,  
 To this old man Boldt,  
 And there I met a Klassen,  
 Who thoroughly liked jesting.

## ZOU VIA DAUT

("That's how it was")

Tune: "Old Black Joe"  
 Lyrics: Cleo Heinrichs,  
 Marie Friesen, Anne Wiebe

Cleo Heinrichs - K  
 Horndean, Manitoba  
 June 23, 1978  
 HR-4

1. Vach zen de Doag,  
 aus vie yungk fon Hoaten vier'n,  
 Vach zent de Doag,  
 daut vie oult vullen zenne yier'n,  
 Nue ze vie oult,  
 en zeenen vauts pesiaht,  
 Dan drei vie om en froagen,  
 "Via daut dit viat?"

## Chorus:

Eck zei die, eck zei die,  
 Mien Hoat es zeeya shvoa,  
 Doa veans zie nich truarich,  
 Eck zie gauns doa.

2. Mutta zehd eemohl,  
 "Paus opp toh vehm due rehdst."  
 Fohda zehd toh mie,  
 "Paus opp met vehm due shpehlst."  
 Horchen deed eck nich,  
 Ohba lieden muss eck dann.  
 Krackt zou down'n miene Chinga nue,  
 Biem opp vaussen.

## Translation:

1. Gone are the days,  
 When we were young at heart,  
 Gone are the days,  
 When we waited to be old,  
 Now we are old,  
 And see what has occurred,  
 We turn around and ask the question,  
 "Was it worth this?"

## Chorus:

I tell you, I tell you,  
 My heart's so heavy now,  
 But don't be said about that,  
 Since I'm 'all there'.



2. Mother told me once,  
"Watch with whom you speak."  
Father told me,  
"Watch with whom you play."  
I didn't listen,  
So had to suffer much,  
And likewise now my children do  
while growing up.

Comments:

At first glance, it appears that this song only bemoans the passing of youthful joys, and contains no references to either Mennonite or Horndean history, despite the fact that it was written specifically for a reunion. A closer look, however, reveals a distinctively village, and possibly characteristically Mennonite attitude: the emphasis on exclusiveness, seen in the warnings to the child to choose playmates carefully. These warnings are like those found in the biblical Proverbs, and are given to the child in order to help maintain his moral integrity.



## DEE GOUDE OULE TIET

("The good old days")

Tune: "Auld Lang Syne"

Lyrics: Cleo Heinrichs,  
Marie Friesen, Anne WiebeCleo Heinrichs - K  
Horndean, Manitoba  
June 23, 1978  
HR-4

1. *Dee oule Frind feyeht vie nich,  
Vie kohmen nuh mohl toup,  
Dee oule. Frind feyeht vie nich,  
Vie zent ons doch noch gout.*

## Chorus:

*Fon oule. Tiet rehd vie, mien Frind,  
Fon de goude oule Tiet,  
Feyehten voa vie ons doch nich,  
En de goude oule Tiet.*

2. *Eck riack die miene Haund mien Frind,  
Du yefst mie diene uck,  
Bott vie ons noch mohl wahda zeen'n,  
Vensh eck die baste yleck.*

## Translation:

1. The good old friends we don't forget,  
We gather now again,  
The good old friends we don't forget,  
For we like each other still.

## Chorus:

*Of olden times we speak, my friend,  
Of good old olden times.  
We won't forget each other e'er,  
In the good old olden times.*

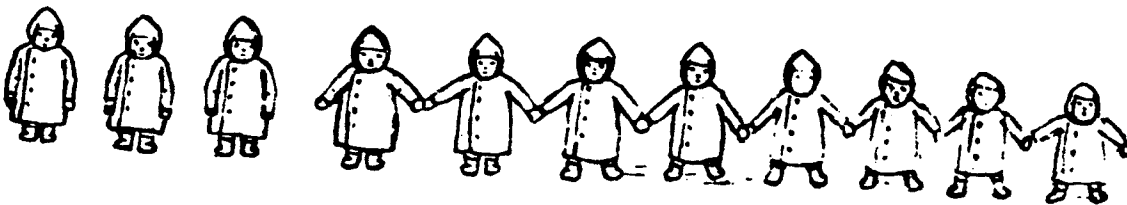
2. I offer you my hand my friend,  
You give me yours also,  
Til we will once more meet again,  
I wish you best of luck.

## Comments:

One editor writes that:

Besides being the theme song of New Year's Eve, this song is widely used at reunions, partings, graduations, and other type of sentimental celebrations (Raph, 1964:49).

The Horndean reunion was another one of these 'sentimental celebrations'. During the singing of the second verse, people were asked to stand up and shake hands with people around them as a symbol of the friendship they share/shared.





"HEISCHRAITJE" LEEDA - Contemporary  
(Songs by "The Locusts")



"HEISCHRAITJE" LEEDA

...because they are rootedly Mennonite, they began a religious group they named Locusts and Wild Honey, as if they were a lone voice crying in the wilderness. But then came the first of the well-known Landmark *Plautdietsche Owendts* (Low German evenings), and for the occasion they became, and have since remained, '*De Heischraitje & Willa Honich*' (The Locusts and Wild Honey) (Penner, 1981:19).

Though they have sung together informally since their childhood in *Krauyelaunt* (Crow's Land), as 'snobs' from Steinbach call Landmark (ibid.), the group as such was formed in 1974. Their initial appearance as the '*Heischraitje*'<sup>1</sup> was at a Talent Night held in Landmark in June 1974, several months earlier than the March 1975 Low German evening to which Penner refers. At this Talent Night, they sang "This Land ain't your Land", a political satire, to which they added a verse about the coming of the Mennonites to Canada, namely, to the East Reserve in Manitoba. They won the top award for their singing at this event.

Since that time, they have performed at numerous community events such as Low German evenings in Landmark, various East Reserve banquets, the Mennonite Festival of Art and Music at Polo Park in Winnipeg, and the Mennonite Pavillion at Folklorama, an inter-ethnic festival held annually in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Most of the '*Heischraitje*' repertoire has been written by the group themselves, usually by Ray Plett, or by his mother-in-law, Mrs. Kay Friesen, the mother of Pat, the 'Wild Honey'. Since most of the songs were written for specific occasions, a short summary of these events follows.

The first of these events was an evening of Low German entertainment presented by the Landmark Alumni Drama Club, of which the '*Heischraitje*' are members, in March 1975. Because the program of Low German skits, readings, and jokes was considered to be too short, the '*Heischraitje*' were asked to sing several songs. They sang their version of "This Land ain't your Land", the familiar "Kanadier" ballad "*On Nohba Klohse haud ne Koa*" ("Our neighbor Klassen had a car"), and some original compositions written especially for this program: "*Vie zent hia fondoag toupyekohme*" ("We are gathered here together today"), "*En Muhsdarp vohn vie aula zaumpt*" ("In Mouse Village we all live together (happily)"), and "*Duh bes mien Zonneshien*" ("You are my Sunshine").

<sup>1</sup>The group are popularly known as the '*Heischraitje*' (Locusts), and this name, rather than the full name, will be used in the following discussion.

They concluded the evening with a potpurri of all their songs, consisting of one verse of each song, with a short piano interlude introducing the next song, a practice which is standard at "Heischraitje" *Plautdietscha Ohvent* performances.

For their second *Plautdietscha Ohvent*, in 1976, the Alumni Drama Club presented an operetta based on Mennonite writer Arnold Dyck's "Koop en Bua faore nao Dietschland" (Koop and Buhr travel to Germany) (Dyck, 1961-62). *Koop en Bua* are two legendary Mennonite bush farmers from *Muhsdarp* (Mouse Village), through whom Dyck reveals the reality of Mennonite village life. Their visit to Germany provides the opportunity for discussing a number of issues of special interest to Mennonites: non-resistance, language and ethnicity, and drinking.

A number of songs written for this operetta were sung at this occasion only: "*En Muhsdarp bie Yrientohl*" ("In Mouse Village near Green Valley"), "*Shepfoara*" ("Sailors"), "*Eins, Zwei, Zuffau*", "*Beesickle*" ("Bicycle"), "*Mien Mehdel*" ("My Bonnie"), and "*Tuhs es Tuhs*" ("Home is Home"). Because most of these songs refer specifically to the drama, they would be ineffective if performed outside of this context.

Songs of general interest written for the drama have been performed since that time. These include: "*En Muhsdarp vohn vie aula saumpt*" ("In Mouse Village we all live (happily) together"), "*Faspa*" ("Lunchtime"), and "*Vie vohne hia en Muhsdarp*" ("We live here in Mouse Village").

By the time of the next *Plautdietscha Ohvent* in October 1977, the "*Heischraitje*" were no longer considered as a filler, but as an essential part of the program. They repeated the general interest songs from the *Koop en Bua* drama, along with "*Duh bes mien Zonneshien*". A number of new songs appeared on this program: "*Sheene Yreet*" ("Lovely Greta"), "*Ons Goade*" ("Our Garden"), "*Shvoat Uag*" ("Ebony Eyes"), and "*Blingyul Lament*" ("Blind/Bilingual Lament"). Almost identical presentations were given on both nights of the performance: four short dramas, a dramatic monologue and about seven songs by the "*Heischraitje*".

A *Heischraitje* performance at the 1978 Mennonite Festival of Art and Music at Polo Park in Winnipeg featured much of the standard *Heischraitje* repertoire, in addition to "*Hackshtacka*" ("Chopsticks"). In comparison with other folk groups which performed at the festival, the *Heischraitje* had a large enthusiastic audience. The fact that several *Heischraitje* fans began cheering even before the group began to sing may have contributed to audience enthusiasm.

Two further operettas have been presented by the Alumni Drama Club: "Daut Straume Shalduak" ("The Lovely Apron"), a Low German version of Gilbert and Sullivan's "*H.M.S. Pinafore*", in 1979, and "Valoare en de Steppe", based on Arnold Dyck's autobiographical novel (Dyck, 1974), presented in 1980. These musicals have not been included in the present study because they were performed after the closing date for field research on Low German songs.

Their latest venture is a recording entitled "*Sprie*" (Chaff), in which they invite the listener to forget their cares and "to laugh at the chaff" (Penner, op. cit.). Released in the spring of 1981, the recording features 14 "*Heischraitje*" Leeda, 11 of which are included in this study. The careful listener/reader will find several discrepancies between the record and my transcriptions. My transcriptions are based on tapes of and attendance at "*Heischraitje*" performances during the years 1976-1978, and consultation with the "*Heischraitje*". They have taken the liberty to make several alterations in these songs for the recording! The recording has received much popular acclaim, considerable air-time on two Mennonite radio stations, CFAM in Altona, Manitoba, and ZP-30 in the Paraguayan Chaco. The sale of 5,000 records during its first three weeks on the market, is an indication of its popularity.

# Heischraitje & Willa Honich

(LOCUSTS AND WILD HONEY)

Disse schaulplote met plautdietsche leeda es von de sanja HEISHRAITJE EN WILLA HONICH von rum Winnipeg jesunge. Disse sanja welle eare plautdietsche earfoarunge met aundre wea sitj va disse schproak interessiere met deele.

This album of low german songs sung by the LOCUSTS & WILD HONEY of the Winnipeg area shares the experiences of the group in Low German with others who appreciate the heritage of this rich language.

Ray Plett ..... *Guitar, Kazoo*  
 Pat Plett ..... *Keyboards, Woodblock*  
 Grant Plett ..... *Plunger*  
 Fin Plett ..... *Broom*  
 Dennis Reimer ... *Bass, Kazoo, Piano*  
 Gerald Reimer ... *Washboard, Kazoo*  
 Dave Roman ..... *Accordion*

*All music arranged by*  
 LOCUSTS AND WILD HONEY

*Recorded at Maddock Studios in Winnipeg*  
*Sound engineering by Dave Roman*  
*Produced and distributed by Knackzote Records*

*Photos by D. Fast*

Distributed in Canada by  
**KNACKZOTE RECORDS**  
 Landmark, Manitoba, Canada

VIE ZENT HIA FONDOAG TOUP VEKOHME  
 ("We are gathered here together today")

Tune/Lyrics: 'Heischraitje', 1975

WPH/PDL-6  
 March 1975/June 1, 1978

Vie zent hia fon-doag toup ye-koh-me,  
 Tohm zee-ne vout vie uat ee-ve,  
 Daut moakt zou-goa cheen ung-a-sheet,  
 Vaut yie den-ke ou-da ylee-ve.

2. Vie fetalle yuhnt fon aule Zitte,  
 En vou et mohl es hia yevast,  
 Vie beede yuhnt hia aula velkomm,  
 Vie sent onze sheene Vast.
3. Vie han nuh fon yuhnt vout vie velle,  
 Dit es yevess cheen bilyet Shpohs,  
 Nuh loht yuhnt daut hia mohl sheen gohne,  
 Villie, Sweet Marie en Klohs.
3. Eck hohp yuhnt haft daut gout yegohne,  
 Vie voare yuhnt nich shvind feyehnte,  
 Eck hohp yie ha ons kunt feshtohne,  
 En ha kunt gout Knacks oht frehte.

Translation:

1. We are gathered here together today,  
 To see what we've rehearsed.  
 It even makes a difference,  
 What you think, or you believe.



2. We'll tell you about all the old customs,  
And how it was here at one time,  
We bid you all welcome here,  
You are our dear guests.
3. We now have from you what we want,  
For this is no cheap entertainment.  
Now let yourselves enjoy it here,  
Willy, Sweet Marie, and Klaus.
4. I hope you have enjoyed it here.  
We will not forget you soon.  
I hope you have been able to understand us,  
And been able to devour sunflower seeds.

Comments:

The melody of this chorale-like tune reminds one of the chorale "Oh wie freuen wir uns die Stunde", ("Oh how joyfully we greet this hour"), though the *Heis chraitje* say the melody is not modelled on any one particular song. Rather, they imitated the general style of the chorale, showing the ritual nature of the celebration of ethnicity.

The first three stanzas were sung at the beginning of the Low German program, while the last stanza concluded the program.

The song was sung in traditional Mennonite "Vorsaenger" or chorister style. A "Vorsaenger" would recite one line of a song, and then the congregation would sing it. This was a regular practice in some 'conservative' Mennonite churches, and was done in other congregations when there was a large gathering where there were not enough hymnbooks for all present. In their rendition of this song, the *Heis chraitje* imitate aspects of this style as it is sung in some churches: a slow, unrhythmic, syllabic style; a nasal tone quality; and, a slurred, scooping movement from one note to the next. They sing this song in unison.

There were varied audience responses to this song. Some appreciated the humor, others felt it was sacreligious.

This is the only contemporary Low German song in which there are overt comments on finances, though it is a well known fact among Mennonites that an evening of Low German entertainment is always a fund-raising event.

## EN MUHSDARP VOHN VIE AULA ZAUMPT

("In Mouse Village we all live together (happily)")

Tune: "Old MacDonald had a Farm"  
Lyrics: "Heischraitje", 1975

WPH/PDL-6<sup>1</sup>  
March 1975/June 2, 1978

En Muhs-darp vohn vie au-la zaumpt, Ee-yee-yee-yee-yee!

Vie zent ons au-la gout be-kaunt, Ee-yee-yee-yee-yee!

Met en Platt Platt hia, en en Platt Platt doa,

Hia en Platt, doa en Platt, doa es mie-re-mohl en Platt

En Muhs-darp vohn vie au-la zaumpt, Oi, yoi, yoi, yoi, yoi.

2. Met en Reima, Reima hia, en en Reima Reima doa,  
Hia en Reima, doa en Reima, Mieremohl en reina Reima...
3. Met en Panna...  
...Daut zent intressaunte Manna...
4. Met en Koup...  
...Shpohzich zent ze aula toup...
5. Met en Kauenhohfen hia, en en Kauenhohfen doa,  
Hia en Kauen, doa en Hohfen, gouda Maun dee Kauenhohfen...

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprrie" as "Oij-foij-foij".



*Platt Platt set opp'm Bratt*

*Reima, Reima becks e enshviena,  
 Hildebraunt, haft cheen Feshhtaunt,  
 Panna, Panna, Becks e tranna,  
 Bruen, Bruen, set opp'm Tuhn,  
 Koup, Koup, Becks e Knoup,  
 Fea, Fea, haft en Shvea,  
 Kehla, Kehla, Kaute chvehla,  
 Oi, yoi, yoi, yoi, yoi!  
 (last line spoken emphatically).*

Translation:

1. In Mouse Village we live communally...  
 We all know each other very well...  
 With a Plett, Plett here, and a Plett, Plett there,  
 Here a Plett, there a Plett, there is frequently a  
 Plett,  
 Oi-yoi...
2. With a Reimer, Reimer here, and a Reimer, Reimer there,  
 Here a Reimer, there a Reimer, frequently a clean  
 Reimer...
3. With a Penner...  
 ...Those are interesting men...
4. With a Koop...  
 ...They're a very funny bunch...
5. With a Kauenhofen here, and a Kauenhofen there,  
 Here a Kauen, there a Hofen, a good man that Kauenhofen...
6. Plett, Plett, sits on the board,  
 Reimer, Reimer, trousers dirtier,  
 Hildebrand, has no understanding (intelligence)  
 Penner, Penner, trousers' ripper,  
 Brown, Brown, sits on the fence,  
 Koop, Koop, trousers button,  
 Fehr, Fehr, has a sore,  
 Kehler, Kehler, cat torturer,  
 Oi, yoi, yoi, yoi, yoi!

## Comments:

"En Mues darp vohn vie aula zaumpt", one of the earliest 'Hei-schraitje' songs, incorporates an aspect of traditional Low German Menno-nite folklore, namely (no pun intended) family nicknames. (See comments re: "De Horndiena".) School children often used these rhyming nicknames to tease each other. The names found in this song, are common family names in Landmark.

The use of the "Old MacDonald" tune suggests a sort of animal farm, with apologies to George Orwell. Through the light-hearted humor which suggests that these are simple rural folk, one sees the attributes of harmonious living in a community in which people know each other well.

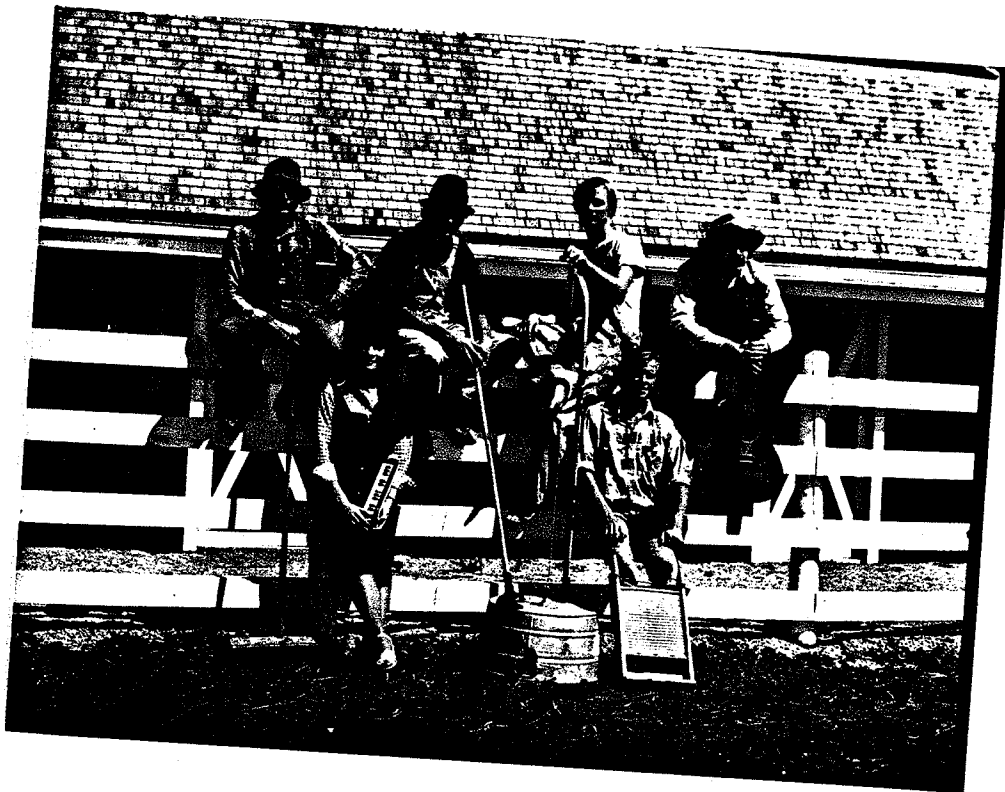


Photo: Dennis Fast<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>All "Hei schraitje" photos taken by Dennis Fast, Kleefeld.

DUH BES MIEN ZONNESHIE  
 ("You are my Sunshine")

Tune: "You are my Sunshine"  
 by Wilf Carter  
 Lyrics: "Heischraitje", 1975

WPH/PDL-6/PDL-1<sup>1</sup>  
 March 1975/June 1, 1978  
 October 8, 1977

Chorus:

Duh bes mien Zonneshien, mien eensya Zonneshien,  
 Duh moakt mie shaftich, em Mohneshien,  
 Duh veetst dehn Drack fon, vou gout eck die zie,  
 Bitte kleiv nich uht fon mie.

1. Bie yistre Ohvent, aus eck noh yuhnt kaum,  
 Bunk eck mien Kunta, aum Tuhnpohl aun,  
 Aus en Vedanke, eck derch'e Hack kaum,  
 Fluach yuhn grouta Hunt mie aun.
2. Dan vonk eck raush om, em fausta Drebbel,  
 Dee Hunt kaum emma nohda aun,  
 Dee beet mie shracklich, daut via nich macklich,  
 Oh Truet! Vuarom bleef eck nich bie Aun. (spoken)
3. Aus dee Hunt zaut via, en mie dan toch leet,  
 Dan rohpt eck miene Beckse toup,  
 Eck feeld noh Klops fleesh, Daut deed zou piep vee,  
 Aus eck opp mien Kunta kroup.
4. Eck veet nich vuarom, eck zou bedutsst zie,  
 Daut eck noch vada noh yuhnt kohm,  
 Oh ta daut shient mie eevach shvierig,  
 Van eck en oula Batshla voa.

Translation:

Chorus:

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,  
 You make me happy when moonlight shines,  
 You don't know 'rubbish' how much I love you,  
 Please don't steal away (claw out) from me.

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie" as "Sonnes chien".



1. Yesterday evening as I was coming to your place,  
I tied my gelding to the fencepost,  
As, deep in thought, I came through the gate,  
Your big dog came flying at me.
2. Then I turned quickly, in a steady trot,  
The dog kept coming closer and closer,  
He bit me terribly, it wasn't comfortable,  
Oh Trudy! Why didn't I stay with Ann? (spoken)
3. When the dog was satiated and left me alone,  
I pulled my pants together.  
I felt like ground beef, It hurt so peep much,  
As I climbed onto my gelding.
4. I don't know why I'm such a fool  
That I come to your place again,  
But 'it seems so desperate to me'  
If I become an old bachelor.

Comments:

In the English version of "You are my Sunshine", we hear the story of a young man who lies dreaming on his pillow. By comparison, the Low German version has lots of colorful and downright painful action.

As in other Low German songs, the cowboy once again becomes a farmer, who hitches his gelding to a fencepost. Undaunted, but slightly mauled, by his encounter with the dog, the young man concludes that his fear of remaining a bachelor is stronger than his fear of an angry dog.

Part of the humor of this song naturally arises from the text, but the inimitable performance style of the "*Heis chraitje*" reinforces and at times, supercedes the text.

The unexpected reference to the moonlight in the chorus becomes even funnier when one sees one performer gazing dreamily up at the moon, another dramatically putting his hand over his heart, and hears another one singing 'Oh yes', in falsetto!

Another "*Heis chraitje*" performance technique which is very effective, is that of changing the singing style as a substitution for expletives, which would not be acceptable to the community. While "Oh Trudy" (vs. 2) may sound mild, it communicates as effectively as a stronger expression would. The reaction to the dog's bite (vs. 3), which hurts so peep much, is another example. The word 'peep' was said in high squeaky tones, as the performers stretched upward. For 1977 audiences who remembered that one of Prime Minister Trudeau's expressions had just been 'bleeped' on national television, there was added humor.

As already stated, some of the humor of the song derives from the text. A few examples will suffice. One example is the juxtaposition

of the gentle request 'Bitte' (please) with 'kleiv nich uht' which has the impact of 'tearing off in a storm of dust'. Another example is the use of imagery. What could be more expressive than feeling like ground beef after being bitten by a dog?

Audiences greet this song with hilarious laughter. They have, on occasion, also been asked by the "Heis chraitje" to join them in the singing of the chorus, since the melody is familiar and the words are easy to memorize.



DAUT NIA YOA  
 ("The New Year")

Tune: "Auld Lang Syne"  
 Words: "Heis chraitje"

"Heis chraitje" - K/Mo.  
 Landmark, Manitoba  
 1978

1. *Via ha en hartzoftet Yoa yehaut,  
 Holpe onst noh vout doa via,  
 Haud vie nicht en hartzoftet Yoa yehaut,  
 Dan hiad yie daut fon hia.*
2. *Tohm Kukkuk han, mie es nua noch,  
 Noh Knackscht en Pepsi,  
 En en shpelche Rook en tohm Kukkuk uch,  
 Chnips brat<sup>1</sup> en Monopoly.*
3. *Vea veet vou't dit Yoa voare voat,  
 Vea veet vout daut voll yeft,  
 Loh't voare vout doa voare voat,  
 Doa veayen voa eck nich febleft.*

Chorus:

*Nue hatt en sheenet Nie Yoa aul,  
 Nue hatt en sheenet Yoa,  
 Loh't Yist're zenne vout Yist're via,  
 And hatt en sheenet Yoa.*

Translation:

1. We've had a hearty year,  
 Helped ourselves according to what was (possible),  
 And if we hadn't had a hearty year,  
 Then you'd hear about it from here.
2. 'To the cuckoo',<sup>2</sup> I feel like  
 Some sunflower seeds and Pepsi,  
 And a game of rook and 'to the cuckoo'  
 Crokinole and Monopoly.

<sup>1</sup>'Chnips brat' or 'snap/flick board' is similar to the High German word 'knipsen' meaning to snap ones fingers, or in photography, to take a snap shot. Even in English conversation, Low German speakers generally refer to the game as 'Chnips brat' rather than 'crokinole' because of the onomatopoeic sound of the word.

<sup>2</sup>The expression 'Tohm Kukkuk han' has the impact of the English equivalent 'How stupid!'



3. Who knows what will happen this year,  
Who knows how things will be,  
Let happen what will happen,  
I won't get excited about it.

Chorus:

Now have a Happy New Year all,  
Now have a Happy Year,  
Let yesterday be what yesterday was,  
And have a Happy Year.

Comments:

Here we have a Low German edition of the traditional English New Year's Song, "Auld Lang Syne". The usual sentimental mood has been replaced with a nonchalant attitude toward past, present and future.

The song refers to several traditional Mennonite pastimes: eating sunflower seeds, and playing table games like Crokinole and Monopoly. These games were almost an institution in many Mennonite homes before the days of Sunday afternoon TV broadcasts of sports events. These games were especially popular among the men at family gatherings. In recent years, games like Crokinole have 'degenerated' to the level of tournaments.

## EN MUHSDARP BIE YRIENTOHL

("In Mouse Village near Grunthal (Green Valley)")

Tune: "Haenschen Klein"

Lyrics: Mrs. Kay Friesen, 1976

WPH/PDL-5

April 1976/June 2, 1978

1. En Muhs darp, bie Yrientohl,  
mank daut Shtruck en Zaunt en Shteen,  
Vohnd een Koup, uck een Bua,  
zent noch beid auleen.  
Foaken rehde disse toup,  
Noh ba Bua met Noh ba Koup,  
Knackte Zoh't, ohne moht,  
aus en Muhs darp voat.
2. Bua dehm bacht aules aun,  
via en simlich forsha Maun,  
Koup dee via, lank en denn,  
kromme Been en shpets e Chen,  
Don een Dach bie Mest auffierre,  
deede disse beid gaustriere,  
Dochte beid zee viste vaut,  
ehva dit en ehva daut.
3. Koup fracht Bua, "Veets t du Maun,  
Vou funk onze Heakunft aun?"  
Bua bizzent zich en shtout,  
Neckopt, zacht, "Daut veet eck gout.  
Englishe fon Engelaund,  
Daut es mie noch gout bekaunt.  
Mennonieten zent doch Dietsch,  
zent dann zecha fon Dietschlaunt."
4. Bua dee zacht, "Dauts intressaunt,  
Vou dee kaume noh dit Launt.  
Aula opp en groutet Shep,  
Fua zou shtoak daut yingk yyyepp.  
Vaut eck nich feshohne kaun,  
Aus dee Menshe kaume aun,  
Vou daut Shep yingk hea toh shtiere,  
En dee Lied noh Muhs darp fiere.
5. "Koup," zacht Bua, "Veets t duh Maun?  
Mie kaumme Yedanke aun.  
Zull vie tvee, f'cheepe 't Fee,  
En noh Dietschlaund reise.  
Vua dee Mennonieten kaume,  
En daut Launt zich unyaneeme,  
Daut vudd vie noch aul de Dinge,  
Gauns believ en Dietschlaund finge."

6. *Donn vull Vua 'n Nohba Koup,  
Opp ne Reiz noh Dietshlaund toup,  
Eyepackt em raddna Zack,  
Muake reed tohm foare.  
Koffte sich iasht nieye Mets e,  
Uck en nieyet poa Shloabecke e,  
Gauns yetroust, fuare lous,  
Opp ne Teis noh Dietshlaunt.*

Translation:

1. In Mouse Village, near Green Valley,  
'Mongst the bush and sand and stone,  
Lived a Koop, and a Buhr,  
Both of whom are single,  
Often these two talked together,  
Neighbor Buhr, with neighbor Koop,  
Cracked sunflower seeds, without measure,  
As is done in Mouse Village.
2. Everything stuck to Buhr,  
Was a rather stocky man,  
Koop, he was, tall and thin,  
Crooked legs and pointed chin.  
Then one day while carting manure,  
These two started a discussion.  
Both thought they knew a lot,  
About this and about that.
3. Koop asks Buhr, "Y'know what man?  
Where began our ethnic group?"  
Buhr thinks hard for a while,  
Nodding says, "I know that well!  
Englishmen come from England,  
That is something I know well,  
Mennonites are German folk,  
Surely come from Germany."
4. Buhr says, "It is interesting,  
How they came right to this land.  
They all came in a big ship,  
Drove so fast that it went ssslip.  
What I cannot understand,  
When the people landed here,  
How the ship could be steered here  
Bringing people to Mouse Village."
5. "Koop," says Buhr, "Y'know what man?  
I just had a (great) idea.  
Should we two, sell our herd,  
And travel to Germany?"

Mennonites, they moved out there,  
 And they overtook the land.  
 There we would surely find out,  
 All those things, in Germany."

6. Together, Buhr and neighbor Koop,  
 Wanted to travel to Germany.  
 Packed their things in gunny sacks,  
 Got ready to travel.  
 First they bought themselves new caps,  
 And a pair of new overalls,  
 Confident, they started out  
 On a trip to Germany.

Comments:

Through this ballad, we are introduced to Koop and Buhr, the main characters in the *Koop 'n Bua* operetta. We see them in home territory, and hear the discussion which results in their trip to Germany.

They come upon the idea of travelling to Germany while carting manure, not while reading travel brochures. Their simple peasant ways are seen as well in their naive assumptions: that because Mennonites speak German, they came by ship directly to the village of *Muhs darp*. The choice of the tune "Haenschen klein", meaning "Little Johnny went into the wide world all alone" provides further humorous comment on their naivete. They are, in fact, like little children setting out to explore an unknown world.



(Dyck, 1949:cover)

## SHEPFOARA

("Sailors")

Tune: "We sail the Ocean Blue"  
(H.M.S. Pinafore)

WPH/PDL-6

Lyrics: Ray Plett, 1976

April 1976/June 2, 1978

Recited, while pianist plays the piece:

## Chorus:

*Vie zent de Shepfoara, daut Vohta daut es ruff,  
Vie klautre mank de Zeayen, Vie zent tuff.*

1. *Dee Vallen dee rollen,  
Dee Vint dee es vild,  
Dee Metfoara henge ehva dee Kaunt,  
Daut es som Bilt.*

2. *Ohne Meyalle es et eenzaum,  
Mounate oppem Vohta.  
Bet vie trig zent, vell'n dee nich luar'n.  
Daut es doch fehl lohta.*

3. *Vie zent Komorohde,  
Vie veete vou daut yeit,  
Fechiele ons manchmohl,  
Dauts ye doch aulreet.*

## Translation:

## Chorus:

We are the sailors, the water, it is rough.  
We climb among the riggings, we are tough.

1. The waves they roll, the wind is wild,  
The passengers hang over the edge,  
That is some picture.

2. Without girls it's lonesome, months on the water.  
Til the time we're back, they don't want to wait.  
After all, that's much later.

3. We are comrades, we know how things are.  
Often beat each other up,  
But that's certainly alright.

Comments:

This song informs us about the character and fate of the sailors, namely, the "Heischraitje", aboard the ship Koop and Buhr took on their travels to Germany.

Arnold Dyck

# Koop en Buhr en Dietschland



Erster Teil

(Dyck, 1960: cover)

## EINS, ZWEI, ZUFFA

("One, two, heave ho!")

Tune: "Einz, Zwei, Zuffa"  
Words: "Heischraitje", 1976WPH/PDL-6  
April 1967/June 2, 1978

Vie zent ent-lich en Dietsch-launt aun-ye-launt,  
Eins, Zwei, Zuffau,  
Vie zent ent-lich lous fon Shtruck en Zaunt,  
Eins, Zwei, Zuffau.

2. Vua es dann blous dee Fadda Shult...  
Dehm toh finge nemmt fehl Veduld...
3. "Wir haben eine schoene Zeit...  
Wir ladden ihn ein zum" 'party tonight'...
4. "Sie kommen gerne von weit und breit...  
Immer fuer spass und gemuetlichkeit..."

## Translation:

1. We have finally landed in Germany,  
One, two, Zuffa,  
We are finally free of bush and sand,  
One, two, Zuffa.
2. And where on earth is that cousin mayor...  
To find him requires a lot of patience...
3. We are having a lovely time...  
We're inviting you to a party tonight...

4. They willingly come from far and wide...  
Always favor fun and geniality...

Comments:

Koop and Buhr celebrate their arrival in Germany.

The "*Heischraitje*" 'composed' this song about five minutes before their premiere performance of the *Koop en Bua* drama. This is not surprising, "for we are told some of their arrangements are finalized in whispered *schnetjekonferenz*<sup>1</sup> between their numbers on stage (Penner, 1981:19).

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<sup>1</sup>Trans. discussion, literally meaning 'biscuit conference', possibly a synonym for 'gossip', as opposed to a real conference which would presumably be held by men, discussing 'important' issues.



BEESICKLE  
("Bicycle")

Tune: "Bicycle built for Two"  
Lyrics: Mrs. Kay Friesen, 1976

WPH/PDL-6  
April 1976/June 1, 1978

1. Koup en Bua dee kaume en Dietshlaunt aun,  
Vou vua vieda, viste zee moh kaum,  
Zee vulle nich opp dee Koare,  
Dee haude zee Tuhs yefoare,  
Zee vulle vaut nieyet, Uck nich opp en Piat,  
Zee viere ye nuh en Dietshlaunt.
2. "Bua," zacht Koup, "Vie zulle fleicht gohne toh Fout,"  
Koup zacht, "Niemohls, daut es mie doch nich gout.  
Daut ha vie aul zoufeyl yedohne,  
Hinga dee Fayde yegohne,  
Vann duh vest dann dou, oh ba mie riackt daut tou,  
Vie zent ye nuh en Dietshlaunt."
3. "Koup," zacht Bua, "Nuh chick emohl shvind noh daut.  
Haft en Shtia, opp yieda Eng noch en Raut.  
Daut blift ye aum foare,  
Meist zou aus dee Koare,  
Deit 'pußß, pußß' en knault, Nuh hia vou daut shault,  
Zount ha ze hia en Dietshlaunt."
4. Bua zacht, "Opp zoun Dingk loht eck mie niehmohls nopp,  
Daut kunn shtelpe, en shpoule mie den Kopp,  
Opp eemohl mank aul dee Koare,  
Donn kaun en Foaraut yefoare."  
En Koup zacht, "Bua zee, opp dit foare tvee,  
Zount voa vie hia uck en Dietshlaunt."
5. Bua haud Frinshaft, en Fadda daut vie en Shult,  
Dehm toh finge, daut neem fehl yedult,  
Viel zee hia en Dietshlaunt viere,  
don fuare dee doa shpatsiere,  
Doch yingk an daut gout, Daut yeeß an fehl Mout,  
Opp en Foaraut fuare zee tvee.
6. Shult haud ne Dochta, Daut via ne Gies ela,  
En shmokket Meake, en Koup dee beoubacht dea,  
Hea haud cheene Fruh yefunge,  
Hea docht daut kunn am yelunge,  
Aus daut Meake daut acht, don yingk zee en lacht,  
Zou yingk daut dee tvee en Dietshlaunt.

## Translation:

1. Koop and Buhr arrived in Germany,  
How to travel, they hardly knew.  
They didn't want to go by car,  
They had driven them at home,  
They wanted something new, but not on a horse,  
After all, they were now in Germany.
2. "Buhr," says Koop, "Maybe we should go by foot."  
Koop says, "Never. That's not good enough for me.  
We've already done so much of that;  
Walking behind the tiller.  
If you want to, go ahead, but I've had enough.  
After all, we are now in Germany."
3. "Koop," says Buhr, "Quickly look at that.  
It has a steering wheel, and a wheel on each end.  
It keeps on driving  
Almost like a car.  
It goes 'puff, puff' and bangs, listen how it sounds.  
That's what they have in Germany."
4. Buhr says, "I'd never dare place myself on one of those.  
It could tip, and crack my head,  
If suddenly among all the cars,  
a cycle appeared.  
And Koop said, "Buhr look,  
there are two driving on this one.  
We'll also do that here in Germany."
5. Buhr had relatives, a cousin who was a mayor,  
To find him took a lot of patience.  
Since they were here in Germany,  
they went to visit him.  
They had a good time, and got lots of courage,  
To ride on a cycle, the two of them.
6. The mayor had a daughter, she was a Gisella,  
A lovely girl, and Koop observed/noticed her.  
He hadn't found any wife,  
And thought it might be worth his while.  
But when the girl noticed that,  
then she went and laughed.  
That's what happened to the two in Germany.

## Comments:

This song describes some of Koop and Buhr's 'Abbot and Costello' like adventures in Germany. Like uninitiated tourists, they think that every new phenomenon they encounter is 'typically German' Nor are they aware that a mayor's daughter may not want to marry a bush farmer.

## MIEN MEHDEL

("My Girl")

Tune: "My Bonnie Lies Over the  
Ocean:  
Words: "Heischraitje", 1976

WPH/PDL-6  
April 1976/June 2, 1978

## Chorus:

Bring trig, Bring trig,  
Oh bring mie mien Mehdel noh mie, noh mie,  
Bring trig, Bring trig,  
Oh bring mie mien Mehdel noh mie.

1. Mien Mehdel es ehva en Vohta,  
Mien Mehdel es ehva en Mea,  
Mien Meydel es ehva en Vohta,  
Oh bring mie mien Mehdel hea.
2. Lats te Nacht lach eck opp mien Chesse,  
Lats te Nacht lach eck ohne Mout,  
Lats te Nacht lach eck opp mien Chesse,  
Eck dreemd daut mien Mehdel via dout.
3. Dee Vint dee blohst ehva een Vohta,  
Dee Vind dee blohst ehva een Mea,  
Dee Vind dee blohst ehva een Vohta,  
En vees mie vaut mien Mehdel via.
4. Oh blohs Vint ehva en Vohta,  
Oh blohs Vint ehva en Mea,  
Oh blohs Vint ehva en Vohta,  
Oh blohs mie mien Mehdel hea.

## Comments:

Except for the second line of vs. 2, the Low German version closely follows the English version of "My Bonnie lies over the Ocean". However, the term for "My bonnie", translated as "Mien Mehdel" (my girl), is High German rather than the Low German "Mien Heeya" (my dear) one would have expected.

One very literal translation into Low German supplies some unintended humor. Instead of saying, 'Last night', the translator has rendered the expression 'The last night', giving the impression that the singer rarely sleeps on a pillow.

## FASPA

("Lunch")

Tune: "Kelligrews Soiree"  
 Lyrics: "Heis chraitje", 1976

WPH/PDL-6<sup>1</sup>

1. Noh Futbaulshpel en Medachshlohp,  
 Eck hohp daut yeft noch Faspa,  
 Denne jell en Shinkefleesh,  
 Zindach opp Faspa,  
 De goude Yips, Eck yrips noh Prips,  
 Zindach opp Faspa,  
 Met aul de Vast, Doa voat yemas t,  
 Zindach opp Faspa.

2. Maunchmohl nu en Barbecue,  
 Zindach opp Faspa,  
 Foake dan daut Fleesh fon Han  
 En Hohn en Kuhn opp Faspa,  
 Mie es noh Los t de sheene Kos t,  
 Zindach opp Faspa,  
 En dan nohm ehte Pehpanehte,  
 Zindach opp Faspa.

## Chorus:

Daut yeft Ringleesh, Shinkefleesh,  
 Heena fleesh en Tveebackreesh,  
 Koms t Borsht, Formavorsht,  
 Zindach opp Faspa,  
 Shnetche, Portzelche,  
 Vereneche en Paska,  
 Nuh zie toh frehd fon deiete  
 Es cheene Reyd opp Faspa.

## Translation:

1. After football games and midday rest,  
 I hope we still have lunch,  
 Runny jam and thick sliced pork,  
 Sunday at lunch.

---

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie".

The best oil (table) cloth, I grab for coffee,  
 Sunday at lunch.  
 With all the guests, we have repast,  
 Sunday at lunch.

2. Often now a barbecue...  
 Often also chicken, rooster and turkey meat at  
 lunchtime,  
 I'd like to have a good repast...  
 And lunch some peppernuts...

Chorus:

There is beef meat, pork meat,  
 Chicken meat and roasted buns,  
 Cabbage Borscht, farmer's sausage,  
 Sunday at lunch.  
 Tea biscuits, New Year's fritters,  
 Cheese pockets and Easter bread,  
 Be satisfied, of dieting,  
 there is no talk at lunch.

Comments:

*Faspa*, the traditional Mennonite afternoon lunch was adopted in rural communities for practical reasons. Interrupting farming operations in the late afternoon to eat a large dinner was an inefficient use of time, and yet it was too long a time to wait with the evening meal til the men finished their work on the fields in the late evening. As a result, they would eat a light lunch usually consisting of buns, cheese, sometimes cold meats and some pastry in the late afternoon, about four o'clock, and eat dinner about eight o'clock when they came in from the fields.

Sunday *Faspa* was a special occasion. Frequently guests were invited to share this meal with the family. This meal featured freshly baked *Tveeback* (see "*Sheena Yreet*") and special pastries in addition to regular lunchtime fare. The best china was set on the table, covered with the best tablecloth, which in some homes was a special oil-cloth, in others, a crocheted tablecloth.

The song makes references to changing traditions: *Faspa* is being replaced with barbecues.

The foods listed, however, are all traditional Mennonite foods, some of them adopted during their sojourn in Russia, but now a part of the tradition. A few foods like cheese pockets would probably not be served at *Faspa*, but the song does communicate that food at *Faspa* is very plentiful.

The tune used for *Faspa* comes from "one of the most popular land songs of Newfoundland" (Fowke, 1973:202). The poet, John Burke, "patterned his ditty on Irish music hall songs" (ibid). Though the

foods in "Faspa" seem a little more palatable than Burke's 'pig's feet and cat's meat', and a little less potent than his 'cherry wine and turpentine', some of the sentiments of the song are retained in the Low German version.

When the "Heischraitje" perform this song, they repeat the chorus after the second verse, gradually accelerating the tempo til the words are barely discernable. When they reach the words 'Vereneche en Pastcha' they stop and groan, holding their stomachs, as they say, "Oh my poor stomach." The tendency to overindulge in one's favorite foods, all the while talking about dieting, is probably not distinctively Mennonite. The tendency to discuss overindulgence in food, as opposed to drink, however, may set certain Mennonites apart from each other, and from other ethnic groups in which drinking is more prevalent.



VIE VOHNE HIA EN MUHSDARP  
 ("We live here in Mouse Village")

Tune/Lyrics: Ray Plett, 1976

WPH/PDL-6<sup>1</sup>  
 April 1976/June 2, 1978

Chorus: Vie vohne hia en Muhs-darp, shaf-tich au-la toup,  
 Ha-be vault vie vel-le, Vien-se, Bua en Koup.  
 1. Vie froa-ge ons ye ia-re mohl vault Me-no-nie-te zent,  
 Zacht Koup, "Daut zent de vea-lou-ze,"  
 Zacht Bua dan, "Gauns ye-vess,"  
 Vie drin-ke nicht, Vie shmia-ke nicht,  
 En vie zent ye-sheit,

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie" as "Schaftich en Musdarp".

Doa es ye han en va-da vea vault daut nich au-la deit!

after vs. 2' chorus

Oo-oooh.

Translation:

Chorus:

We're living here in Mouse Village  
happily together,  
Have everything we want  
because we work together.

1. We ask ourselves quite frequently  
just who the Mennonites are.  
Says Koop, "We're non-resistant."  
says Bua, "Of course, that's true."  
We do not drink, we do not smoke,  
and we behave ourselves.  
Though here and there, there is someone,  
who doesn't do all that.
2. We all believe in unity,  
we all work together,  
Sometimes we really get annoyed,  
and then make up again  
When something (one?) doesn't suit us well,  
we all help make amends,  
We are after all here by ourselves,  
that surely is our right (responsibility).

Comments:

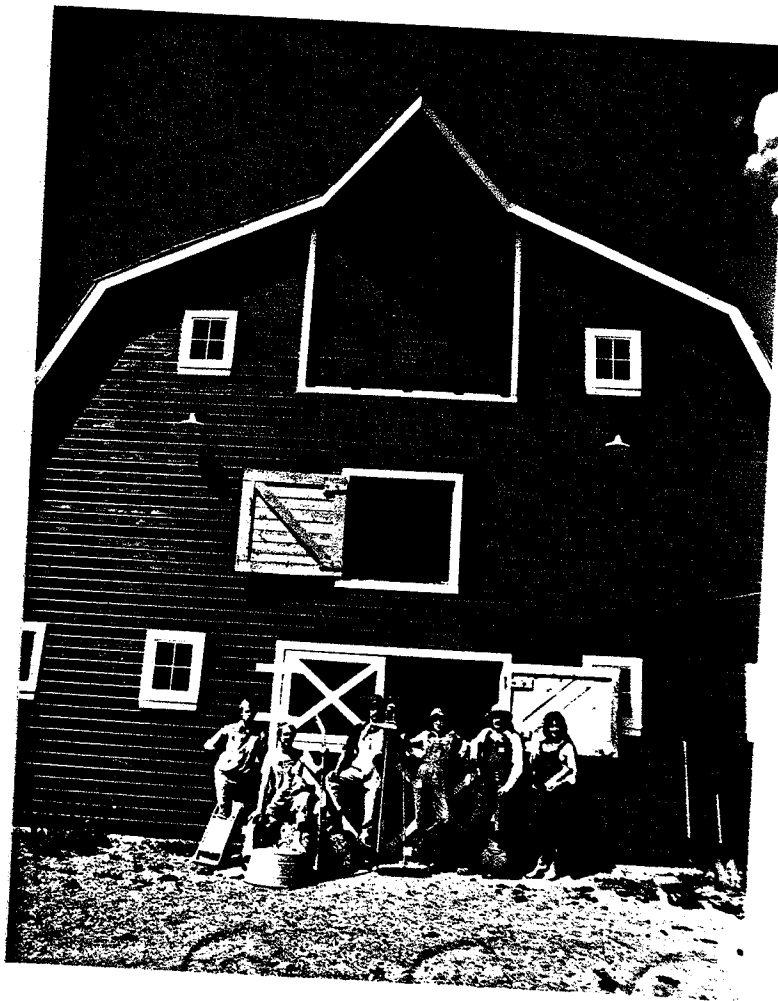
This is one of the few "*Heis chraitje*" songs for which they composed their own melody. The melody, by Ray Plett, the group's guitarist, has the character of a lively German folksong. In this respect, it is similar to the melodies which the group have borrowed for their other songs.

The essence of the song is in its expression of togetherness or community. This operates on several levels. On the surface, it operates as conformity to an external ethical code. The sense of community is also expressed by a willingness to resolve conflicts, though the conflict between conformity and individuality must surely be the cause for continual dynamic interaction. The idyllic expression of unity within this mythical community, one suspects, is somewhat idealized.



Audience reaction to the last line of the first verse confirms this suspicion.

Though this song was sung initially for the Koop and Buhr evening, it has remained in the active repertoire of the group because of its universal theme.



TUHS ES TUHS  
 ("Home is Home")

Tune: "There's no Place  
 Like Home"

WPH/PDL-6

Words: Mrs. Kay Friesen, 1976

April 1976/June 2, 1978

Chorus:

Tuhs, Tuhs, Tuhs sheenet Tuhs,  
 Es cheene shtehd opp Iade,  
 Zou vundasheen aus Tuhs.

1. Via habe viet yereist  
 on vie habe fehl yehiat,  
 Vie habe fehl yezeene  
 on habe fehl yeliat,  
 Vie zent verklich dankboa  
 en zent uck verklich frou,  
 Daut vie ylecklich Tuhs zent,  
 Muhs darp yefellt ons zou.
2. En Dietshlaunt opp dee Gauss e,  
 doa zent dee furchboa neiv,  
 Daut oiyat an doa zeeya  
 vann eck Papia han heiv.  
 Doa voat zou fehl yedrunke,  
 daut deit doa yieda Laups,  
 Dee drinke toh fehl Beeya,  
 en drinke toh fehl Shnaups.
3. Dee rehde aula Huachdiets h  
 en zeije Hut fea Hout,  
 En cheena reht doa Plautdiets h,  
 daut es an goanich gout.  
 En aul dee dietshe Meakes,  
 zou frintlich en zou sheen,  
 Dee shlappe ons daut Hoat opp,  
 en lohete ons auleen.
4. En dann em Yetread Eifst,  
 en aul dee drocke Tiet,  
 Vann vie hia aula shaufe,  
 Zent dee em Kuaryebiet,  
 En zonne zich biem Vohta  
 en shpehle doa dann romm,  
 En denke nicht aun Oa beit,  
 daut shient ons zeeya domm.

5. *Muhs darp es gauns aundash,  
hia zent vie verklich frou,  
Daut es zou aus ne Insel,  
en foake shient daut zou,  
Aus vann dee aundre Menshe  
rund om ons en dee Velt  
Doch gauns aundash lehve  
en meissens Heide zent.*

Translation:

Chorus:

Home, home, home beautiful home,  
There's no place on earth,  
So very dear as home.

1. We have travelled far  
and we've heard many things,  
We have seen much  
and have learned many things.  
We are truly thankful  
and also truly happy  
That we are safely home,  
We really like Mouse Village.
2. On the streets of Germany,  
they are very fussy,  
They get very annoyed  
if I toss (heave) paper there.  
There is so much drinking,  
every foolish person does it there,  
They drink too much beer,  
and they drink too much strong liquor.
3. They all speak High German  
and say "Hut" for hat,  
And no one speaks Low German,  
tis not good enough for them.  
And all the German girls,  
so friendly and so nice,  
They warm our hearts so,  
yet leave us all alone.
4. And then in the grain harvest,  
in that very busy time,  
When we all work here,  
they are at the resort,  
And suntan by the water,  
and play around out there,  
And don't think about work,  
That seems very stupid to us.

5. Mouse Village is completely different,  
 here we are really happy,  
 Its almost like an island,  
 And often it seems  
 As though other people  
 Around the world  
 Live completely differently,  
 and are mostly heathen.

Comments:

Arnold Dyck's Koop and Buhr have always acted as a mirror of their society: Mennonite village folk. Through these two, Mr. Dyck has been able to discuss the follies and foibles of these folk.

Koop and Buhr's conversation in this song reminds us of the prejudices often found among these folk: non-drinkers are critical of those who drink, those who speak Low German feel that those who speak High German are elitist, those who subscribe strongly to the work ethic consider everybody else to be lazy; in fact, anyone who lives differently than we do, must by definition, be pagan. One senses that these folk are really very exclusive. Neither exclusiveness nor ethnocentrism are unique to Mennonites, but they are nevertheless forces in certain segments of the Mennonite population which must be acknowledged. This version of "There's no place like home" then, uses the expression in a much more restrictive sense than its English counterpart.



(Dyck, 1954a:63)

SHEENE GREET<sup>1</sup>

("Lovely Greta")

Tune: "K-K-K-Katie"

Lyrics: "Heis chraitje", 1977

"Heis chraitje" - K/Mo.<sup>2</sup>  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
May 28, 1978

1. Greet miene Leefste, via aum backe,  
Zee haud eare Tveeback grohd tefea yebrocht,  
De Hunt dee lag doa, feare de Tochdea,  
De Flieye brumde rum zien Kopp omhea.
2. Peetash Greta, yibaye Greta,  
Yef mie bitte en fresha voama Tveeback hea,  
Komm en beht zette, vell die noch drecke,  
En kleiv ve dann uat fom oula met zien yevea.
3. Iatshocke Peetash, zaut en'ne Fealehv  
En de Hunt de shneppad am emma aunne Lemp,  
Ene Oh braum, kaum met'em Chehtel,  
Kaum toh frieye, ohba de Oh braum via 'ne Shtremp.
4. Doa zent uck noch aundre, vaut Greet hingaraun zent,  
Oh eck vensh dee Greet dee sheckt dehn aula fuat,  
Ohba eck vunda, aus daut voat voare,  
Ze blift aum backe, en eck shtoh hia noch en lua.

## Chorus:

Freshe Eenbach, yereeshte Tveeback,  
Yreet en eare Buns dee ligge mie dicht aum Hoat,  
Eck voa doa shpatsiere, vel mie nich riere,  
Sheene Yreeta, vunda vaut daut noch yehve voat.

---

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie" as "Greet".

<sup>2</sup>Because more than half of the group lived or studied in Winnipeg a number of my interviews with members of the group were held in Winnipeg.

# SPRIE

## Translation:

1. Greta (Margaret) my dearest one, was busy baking,  
She had just finished putting her 'Tveeback'<sup>1</sup> on the  
pans,  
The dog, it lay there, in front of the screen door,  
The flies were busy, busy buzzing around his head.
2. Greta Peters, giggling Greta,  
Please give me just one warm freshly-baked 'Tveeback',  
Come and sit with me, I want to hug you,  
And sneak out from the old man's stubbornness.
3. Potato Peters,<sup>2</sup> sat on the verandah,  
And the dog was busy sniffing his trouser legs,  
Abram Ens came, came with his tractor,  
Came to court her, but that Abram was a sock!
4. But there are others, who're chasing Greta,  
Oh I wish that Greta would send them all away,  
But I wonder, if that will happen,  
She keeps on baking, while I stand and wait and wait.

## Chorus:

Fresh, fresh buns, and, roasted 'Tveeback',  
Greta and her buns they lie close to my heart,  
I'll go visit there, don't want to ?  
Lovely Greta, wonder how things will turn out.

## Comments:

One can safely assume that a song praising a woman for her domestic skills was, in fact, composed by a group of men, and must of necessity refer to the pre-women's movement days.

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<sup>1</sup>Tveeback or 'two bake' are buns made from a dough similar to bread, but containing more salt and shortening. The two refers to the fact that each bun is made from two balls of dough. The top one, which is slightly smaller, is pressed into the bottom one to keep it from rolling off while they bake. 'Tveeback' were customarily baked on Saturdays, especially for Sunday 'Faspa' or lunch, to be served with jam, cheese or cold meat. (Dick, 1958:4).

<sup>2</sup>Because there are a limited number of Mennonite family names, and given names are frequently duplicated, villagers often use nicknames to differentiate between villagers with the same or similar names. These nicknames may be based on the person's occupation or some peculiarity associated with him or his family.

The singer is a confident young man who feels he can surmount any of the obvious obstacles in his path. The old man is stubborn, but one can get around him by arranging a secretive relationship. There is another suitor, but he is obviously a simple young man; he comes courting on a tractor! The one main obstacle is dearest Greta, who seems to have inherited some of the old man's stubbornness.

The young man's plight is accentuated by the performance style. For the last verse, Ray Plett, one of the "*Heis chraitje*", sings a slow, melancholy solo, while the rest of the singers hum. When they reach the chorus, they once again pick up the lively singing style.



## ONS GOADE

("Our Garden")

Tune: "Yankee Doodle"

Lyrics: Mrs. Kay Friesen, 1977

Landmark, Manitoba

October 8, 1977

PDL-1<sup>1</sup>

1. De Zomma en ons Goade  
doa voust zou fehl Yemiez,  
Ridies che, Dell en Sucka Shoute,  
Shauble Sipple, Pies,  
Bloume Komps t en aundra Komps t  
yebruckt tohm Komps t Borsht koake,  
Yalmeare en Postanak,  
En Karps tohm Karps Pei moake.

## Chorus:

Oh ba Onkruet via zou fehl t,  
Enn dount vaut vie uck deede,  
Emma vort ons donn yesheckt,  
"Na Yung, dann goh doch veede!"

2. Pehpakruet en Peetas ely,  
Ribuhss e en Miloune,  
Bucklezhone en Shis nick,  
Siloht en groute Boune,  
Gurke viere zeeya fehl,  
chliene en uck groute,  
Beete, Vrucke, Totshoke,  
En Korn en Pehpashoute.
3. Fattehan en Zeayekou,  
Toushkikruet en Chveak,  
Muste hacke mank daut Kruet,  
zas Doag enne Veak.  
Villa Hadrick, Zeayelkruet,  
Luhdick en Dreekaunt,  
Villa Hohva, vou daut vaust,  
Es yuh gout bekaunt.

---

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie" as "Jemies" ("Vegetables").



4. *Keis chekruht en Bottabloum,  
 En dann noch Shvounshoh bel,  
 Emma chemt doa meeya Kruht,  
 Dee Dies tel es misroh bel!  
 Kracht zou zent vie Menshe uck,  
 Yieda Dach em Lehve,  
 Aul daut Onkruht chempt fezelvst,  
 En doaveayn mott vie shtrahve.*

Last chorus:

*Du has t Fehla, eck hab Fehla,  
 Fehla ha vie aulla,  
 Veede mott vie yieda Dach,  
 Dee Vach es moh een shmaulla.*

Translation:

1. In summer in our garden,  
 there grow so many vegetables,  
 Radishes, Dill and peas,  
 beans, onions, peas,  
 Cauliflower and other cabbage  
 to cook cabbage borsht,  
 Carrots and parsnips,  
 and pumpkin to make pumpkin pie.

Chorus:

But the weeds were so plentiful,  
 Regardless of what we'd do,  
 We were always sent to work with  
 "Well son, why don't you go hoe!"

2. Summer savory and parsley,  
 watermelons and other melons,  
 Tomatoes and garlic,  
 Lettuce and big beans,  
 Very many cucumbers,  
 little ones and big ones,  
 Beets, turnips, potatoes,  
 and corn and green peppers.
3. Chick weed and sow thistle,  
 stink weed and "couch" grass,  
 (We) had to hoe among the weeds,  
 six days of the week,  
 Wild mustard and foxtail,  
 tobacco and wild buckwheat,  
 Wild oats, how they grow,  
 you already know.

4. Marrow and dandelion,  
and also timothy,  
There are continually more weeds,  
the thistle is horrible!  
We people are just like that  
every day of our lives,  
All those weeds come of themselves,  
And therefore we have to keep on striving.

Last Chorus:

You have failings, I have failings,  
We all have imperfections.  
We need to hoe/weed every day,  
The way is just a narrow one.

Comments:

When the "*Heis chraitje*" perform this song, they omit the fourth verse and the final moralistic chorus, so comments will be restricted to the first part of the song.

Along with all the usual vegetables one expected to find in a Mennonite farm garden, we are told in verse 3 about the weeds which inevitably accompanied the vegetables. The weeds also seemed to have their inevitable accompaniment: the command to go and hoe the garden. And what options did the poor youth have in the face of such a strong work ethic!



## SHVOATUAG

("Black/Ebony Eyes")

Tune: "Ebony Eyes"  
by the Everly Brothers  
Lyrics: "Heis chraitje", 1977

Landmark, Manitoba  
October 8, 1978  
PDL-1<sup>I</sup>

1. *Opp en Heilyendach, haud eck nich Tiet yehaut,  
Tohm noh Huhs toh foare noh onze Chast,  
Donn yingk eck nohm Kounsla, en hee kounsuld mie,  
Vaut has t fonne Pracharie?  
Mien sheens te Shvoatuag dee chemt mie aunteyayn,  
Fon uate Loft opp Flucht tvalv null nea'n,  
Omm ne Shtund ohda zou, vudd eck fushle, "Eck dou."  
Toh miene leefste Shvoauag.*
  
2. (spoken with humming and guitar accompaniment)
 

*Daut Loftshep via shentlich loht.  
Aulzou yingk eck nohm Loftshep's Yesheft's Desh,  
En zehd, "Heeya, Veets du vuarom Flucht tvalv null  
nea'n zou loht es?"  
"They couldn't get the plane loose," meend a,  
"Or maybe Sturm und Drang."  
Don yingk eck fuats Ruat, en luad bie dee Fuat,  
On beoubacht doa daut Beeyakaunlicht  
Aus daut derch de dunkle, diest re, deepe Nacht vept,  
Aus zocht daut noh miene sheens te, leefste Shvoatuag.  
Donn vort ehvrem Uhtshprecha bekaunt yemoakt,  
"Vudde dee yansye vaut Frind ohda Yeshvis ta opp Flucht  
tvalv null nea'n fuats oppe shtehd noh daut Choaks che  
ehva de Gaus gohne."*
  
3. *Don feeld eck ne Veedoag deep enne Bros t,  
Donn vist eck de himmlishe dunkle Loft,  
Miene leefste, lehves Pries vachdruach,  
Miene shtraume leefste Shvoatuag.  
Vann eck yeemohls kohm, nohm Himmel, eck vadd,  
Daut iashte Engel vaut sich bekaunt muak,  
Frintelt mie aun, Ea yleckelya Maun,  
Miene sheens te leefste Shvoatuag.*

---

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie" as "Schvatuag".

## Translation:

1. On a holiday, I hadn't had time  
To go home for our wedding.  
Then I went to a counsellor, and he counselled me,  
"What kind of stupidity (begging) is this?"  
My lovely ebony (black) eyes, is returning to me,  
From the air, on flight 1209.  
In an hour or so, I would whisper, "I do."  
To my dearest ebony eyes.
2. The airplane (airship) was terribly late.  
So I went to the airline's business desk  
And said, "Hey, do you know why flight 1209 is so late?  
"They couldn't get the plane loose,"<sup>1</sup> he said,  
"or maybe 'storm and stress'."<sup>2</sup>  
Then I went out immediately, and waited at the runway,  
And observed how the beaconlight (beercan light)  
Whipped through the deep pitch dark night,  
As though it was looking for my dearest loveliest ebony  
eyes.  
Then the announcement was made over the loudspeaker,  
"Would those who have friends or relatives on flight 1209  
immediately go to the little church across the street."
3. Then I felt a pain deep in my breast,  
Then I knew the dark heavenly air,  
Which carried away my dearest life's prize,  
My beautiful, dearest ebony eyes.  
If I ever get to heaven, I bet  
The first angel to greet me (make herself known),  
And smile at me, her happy man (husband),  
(Will be) my loveliest, dearest ebony eyes.

## Comments:

'Extraneous noise' on a tape of the first performance of this piece provided an index for audience reaction. There was nervous laughter as the first few lines were sung. Then the audience became quiet. As they quieted, the sound of the cracking sunflower seeds increased. People were puzzled. Was this a serious song, or was it a

<sup>1</sup>This is a literal translation of the Low German expression for 'They couldn't get the plane started'.

<sup>2</sup>"Sturm und Drang" was the late 18th century German literary movement in which man's individual, impulsive struggle with conventional society was depicted. In this context, the storm/stress label is applied to the weather.

humorous song? The counsellor's comments and the conversation at the flight information desk suggested humor, yet the story of the dearest ebony eyes had so much pathos.

For the "Heis chraitje", this Low German version was an attempt to ridicule the traumatic, heart-breaking, tear-jerker lyrics usually found in country and western songs.

### SCHWOATUAG

*Op'n heilja dach, haud etj nich tiet jehaut  
Om no hus te foare no onse tjasst  
Dan jintj etj no'm kaunsla en hee kaunseled mie  
Waut hast von 'ne pracharie  
Miene leewste schwuat uag tjemmt mie auntjeijen  
Von ute loft op flucht twalwe nul neijen  
Om 'ne stund ouda sou wud etj fuschle "etj dou"  
Tou miene leewste schwoatuag.*

*Daut loftschepp wia schentlich lot  
Aulsou jintj etj no'm loftscheppsjeschaftsdesch  
En meend "heeja, weet waarom dout loftschepp sou schentlich lot es?  
"Maybe they couldn't get the plane loose," meend á, "or maybe  
sturm und drank."  
Dan jintj etj suat rut en luad bie'm suat  
En beoubacht doa daut beejakaun licht  
Aus daut derch'e dunkle, diestre, deepe nacht weppt  
Aus socht daut no miene scheene leewste schwoatuag  
En dan wort äwa dem utschprecha bekaunt jemoakt  
"Wudde dee janstje met frinnd ouda jeschwissta op loftschepp 1209  
Fuat op'e schtäd no daut tjoatjstje äwa'm waich kome."*

*Dan feeld etj ne weedoag deep en'e Brust  
En dan wisst etj de himmlische dunkle loft  
Miene leewste läwespriess waich druach  
Miene straume leewste schwoatuag  
Wan etj jeemols kom no'm himmel etj wad  
Daut iaschte enjel waut sich bekaunt maak  
Frintelt mie aun, eah jletjelja maun  
Miene scheene leewste schwoatuag.*

(from "Sprie" record liner)

HACKSHTACKA  
("Chopsticks")

Tune: "Chopsticks"  
Lyric: translated by the  
"Heis chraitje", 1978

"Heis chraitje"  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Hia es en Leet vout vie au-la gout chan-ne,  
Daut liad vie aus Shoul-ching-a opp'm Pi-a-no,  
Zou ee-fach tohm shpeh-le daut ir-yent-vea kaun daut,  
Zou-goa opp een Kaus-te vout goa-nich shtemt.  
Daut shpeh-le toup yeit yie-drem gout,  
Enn vann daut uck nich au-la shtemt,  
De main Thing es 'ne gou-de Vies,  
Who cares auf shtem-men au-le Keys?

2. *Doch Vann vie prouve daut Leetche toh liare,  
 Dan yeit't nich,  
 viels daut zou ferchtalich sheide deit,  
 Aundre dee fohte Zich blous noh de Oare,  
 En zennt fon ons shpehle bould aufyedreit,  
 Vou kaun daut blous tou'm Zeayen fiare,  
 Vann vie nue shpehle zou'n Instrument?  
 Vann dit duet zich sheen zaul hiare,  
 Dann mott daut Piano iasht eryeshent.*

Translation:

1. Here is a song which we all know very well.  
 We learned it as school-children, on the piano.  
 So simple to play that anyone can do it,  
 Even on a 'Box' which is completely out of tune  
 (doesn't agree).  
 Everyone enjoys playing together  
 Even if it doesn't all agree.  
 The main thing is a good melody,  
 Who cares if all the keys are in tune?
2. Yet, when we try to learn the song,  
 It doesn't work because it disagrees so frightfully,  
 Others, just reach for their ears  
 And soon are turned off by our playing.  
 How can that lead to a blessing?  
 If we play such an instrument?  
 If this duet is supposed to sound good,  
 Then the piano must first be tuned.

Comments:

Sung at the Mennonite Arts Festival, this song was translated by the group from a copy which Grant Plett brought with him from the Mennonite Bible School he attended in British Columbia. The piece, "Everybody's Piano Favorite" is a take-off on a hack-tune often played on the piano by children with no formal musical training.

In addition, the use of dissonance at the end of the piece is a pun on out-of-tune pianos. The reference to 'blessing' in the second verse, suggests that they are referring specifically to church pianos which are often notoriously out of tune.

Humor in the performance of the piece was achieved by singing in a very clipped syllabic fashion, suggesting the monotony of a performance by an unmusical child. Also, the intonation of the "Heis chraitje" is of such high calibre, that the use of dissonance at the end of the song was really effective. Lastly, the mock seriousness with which these singers perform a humorous song adds to the enjoyment of the audience.

AUN 'E 1951<sup>1</sup>

("In 1951")

Tune: "Battle of New Orleans" "Heis chraitje" - K/Mo.  
 Lyrics: "Heis chraitje", Winnipeg, Manitoba  
 May 28, 1978 May 28, 1978

1. Aun 'e neantien-eene-feeftig  
 vort en yunga Shlaups yeburn,  
 Daut leet noh nusht bezundaret  
 met ziene kohle Uaren,  
 Hee via daut iashte Chint  
 fon en Poa Chleeyemeenta Lied,  
 Vudd cheena han yedocht  
 daut hee en Pentecos tal fried.
2. Dee chliena Penzel vos dann opp,  
 en racht begohvna Yung,  
 Vie viss te daut fon vaut hee zehd,  
 en aules vaut hee zungk,  
 Daut Football en daut Hockey shpel  
 daut via am zeeya noh,  
 Vann yie am froage, "Viasht du gout?"  
 dann vudd hee zeiyen, "Yoh."
3. Dee Voare yinge yeniets h febie,  
 Hee reist de Velt herum,  
 Dee Meakes leet hee aula toch,  
 Hee docht hee via toh from.  
 Doa kaum ne Tiet don dreid et rumm,  
 Hee zungk met Breeda Leev,  
 Dit Meake intresiad am don,  
 Daut gauß boult Zes ta Leev.

## Comments:

Some folklorists whose primary concern is the authenticity of a song, based on criteria like anonymity of the author, a time-depth of at least two or three generations, transmission by oral tradition, would not bother to look at a song like this. Its authors are known, it is barely one year old, it was written down when it was composed, it was performed from this written copy, and it was sung only once and will probably never be sung again.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie" as "Toupyefrie" ("Intermarriage").

<sup>2</sup>This assumption was proven false when the song appeared on "Sprie".



But, the song is a valuable addition to this collection, because it exemplifies the social process by which a number of Low German songs, especially some of the more recent ones, were written. A description of this process follows.

When Dennis Reimer, one of the "*Heis chraitje*", decided to get married, he asked the remaining members of the group to prepare some songs for the wedding reception. One song was supposed to be sung in English, because his fiancée does not understand German, and the other song, in Low German.

On a Sunday afternoon, May 28, 1978, to be precise, the "*Heis chraitje*", minus Dennis, gathered at the home of Ray and Pat Plett to compose a Low German song for the wedding. They had just finished performing at the Mennonite Arts Festival, but since some members of the group were going on vacation and they couldn't meet again before the wedding, they had to ignore the fact that they were tired.

Several tune of German love songs were suggested: "Oh Du Lieber Augusinte" and "Du, du, liegst mir am Herzen", but they did not seem to capture anyone's imagination. Then someone suggested "The Battle of New Orleans", a Johnny Horton song. This, they thought would be suitable because the English words begin "In 1950..." and continue in ballad style, providing a good format for a ballad about Dennis' life and courtship.

One of the singers, Grant Plett got out paper and pencil and began writing. Ideas seemed to flow easily. He would write a line or two, and then check with the rest of the group. As they sat around the living room floor eating pizza and sipping iced tea, the "*Heis chraitje*" continued to throw out ideas: "We have to have something in the song about Dennis being slow with women." "We should talk first of all about him as a little boy, then as a teenager, then early twenties, and then about "Brotherlove". "Not just about birth and marriage." "Was he active in sports?" "Yea, he was actually pretty good in hockey. Well, sort of." As can be seen, this conversation is reflected in the lyrics.

The chorus of the song was not completed at this time. Creativity was running low by that point, and, they thought, they could write it when they got together to rehearse just before the wedding in Brandon. No one appears to have kept a copy of this chorus, which now appears on "*Sprrie*".

Even without the chorus, we gain a better understanding of the Low German composition process through a look at the forces which shaped the creation of this song. It offers a pungent counter-example to folklorists who would have us believe that all songs are composed by individuals (see Nettl, 1973:5-7).

## BLINGYUL LAMENT

("Blind/Bilingual Lament")

Tune: "Auld Lang Syne"  
 Lyrics: "Heis chraitje", 1977

Landmark, Manitoba  
 October 8, 1978  
 PDL-1<sup>1</sup>

## Chorus:

Daut Plautdietsch es ons aula vach,  
 Daut es ne truaye zach,  
 Nuh zeiy vie boult, "Bonjour, Monsieur,"  
 Enne shtehd, "Mien Frint, Goun Dach."

1. Doa via ne Tiet dann rehd vie Dietsch  
 Gauns shtolt via vie doabie,  
 Vie knackte Zoat, en gauve Roht,  
 Daut es nuh Historie.  
 Enne neantian neantian yries d daut uht,  
 Dee Bildung fungk don aun,  
 Don trocke fehl noh Paraguay,  
 Dee Kuarn foll viet fom Shtaum.
2. Aum Aunfank via vie dann auleen,  
 Vie freide ons doatou,  
 Nuh kaumen aundre Folk hia mangk,  
 Daut muak ons goanich frou.  
 Daut via uck fleicht alright yevasst,  
 Daut bleeß doa goanich bie,  
 Dee shmoeke girls met shmoeke curls,  
 Daut gauf en toupyefrie.
3. Don kaum T.V. on radio  
 Aunt Olly, dea haft Shult,  
 Dea Ts eitungk holp doch nisht doabie,  
 Daut haud vie nicht yevullt.  
 Nuh's just about ons Plautdietsch vach,  
 Vie zent meist assimilate,  
 Nuh fang blous nicht Fraunshouzhish aun,  
 Aus chrichs eent feare freht.

## Translation:

## Chorus:

Low German is completely gone,  
 It's such a sad situation,  
 We'll soon say, "Bonjour Monsieur"  
 Instead of "My Friend, Good Day."

<sup>1</sup>Recorded on "Sprie" as "Blingjul Lament".

1. There was a time when we spoke German,  
And were very proud of it.  
We cracked seeds, and gave advice,  
But that's history now.  
In 1919 things went haywire (got 'dirtied out')  
Education started then.  
Many moved to Paraguay,  
The kernel fell far from the stalk/stem.
2. In the beginning we were all alone,  
And were very happy that way,  
But then other folk began to move in,  
And we were not happy with that.  
It might have been alright,  
But it didn't stay at that,  
Those lovely girls with the lovely curls,  
There soon was intermarriage.
3. Then came T.V. and radio,  
Aunt Oily, it's her fault,  
The newspaper also didn't help,  
We didn't even want it.  
Now our Low German is just about gone,  
We are almost assimilated,  
Now just don't start French,  
Or you'll get it in the mouth (mug-animal term).

Comments:

The "*Heis chraitje*" call this song their "*Blingyul Lament*". This title has several layers of meaning. On the one hand, it may refer to bilingualism as either a national Canadian or local Landmark issue; that is, either the French-English or, Low German-French tensions, since Landmark is bordered by French-speaking communities.

On the other hand, the title may refer to the 'blindness' ('*blint*') of people within the Mennonite community who do not realize how their language is being lost. The title itself is representative of this loss: *blingyul*, is an anglicized Low German term for bilingual. Certainly a very clever title!

The song, a ballad, describes the successive stages in the decline of Low German usage. The first concession, they claim, was bowing to the public school system, through which they used High German, and introduced English, totally ignoring Low German. They refer to those who tried to avoid selling out Low German, probably symbolic of their whole value system, by moving to Paraguay.

While the Mennonites lived in fairly isolated communities, they were able to maintain certain aspects of their identity without overt threats. The increasing proximity of other ethnic groups and consequent intermarriages which followed once again posed a threat to the language.

The media compounded the problem. 'Foreign language' newspapers, T.V. and radio - even CFAM, which claims to represent the Mennonite people, yet has little Low German programming, are also blamed for their impact on the situation.

And lastly, they cite the willingness of many Mennonites to assimilate to the dominant culture.

The choice of tune is appropriate. Usually used to 'bemoan' the passing of yet another year, "Auld Lang Syne" adds weight to the message of the song.

The *'Heis chraitje'* usually end their performances with the singing of this song. When it appears at the end of the program, the chorus is changed to read

*Daut Plautdietsch es ons aula vach,  
Daut es ne truaye Sach,  
Nue sei vie boult, "Bon Soir, Monsieur,"  
Daut meent, "Mien Frint, Goun Nacht."*

translated as

Low German is completely gone,  
It's such a sad situation.  
We'll soon say "Bon Soir, Monsieur,"  
Instead of "My friend, good night."



APPENDIX III  
MELODIC SOURCES CHART

KEY

re: immigration period of the informant

- A/Me. - "Auswanderer" returned from Mexico
- A/Pa. - "Auswanderer" returned from Paraguay
- K - "Kanadier" of Chortitza Colony origin
- K/Mo. - "Kanadier" of Molotschna Colony origin
- K/Pr. - "Kanadier" who migrated through Prussia to Canada  
c. 1890
- K/USA - "Kanadier" who migrated to Canada from the USA,  
c. 1890
- N - "Neueingewanderte" who migrated to Canada via  
Germany (post WW II)
- N/Pa. - "Neueingewanderte" who migrated to Canada via  
Paraguay (post WW II)
- R - "Russlaender" of Chortitza Colony origin
- R/Mo. - "Russlaender" of Molotschna Colony origin
- VPDL - Veertien Platdietsche Leeda, a book of Low German  
songs published in Winnipeg c. 1960

re: place of origin of song

- Blfd. - Blumenfeld, Manitoba
- ERes. - East Reserve, east of the Red River
- Hndn. - Horndean, Manitoba
- Klfd. - Kleefeld, Manitoba
- Ldmk. - Landmark, Manitoba - general term to designate  
"Heischraitje" compositions though some were com-  
posed in Winnipeg
- NeuB. - Neu Bergthal, Manitoba
- Rnld. - Reinland, Manitoba
- Stbh. - Steinbach, Manitoba
- Wklr. - Winkler, Manitoba
- Wpg. - Winnipeg, Manitoba

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
Chant	Falling -3rd	"Holt Zoage"	N	Russia	
		"Ohtwa"	K	"	
		"Seet en Maaks tje"	K/Mo.	"	
		"Runde, runde Rouze"	N	"	
	Falling p4th	"Backe Kuakches Backe"	K/Mo.	"	
		"Dee Bloumenuatshe Yunges "	K	Canada	
		"Foutchi Beshlohne"	K/Mo.	Russia	
		"Holt Zoage"	"	"	
		"Ria Yretche"	"	"	
		"Shokkel shokkel sheiya"	"	"	
Teasing tune	"Tripje trapje trohnche"	"	"		
	"Backe, backe Kuaken"	K	Russia		
		"Shokkel, shokkel sheiya"	K	"	
-----					
High German folksong	"Alle Jahre wieder" (variant)	"Aule leeve Morjen"	K	Canada	
		"Hazha Poppa zuhzhe"	N/Pa.	Russia	
		"Hotte Maunche rieden"	K, R	"	
		"Shohpche yingk ent Voulche"	K, R, N	"	
		"Shokkel, shokkel sheiya"	K, R	"	
		"Zuhze, zuhze zentche"	N	"	
		"Vie, vie, vie, vie..."	R, N	"	

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
High German folksong	"Bohnen pott"/ "Kreuzpolka"	"Marie, Marei, Marushkaka"	K/Mo.	Klfd.	c.1960
	"Du kleine Fliege"	"Duh chliena Chniepa"	K, K/Mo.	Canada	
	"Eine kleine Geige"	"Eene kleene Fiddel"	K	Wklr.	
	"Eins, zwei zuffa"	"Eins, zwei, zuffa"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1976
	"Eiya popeiya"	"Eiya pohpeiya"	R, N	Russia	
	"Fuchs du hast dje Gans gestolen" <sup>1</sup>	"Aus dee Bua" "Aus dee Sheepa/Peeta" "Aus dee Yued"	R/Mo. R K	Russia " "	
	"Fuchs..." (variant) <sup>1</sup>	"En Lamche haud en Kobbelche"	K, R, N	Russia	
		"Hauns che haud en Hieshache"	K	"	
		"Shusta...Kobbelche"	A/Pa.	"	
		"Yungche...Hieshache"	K/Mo.	"	
	"Frage und Antwort- spiel"	"Hawis zh Poppa" "Shokkel, shokkel sheiya"	K/Mo. R	Russia "	
	"Gruenes Gras"	"Shprungk en Bock" "Yreenet Graus"	R R	" "	
	"Haenschen klein"	"En Muhs darp bie Yrientohl"	K	Ldmk.	1976

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
High German folksong	"Haense1 & Gretel"	"Peetache en Leenache"	R	Russia	
	Humperdinck's "Haense1 & Gretel"	"Zuhza Petruhza"	R	Russia	
	"Klipp klopp"	"Aus eck yingk met de Hoak opp'e Dehl" (variant 2)			
	"Kuchenbaken"	"Bakke bakke Kuaken"	K	Russia	
	"Der lustige Soldat" (variant)	"Allemaal kann ich nicht lustig sein"	K, R, N	Russia	
	"Ich hatt emal en Freier"	"Et vier 'mohl en Frieja"	R/Mo.	Rus./Ger. <sup>2</sup>	
	"Im Wald und auf der Heide"	"Dee Horndiena"	K	Hdn.	1978
	"Kommt der Nacht"	"Chemt dee Nacht"	N	Russia	
	"Als ich gestern Abend"	"Aus eck yis tern Ohvent"	R	Russia	
	"Mein Hut der hat drei Ecken"	"Ohm Banyamien es mien Liehra" "Vaut zent mie daut fea Nushte"	R/Mo. R/Mo.	Russia Russia	

(Continued)



Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
High German folksong	"Mein Vater war ein Wandersman"	"Mien Fohda via en Formashmaun"	R	Rnld.	
	"Oh du lieber Augustine"	"Oh du lieber Augustine"	N	ERes.	1978
	"Schoen ist die Jugend"	"Sheen es dee Yugent"	R, N	Russia	
	"Schlaf Kindlein"	"Shloh p Chindche shloh p"	K, R	Russia	
	"Zum tanze mit der Puppe"	"Hups Meryalche"	R	Russia	
High German religious songs	"Am Jordan's Ufer"	"Am Jordan's Eeuw"	VPDL	Wpg.	
	"Bald ja bald"	"Jo all bold"	VPDL	"	
	"Bei dir Jesus"	"Bie die Jesus"	VPDL	"	
	"Du bist auf den Weg zum Himmel"	"Oellern nemt doch june Kinga"	VPDL <sup>3</sup>	"	
	"Er lebt" (variant)	"Tiep Heenaches"	R	Russia	

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
High German religious songs	"Es lebe Gott allein in mir"	"Legend of the Gauss e-shlinyels" "Shohpche yingke ent Voulche"	R R	Rnld. Russia	1975
	"Die Gnade sei mit allen"	"On Nohba es dehm Koh'ta ferakt?"	R	Wk1r.	
	"Der Himmel steht offen"	"De Himmel steit open"	VPDL	Wpg.	
	"Horch dein Heiland"	"Horch den Heiland"	VPDL	"	
	"Ich und mein Haus"	"Een maunchet Poa"	K/USA	?	
	"Ich weiss einen Strom"	"Eck weet eenen Strom"	VPDL	Wpg.	
	"Ihr Kinderlein kommet"	"Mie hungatt" "Zuhza Petruh'zha"	K, R R	Russia "	
	"Jesus liebt mich"	"Miene mame es mie gout"	K, R	Russia	
	"Jesus nimmt"	"Jesus nemmt noch Suenda"	VPDL	Wpg.	
	"Kommt Brueder"	"Oh seet doch wo so schwind"	VPDL	"	
	"Mir ist Erbarmung widerfahren"	"Ons Nohba es mie doll gevorden"	K	Plum Coulee?	

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
High German religious songs	"Preist ihm"	"Shnetche"	K		
	"Solang als Jesus lebt"	"Solang as Jesus lebt"	VPDL	Wpg.	
	"Venn der Heiland"	"Vann dee Heilaunt"	K	Wklr.	1978
	"Weisz ich den Weg"	"Kann eck den Wag"	VPDL	"	
	"Wie sollt ich muessig bleiben" (variant)	"Tiep Heenaches"	R	Russia	
-----					
Russian folksong	"Oi pied haiyem" <sup>4</sup>	"Aus dee Bua" etc.	K, R, N	Russia	
	"Stenka Razin"	"Ballad of Peter Harms"	R	Rnld.	1975
	unknown	"Eene Piep, eene Yack"	R	Russia	
	unknown	"Vess nich shlohpe"		Russia	
-----					
North Am- can folksong <sup>5</sup>	"Alouette"	"All you etta"	K	Canada	

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
North American folk-song	"Auld lang syne"	"Daut nia Yoa" "De goude oule Tiet" "Blingyul Lament"	K/Mo. K K/Mo.	Ldmk. Hdn. Ldmk.	1975 1978 1977
	"Battle of New Orleans"	"Toupyefrie"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1978
	Beverly Hillbillies theme song	"Loht mie yuent fetalle"	K	Gretna	1976
	"Bicycle built for two"	"Beesikul"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1976
	"Kelligrews Soiree"	"Fas pa"	K	Ldmk.	1976
	"Chisholm Trail"	"Komma kei yei yippie"	K	WkTr.	c.1940
	"Chopsticks"	"Hackshacka"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1978
	"Ebony Eyes"	"Miene leefste Shvoatuag"	K/Mo.	Ldmk	1977
	"Edelweiss"	"Botta bloum"	R	Wpg.	
	"For he's a jolly good fellow"	"Ballad of the Duevenmeista" "Miene Mame en Pape" "Mame en Pape fuaren"	R K/Mo. K	Rnld. ERes. Sask.	1975
	"Good Night Ladies"	"Gouden Nacht Munches"	R	WkTr.	1978

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
North American folk-song	"In the good old summertime"	"Onze goude oule Tiet"	K/Pr.	NeuB.	c.1920
	"K-K-K-Katie"	"Sheene Yreet"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1977
	"Mlle. from Armentier"	"Ons Noh ta Klohs e haud ne Koa"	K	Canada	
	"Mary had a little lamb"	"M'rieche haud en chlienet Laum"	A/Me.	?	
	"My Bonnie lies the Ocean"	"Mien Heeya" "Mien Mehdel"	R K/Mo.	Wk1r. Ldmk.	1976
	"O bury me not"	"O begrount mie nich"		Wk1r. <sup>6</sup>	1972
	"Oh Susanna"	"Oh Zuhsche Aunna"	R	Wk1r.	1973
	"Old Black Joe"	"Oula shvoata Youseff" "Zauvea daut"	R/Mo. K	Stbh. Hndn.	1974 1978
	"Old MacDonald had a farm"	"En Muhs darp vohn vie aula toup"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1975
	"On top of old Smokey"	"Acht Meyalles"	K, R	Stbh.	c.1970
	"Sail on silvery moon"	"Kulla felengst"	K	Wk1r.	c.1940

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
North American folk-song	"Polly wolly doodle"	"Polly volley Duedel"	R	Wk1r.	1973
	"Something to sing about"	"Mien Darp - Bloumenfelt"	K	Blfd.	1978
	"Tell me why baby"	"Tell me why baby"	A/Me.	Sask.	1956
	"The farmer in the dell"	"Doa vie emohl een Maun"	K/Mo.	Canada	
		"Eck yingk emohl em Voult"	K, A/Pa., R	Canada	
	"The Old Lamplighter"	"Dee oula Laumpaun-shtekka"	K	Wk1r.	c.1940
	"There's no place like home"	"Tuhs es tuhs"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1976
	"This land is your land"	"Diss e Shtaudt es Vinkla"	K	Wk1r.	1976/8
		"Dit Darp es Reinlaund"	R	Rn1d.	1975
		"Don kaume de Menno-niete"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1974
	"We sail the ocean blue"	"Shepfoara"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1976
	"Yankee Doodle"	"Ons Goade"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1977
"You are my sunshine"	"Du bes mien Zonneshien"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1975	

(Continued)

Type of Tune	Original Tune Name	Low German Title	Immigration Period	Place of Origin	Time
English re- ligious songs	"Away in a manger"/ "Flow gently sweet Afton"	"Daut es vada Vienacht"	A/Me., K	ERes.	
	"I'm going higher"	"Eck goh noch hecha"	A/Pa.		
	"Is my name written there?"	"Steet mien Nomen all dor?"	VPDL	Wpg.	
	"My Lord is writing"	"Mien leeva Gott"	K, A/Pa.		
	"Tell me the old, old story"	"Fetall me Geschichti"	K?		
	"The wise man"	"De Kluaka Maun"	A/Me.		
	"Why worry when you can pray?"	"Vuarom duaren?"	A/Pa.		
-----					
Original melodies		"De Horndienshe Meyalles"	K	Hdn.	1978
		"Vie sent hia fondoag toupyekohme"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1975
		"Vie vohne hia en Muhs darp"	K/Mo.	Ldmk.	1976
-----					
European Low German songs	"Dat du mien Leefst"	"Daut duh mien Leefst ta best"	K	?	

<sup>1</sup>Mennonite informants always identified this tune as a familiar High German folksong, "Fuchs du hast die Gans gestolen", but Ukrainian informants considered the tune to be a variant of "Oi pied Haiyem" ("In the Grove").

<sup>2</sup>Learned in Germany enroute from Russia to Canada.

<sup>3</sup>Tape recorded on #PD-1 with some of the Veertein Plattdietsche Leeda, but not published.

<sup>4</sup>See Footnote 1.

<sup>5</sup>The term 'North American folksong' is used here as a broad cover term to represent the entire range of musical tunes available to Mennonites in Canada, though some of them are neither folksong nor North American in origin.

<sup>6</sup>Composed in British Columbia in 1972, and publicly performed in Manitoba for the first time in Winkler in 1973.



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