BLUMENORT

A Changing Mennonite Community

1874-1982

by: Royden Loewen

A Thesis in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of a Master of Arts Degree

September 9, 1983

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

BLUMENORT

A CHANGING MENNONITE COMMUNITY

1874-1982

by

Royden Keith Loewen

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

© 1983

Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA to lend or sell copies of this thesis, to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS to publish an abstract of this thesis.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

SUMMARY

The years were 1874 and 1875. Their names were Friesen and Reimer, Toews and Wiebe, Penner and Plett, Warkentin and Janzen, Unger and Koop, Loewen and Wohlgemuth. They were members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from the Colony of Borosenko in southern Russia. Together with other members of their church, they left their old homeland and made their way to a new country, in which they had been assured a place to practice freely their humble faith and to follow their simple lifestyle. Their new home was to be found in three prairie villages in the northeastern township of the East Reserve in Manitoba. They named the first village Blumenort, meaning "a place of flowers". Blumenort was to become one of the largest villages of the Reserve and the centre of a community which included the neighboring sister villages of Blumenhof and Neuanlage. The villages, patterned after European peasant villages, were the main features of the new settlement. It was in the village where settlers established their farms, schooled their children, met to worship and enriched community life through neighborly interaction.

The story of Blumenort, however, is more than the story of how a group of Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites founded and built a village community. It is the story of a people

changing and adjusting to a new physical and social environment over time. In 1910, after 35 years of holding the settlers together in close community, the village of Blumenort disbanded. Families moved onto their own quarters of land and established their own farmyards. Along with this change came changes in every sphere of the community as farming, business, social service, education and church life experienced times of transition. Each change seemingly removed Blumenort one more step from the peculiar, ethnocentric community it had been before 1910.

By 1948 the roots of a new community had been entrenched. Farming had become specialized, and the foundations of a residential and business community were established. The church was Americanized. English became increasingly the language of the people, with the school and social services regulated by the provincial government.

The years after 1948 were marked by a steady increase in the community's standard of living, openness to higher education and interaction with non-Mennonites. The Blumenort area in 1982 was a community which had few of the characteristics which had distinguished it as a Kleine Gemeinde pioneer settlement in 1874.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

I THE COMING 10

1 The Old Homeland 12

2 Manitoba Before Settlement 25

3 Leaving Russia 33

4 Settling in a New Land 40

II THE VILLAGE ERA: 1874-1910 61

1 The Village Landscape 63

2 Government and the Villagers 72

3 Farming the Village Land 82

4 Women and Homemaking 104

5 Trades and Services 112

6 Education in the Village 123

7 The Church of the Village 136

8 Culture: Low German and "Spazieren" . . 160

9 Helping the Village Needy 183

10 Meeting Outsiders 195

11 The Village System Ends 208

III THE TRANSITION ERA: 1910-1948 224

1 Landscape in Transition 225

2 Changing Ways of Farming 234

3 The Rise of Local Businesses 250

4 Education in Transition 275

5 The Kleine Gemeinde Faces Changes . . . 292

6 The Helping Hand in Transition 315

7 A Changing Lifestyle 332

8 Exodus: The End of an Era 343

IV THE ERA OF NEW BLUMENORT: 1948-1982 359

1 A New Landscape 360

2 Farm Specialization 369

3 A New Business Community 389

4 New Approaches to Eduaction 424

5 The Evangelical Mennonite Church . . . 438

6 The Colonization Movement 464

7 New Blumenort Lifestyles 473

CONCLUSION 483

Maps 490

Bibliography 500

INTRODUCTION

The years were 1874 and 1875. Their names were Friesen and Reimer, Toews and Wiebe, Penner and Plett, Warkentin and Janzen, Unger and Koop. They were members of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from the Colony of Borosenko in southern Russia. Together with other members of their church they left their old homeland and made their way to a new country where they had been assurred a place where they could freely live-out their humble faith and simple lifestyle. Their new home was to be a prairie village in the northeastern township of the East Reserve in Manitoba. They named the village Blumenort, meaning a place of flowers. Blumenort was to become one of the largest villages of the Reserve and the center of a community which included the neighbouring sister villages of Blumenhof and Neuanlage. The village, patterned after European peasant villages, was the main feature of the new settlement. It was in the village where settlers established their farms, where the children were schooled and where the church met, where people interacted and the richness of community flourished.

The story of Blumenort, however, is more than the story of how a group of Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites founded and built a village community. It is the story of a people changing and adjusting to a new physical and social environment over time. In 1910, after 35 years of holding the settlers together in close community the village of Blumenort disbanded. Families

moved onto their own quarters of land and established their own farmyards. Along with this change came changes to every sphere of the community as farming, business, social service, education and church life experienced times of transition. Each change seemingly removed Blumenort one more step from the peculiar, ethnocentric community it had been before 1910.

By 1948 the roots of a new community had been entrenched. Farming had become specialized, business acceptable, school and social service regulated by the provincial government, the church North Americanized, the language increasingly English and the foundations of a new residential and business center established.

The years after 1948 were marked by a steady increase in the community's standard of living, openness to higher education and interaction with non-Mennonites. Blumenort in 1982 was a community which had attained the appearance of a rather typical, prosperous farming community centered around a small town. Few of the characteristics which had distinguished Blumenort as a Kleine Gemeinde pioneer settlement in 1874 were visible. Yet, as during its first era, Blumenort continued to be an agriculturally-based, church-centered, homogeneously Mennonite community.

This thesis then is the story of the Mennonite people in Blumenort, Manitoba between 1874 and 1982. Two tenets have governed the aim with which this writing was undertaken. The first tenet is based on the Leceister School of local history which posits "that local history is a subject worthy of study in its own right."[1] This school of thought maintains

that the dynamics and tension within a defined community are usually more important to local people than the political happenings many miles and many cultural barriers away. Local history can be of value if it seeks to portray empathetically, accurately and vividly how a particular group of people set in its defined geographic environment and specific time frame undertook "real life".

The second underlying tenet of this work is that local history can provide something to the understanding of the nature of the larger society. A local history should show an awareness of the dominant themes in regional, national or even universal history and seek to contribute something to them. Criticisms like Alan Artibise's that many local studies "are primarily accounts of local events with an emphasis on the greatness of community achievements... [and on the community's] distinct personality"[2] has been kept in mind. It is realized that those aspects in Blumenort's history which make it a distinctive place are mere variations of themes played out elsewhere; albeit, variations which may help to illuminate those very themes.

This study of Blumenort will differ from other local studies, in particular recent histories on the birth and development of Western Canadian towns. Among such histories is Barry Potyondi's M.A. thesis on Minnedosa, which provides a balanced and intricate view of the community in its early stages.[3] Potyondi vividly portrays Minnedosa's economic base, its local society and its relation to the people within the

greater community. Like Minnedosa, the study on Blumenort attempts to present a wholistic view of an agriculturally-based, socially homogenous and expanding Western Canadian community. Blumenort, too, was affected by fluctuations in agricultural markets, by transportation routes and by enterprising individuals. However, unlike Minnedosa and many other frontier communities, Blumenort was not founded and developed with the aim for it to become a thriving and growing prairie landmark. According to Paul Voisey it was this aim which was central to the birth and development of small towns in Southern Alberta. It was an aim which manifested itself in "boosterism", which Voisey defines as "the campaign to stimulate economic and population growth by advertising, lobbying and offering incentives to development".[4] The essential things to the growth of most Western Canadian places were railways and more settlers, and the main players in this game were land speculators who did everything in their power to obtain both ingredients.

While Blumenort was established by deliberate action it was essentially different than that described above. To understand the establishment and development of Blumenort it is necessary to turn to the works which describe the process by which etnic minorities, adhering to certain old world values, established self-contained communities in a vibrant and assimilative North American geographical and social environment. Andrew H. Clark, the noted geographical historian, saw a significant story in how European cultures affected new world geographies. Members within his school have extended his

work to examine how new world realities affected transplanted European cultures.

James T. Lemon, for instance, in an attempt to explain modern American social and geographical norms, has studied the socail changes in early Pennsylvania. It is here that Lemon insists the "beginnings of possessive individualism that overwhelmed previous forms of community found in Europe"[5] can be seen. Market exchange, land speculation, weak local government, evangelical piety and the demand of absolute land ownership, which found such fertile ground in the American context, brought an end to the ideal of community based on old world values.

D. A. McQuillan, in his study of ethnic communities in Kansas has attempted to explain why some European groups have seen their ways remain more viable in North America than others have. According to McQuillan, it is territorial homogeneity strengthened by religion, isolation, agriculture, patriarchy and endogamy which ensures against social assimilation.[6]

Thus in order to understand a specific ethnocentric community and even a larger society such as Western Canada it is necessary to examine the tension which exists between a community's attempt to maintain its tradtional pattern of life and its inclination to the economic and social opportunities in a new society. It is this tension which several historians describing the Mennonite communities in Western Canada have propounded. The most noted historian of this process remains E. K. Francis. In his book, <u>In Search of Utopia</u>, he has examined the way in which Manitoba Mennonites

have sought to maintain a dynamic sub-culture while adjusting to the market structure, lingua franca and educational institutions of the larger society. By remaining a homogenous group and relinquishing only those old world institutions necessary to reach an equalibrium with the pressures that the dominant society was exerting, the Mennonites were able to ensure that "acculturation...by no means led to any significant degree of assimilation".[7]

John Warkentin has undertaken a similar study of the Manitoba Mennonites, although from a geographical perspective. He describes how the Mennonites were brought to give up their peculiar settlement pattern and agricultural mode because of the "indirect yet continuous affect of Canadian customs".[8] He seems as significiant the fact that the Mennonite settlements in Manitoba were not the result of "a migration of individualistic pioneers, but a group migration in which entire communities from the steppes of Russia were transferred to the fundamentally similar prairies in Manitoba".[9] The significance of this lies in the fact that despite their strong beginning, Mennonite communities did not withstand the Canadian pressures and were in 1955 "becoming more flexible all the time".[10]

Elaborating on the theme of how Mennonites in Canada have fared in "attempting to create a separate community and way of life" is Frank Epp.[11] In two volumes which examine this struggle among Canadian Mennonites between 1786 and 1940, Epp has emphasized the different approaches Mennonites have taken to the pressures of the dominant society. While most

Mennonites in Canada tended to focus inward to nurture the growth of a congregational community and attempted to main-- tain their preculiar religious and cultural forms, they reacted in different ways to the Canadian pressures for them to assimilate. For instance, the Mennonites assumed three approaches to the 1919 education crisis in Manitoba; one was geographic isolation achieved by emigrating from Canada, the second was open acceptance of the Canadian ways based on the belief that the Mennonitism could be maintained through the church and the third was a carefully controlled accommodation to the new ways.[12]

It is in the diversity of the various Mennonite approaches to the pressures to integrate with the rest of society that Blumenort finds its niche. In recent years two local studies of Mennonites in Manitoba have added invaluable insights to the different ways in which Mennonites have adjusted to the Canadian way of life. Peter Zacharias in his work has shown how the deeply conservative Old Colonist Mennonites on the West Reserve village of Reinland built up a community in an "expression of their philosophy of faith and life".[13] While the Reinlanders accepted innovative technology and marketing schemes, they have succeeded more than most Mennonite communities in upholding their ethnic identity by maintaining a farm-operator village, a locally controlled school and the German language in church. While a number of Reinland families left Canada during the 20's the nature of the community did not change substantially as the emigrants' places were filled by some of the move conservative Russlaender immigrants.

Juxtaposed to the Reinland experience is Esther Epp-Thiessen's work on Altona. Unlike Reinland, Altona is a town which was developed by non-Mennonites in similar fashion to that of Minnedosa. The town, its railroad, municipal government, and public school were quickly accepted by the more liberal Bergthaler Mennonites in the area. As early as 1898 the open field system in the Altona area was dissolved. It is a surprising fact, writes Epp-Thiessen, that the system in Altona lasted as long as it did. While Altona became more conservative after many of the non-Mennonites left around World War I, by 1940 the community had experienced a renaissance and changed from a "slow-moving village to a fast-growing town" which was peopled by citizens who increasingly identified themselves as Canadians and "not only as Mennonites".[14]

Using Reinland and Altona as models of two different approaches by Mennonites to the dominant society, one isolationist and the other accommodationist, Blumenort can be put into historiographical context. Blumenort was settled by the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites who are generally considered more liberal than the Old Colonists but more conservative than the Bergthalers. Like the Reinlanders, the Blumenort settlers were committed to establishing a church-dominated settlement which strictly adhered to an ideology of Christian discipleship and separation from the "world". Thus Blumenort avoided involvement with municipal government, strongly opposed the Public Schools Act of 1916, refrained from any participation in World Wars I and II, and saw a good number of its members leave Canada after the government pressured them to assimilate.

Like the Altonians, however, Blumenort people were more willing to adopt Canadian geographic patterns, more accommodating to the public school system, more open to innovations in the church, and in later years quite eager to see their community grow into a thriving business center and an increasingly significant focus for business in southeastern Manitoba.

Thus, while Blumenort stands in 1982 as a rather typical prairie community, the route by which it came to assume that place is distinct. It is hoped that although this study emphasizes the distinct features of a small community, it will not suffer from "a cacoon of uniqueness", the apparent malaise of local history, but instead add something to the understanding of the diverse historical process in which rural Canada was settled and developed.

INTRODUCTION TO PART I: THE COMING

When the Mennonite immigrants began their settlement in southeastern Manitoba in 1874, they attracted a great deal of attention from English-Canadians. Not only were they noted for their agricultural skills: they were also noted for being a people with a peculiar language and culture, a distinctive religious faith, and a unique way of settling the land. The Mennonites had succeeded in making a wholesale transfer of their way-of-living from Russia to Canada.

In this regard the Blumenort settlers were typical of the Mennonites. Almost every feature of the early years of settlement could be traced to the way of life accustomed to in Russia. It was there that their concept of being a people set apart from the world, both in terms of geography and special privileges, had grown. It was there that the Kleine Gemeinde Church, which emphasized a strict life of Christian discipleship, was founded in 1812. It was there that their reputation for being an industrious and skillful agricultural people was noticed. It was there that their village system of settlement was perfected. And, it was there that they once again were proved to be a transient people, a people who would migrate rather than compromise their faith.

These were the characteristics of the people who immigrated to Canada and founded the Blumenort community. And

these were the characteristics which these people established in the settlement they founded.

Part I, Chapter 1: The Old Homeland

The land from which the Blumenort settlers came was in many ways similar to Canada. In the latter part of the 1700s Russia, under the leadership of Catherine II, was in possession of huge tracts of land in the south. The land had formerly been occupied by the Moslem Turks from the south and now lay bleak and empty, a treeless, unbroken plain. The natives of Southern Russia were not considered to have the skills or the industry to settle this land. So Catherine II embarked on a program to attract Western Europeans to Russia. Among the Europeans to respond to the Czarina's invitation were the Mennonites living near the mouth of the Vistula River in Prussia, which today is known as Poland.

Here the Mennonites, who strongly held to the Anabaptist doctrine of non-resistance and separation of church and state, were being pressured by Prussia to render military service. When the Russian government promised them land and complete religious freedom "for all of eternity", the Prussian Mennonites quickly responded.[1]

By 1788 the first Mennonite colony, called Chortitza, was founded on rolling land on the Ukrainian steppe in southern Russia. Fifteen years later, in 1803, a second colony, named Molotschna, was established one hundred miles south of the old colony. It was in the Molotschna that the ancestors of the future Blumenorters settled. The land on the Molotschna Colony was more fertile and flatter than that of the Chortitza, and most of its settlers were wealthier and more

progressive.

By 1835 the population of the Molotschna stood at 6,000, the area of the colony at 5,000 square miles, and the number of villages at 45. By this time the Molotschna villages had begun to prosper, and, with innovative leaders like Johann Cornies, the farms had become exemplary for all of Russia. As early as 1833 the Molotschna farmers were exporting grain from Russia and were renting huge tracts of land from the Russian government for sheep and cattle grazing. The Mennonite Encyclopedia gives the following analysis of the Molotschna Colony:

> Favorable soil and climatic conditions, the industry of the majority of the farmers, and farsighted leadership made the Molotschna settlement a garden spot of the Ukraine and one of the most successful Mennonite settlements of Russia.[2]

The settlers who came to Blumenort in 1874 were people of the Kleine Gemeinde Church. This church was begun in the Molotschna in 1812, just as life there was beginning to prosper.

The Kleine Gemeinde was founded by a young minister, Klaas Reimer, who had already become dismayed by certain practices of the Mennonites in Prussia. He was appalled by the low spiritual life, lack of personal morality, and lax church discipline he saw among the Mennonites. In one of his early writings Reimer, apparently, "bewailed the careless and light-hearted living he experienced when working with a group of carpenters where nothing but frivolous banter continued all day."[3]

In addition, he saw the practice of corporal punishment and the use of police power by some Mennonite authorities as contrary to the Anabaptist teachings of non-resistance and the separation of church and state. His objection to this heightened when the Mennonite church responded to a government request that the colonists swear allegiance to the Czar and make contributions of horses and money to the Russian army during Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812.[4]

Feeling that the church was erring in these matters, Reimer intensified his close study of the Scriptures and Anabaptist writings. In 1812 Reimer was invited by a small group, who shared his feelings, to conduct services in private homes in two Molotschna villages, without the consent of the church elders. In time the members of this group stopped attending services in the main churches and the church leaders, seeing the small group as a threat, pressured it to return to the fold.

By this time, however, Reimer had concluded that the existing Mennonite church in its unreformed state could no longer be considered to comprise the true church, and led his group formally to disassociate itself from it. Reimer found this decision difficult, "for," as he confessed, "It is not within the power of man to leave a church when he cannot find sanctuary in another ... [but] as Menno Simons says, thing displeases Satan more than to see people leave the [false] church, and according to the Word of the Lord, exercise discipline earnestly through the ban and confess God's Word before men."[5]

In 1814 the small group chose Reimer as the Elder of a separate church. Two years later the church had grown to 20 members. Strong opposition to the new body, however, continued from members of the other Mennonite churches who derisively began calling this new church de Kleen-Gemeenda.

It was not until 1843 that Johann Cornies, impressed by the exemplary farms and moral conduct of this group, used his influence to convince the government to recognize the Kleine Gemeinde, grant them a status equal to the other Mennonite churches and allow them to gather for services in private homes.[6]

It was the philosophy of the Kleine Gemeinde which separated it from the other Mennonite churches. Historians have often concluded that the fact that the Kleine Gemeinde was able to attract only 120 members by 1838 was due to its narrow conservatism, which made it an unattractive church to join. Despite this fact, historians such as John A. Toews have admitted that the Kleine Gemeinde had an ideal of renewal after which it strove. According to Toews, the actions of the Kleine Gemeinde "must be interpreted as attempts to return to early Anabaptist principles and practice even though inadequately understood.[7]

The principles which distinguished the Kleine Gemeinde were clearly outlined in a booklet written by Heinrich Balzer, a Mennonite minister and thinker who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1833 after becoming dismayed with the trends toward "secularism" on the one hand and "emotionalism" on the other

in the Molotschna Mennonite churches. According to Robert Friedmann, Balzer was attracted to "the conservative way of strict adherence to Biblical commandments and to the pattern of the[Anabaptist] forefathers" which he say in the Kleine Gemeinde.[8] Balzer became a very influential minister in the church he joined, and his booklet, entitled Verstand und Vernunft (Faith and Reason), was among the treasured writings brought to Manitoba by the Kleine Gemeinde. By briefly examining some of the points in Balzer's writings, the values which guided the Blumenort community in Manitoba may be illuminated.

Balzer exalted the first-century church as following the ideal lifestyle. The early Christians had been convinced by the Holy Spirit "that they would live more happily in this world by giving themselves completely to the simplicity of Christ . . . brotherly love made them like a great family and no one wished a privilege for himself at the expense of another."[9] It was Menno Simons, stated Balzer, who "under the rubble of many errors of [historic] Christianity rediscovered the simple teachings of the Lord ... namely, that believers should not think of vengeance, resistance, oath, secular learning and the great things of this world, but rather should keep always to the lowly and meek ones."[10] This thinking had far-reaching implications for every aspect of life.

Government and the church must remain completely separate. Concerning this matter, Balzer wrote the following:

> The Church of Jesus Christ considers itself here in this world, not as a world citizenry, but rather as ... a spiritual brotherhood ... Members who serve the

> the worldly affairs of the church ... must never think of themselves as ... secular functionaries with any kind of authority to arbitrarily direct the church according to the laws and powers of the state.[11]

Farming, according to Balzer, was the only true occupation. This was because it was

> ... the most conducive one for the preservation of a genuine simplicity in Christ. In it we can find a plentiful livelihood through industry and diligence under the blessing of God. And we should be satisfied in finding food and clothing; striving after greater wealth or a position of high distinction in this world would spiritually be only too harmful for the church.[12]

Business should be avoided because it gradually led Mennonites to become "conditioned to the doings of this world without even noticing it."[13]

Education of children must be a primary concern for the true Christian community. However, one must be alert "lest the young flowers of our church become biased against our principles." In particular one should be on guard against the following:

> ... not to expand the necessary instruction beyond such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic, singing and anything else useful and handy for the simple practice of a husbandman. Whatever belongs to higher learning brings forth nothing but sophistry, unbelief and corruption of the church; for 'knowledge puffeth up' (I Cor. 8:1).[14]

A social and leisure life which included wedding celebrations and reading secular books should also be avoided. Reasoned Balzer, "that which is externally tasteful easily undermines the taste for simpler things and for the Word of God."[15]

The true Christian community, according to Balzer, must be a church brotherhood which stresses love and harmony. "Love," wrote Balzer, "works unity; unity gives firmness;

firmness protects against decline."[16]

Although the Kleine Gemeinde with their strict concept of discipleship were often considered fanatics by their fellow Mennonites, they did gain recognition for their farming skills. P. M. Friesen, the 19th century Mennonite Brethren historian, writes the following about the Kleine Gemeinde:

> It needs to be said here again, that the Kleine Gemeinde, in spite of its unhealthy Mennonite narrowness and severity, never came into conflict with the Agricultural Society: in fact, the members of the society met the church half-way, allowing its members to paint the wood on their farm buildings blue ... and replacing the gable of the house facing the street, which was supposed to be made of burned brick but appeared "too proud" to them, with wood gables painted blue ... The yards, fields, gardens and cattle of the Kleine Gemeinde belonged to the best in the colonies.[17]

Despite the moderately prosperous life which the Kleine Gemeinde enjoyed in the Molotschna, they were among the Mennonites who were facing a land squeeze by mid-century. Land shortages had affected the Russian Mennonites as early as 1836, when a third main colony, Bergthal, had been founded by the Chortitza Colony. By 1860 the problem of land shortages had become acute in the Molotschna, where almost 70 per cent of the farmers were landless and where there was a growing animosity between rich and poor. Because the Russian government had forced the Russian nobility to release their serfs in 1861, huge tracts of land became available for reasonable prices. Among the Molotschna Mennonites to avail themselves of these lands were the Kleine Gemeinde people. For the first time the Kleine Gemeinde faced the prospect of forming separate villages and living in close proximity to one another. To make sure that everyone in the church had the opportunity

to move, the Kleine Gemeinde church rented or purchased land for its poorer members.

In the fall of 1863 the first substantial Kleine Gemeinde group left the Molotschna Colony and moved 60 miles to the north to a place near the city of Alexandrowsk and the old colony of Chortitza. Here they settled on land rented from the aristocrat Edelfrau Marcus and called their new colony Marcus land and sometimes Pachtland, meaning rented land.

Two years later, in 1865, a larger group of 120 families moved 80 miles west of the Molotschna to farm Borosenko, which was to become the most important Kleine Gemeinde Colony at the time. This colony was founded on a huge 18,000-acre tract of land bought from Borsa, a rich Russian landowner for the price of 184,110 rubles. This land was very similar in quality to the land of the Molotschna. Although the Dnieper River lay only a couple of miles to the south and several tiny rivers such as Bazavluk and Solenaya traversed the colony, the land was a dry, treeless plain. The soil, however, contained a deep, brown clay loam. Six villages were founded: Blumenhof, Nikolaital, Steinbach, Annafeld, Heuboden, and Rosenfeld. Blumenhof soon became the central village in Borosenko, seemingly because it was closest to Nikopol, which served Borosenko as post office and riverport. It was here in Blumenhof that the first Kleine Gemeinde Meeting House, a beautiful brick building, was erected by volunteer help in 1872. Blumenhof was also the headquarters for the largest part of the Kleine Gemeinde, led by Peter Toews.[18]

Although the problem of land shortages had been largely resolved by 1870, the Kleine Gemeinde people were not trouble-free. Under the leadership of Elder Johann Friesen during the 1860s, the church began to experience internal divisions caused by differing views about church discipline. In 1866 the Kleine Gemeinde was rent in two. By 1869 there were two clerly defined churches, both calling themselves the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. The larger body was centred in Blumenhof. It was led first by Heinrich Enns (1801-1881) and, after 1870, by Peter Toews. It was this group which settled in the East Reserve in 1874 and 1875. The smaller group was centred in Heuboden and led by Abram L. Friesen. The majority of the Heuboden members eventually settled in Nebraska and in Rosenort, Manitoba. Another consequence of this schism was the demoralization of the church, leaving many in it discouraged and unsettled.[20]

Much more crucial to the continued existence of the Kleine Gemeinde than this schism was a threat which came from the Russian government. It was having second thoughts about the privileges it had granted the Mennonites "for all eternity." Because the Russian government was slowly becoming more democratic and nationalistic, it was beginning to reconsider the special privileges it had granted foreign peoples, including Mennonites, living on Russian soil. By 1870 the government had embarked on a program of reform which was to have a major effect on the Mennonites.

It was the new Military Service law which came into effect in January, 1874 as part of Russia's program of reform

which directly affected all Mennonites and compelled a third of them to leave Russia. As early as 1870 newspapers were reporting that a new law was being drafted which would annul the Mennonites' military exemption. The Kleine Gemeinde leaders immediately drafted a petition to the government. When the government failed to respond, the leaders of both the Blumenhof and Heuboden churches, Peter Toews and Abraham Friesen, as well as a representative of the Molotschna Kleine Gemeinde, Abraham Klassen, joined a 12-man delegation to travel to St. Petersburg to seek audience with Czar Alexander II. Although they were not allowed to see the Czar, the delegation was told by an official to return home and "calm their brethren because the Czar was their best advocate and that, at least for the time being, the Mennonite youth would not have to take the sword."[21]

The delegation was not satisfied. October of 1872 saw many high level meetings in the Molotschna Colony to decide what should be done. When word came that the Czar had travelled to the Crimea, another delegation, including Toews and Friesen, was sent to try to see the monarch. Here they were told by an official that the Czar was soon leaving and thus could not be seen. The official, however, promised the Mennonites that they would not have to take up arms if they were prepared to do alternative service. While the possibility for alternative service satisfied the more liberal Mennonites, it was no consolation to the Kleine Gemeinde leaders. They saw any formal association with the government conflicting with their "historic Anabaptist conviction of the

radical difference between the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God."[22] The new law which ended their total military exemption meant that their sojourn in Russia had come to an end.

Having fled threats to their faith both in Holland and in Prussia, the Mennonites had grown accustomed to the possibilities of migrating when the need arose. By 1870 many felt this need and many, too, had read the glowing reports of America.[23] Both the Canadian and American governments were vigorously advertising the huge tracts of land suitable for agriculture. Inquiries were sent to the Canadian government and soon the Canadian Immigration officer from Germany, William Hespeler, arrived at Berdiansk to meet the Mennonite leaders and invite them to come and inspect the land. When the Russian police found out about this visit, Hespeler was forced to leave.

With continued stalling from the Russian government, and with more and more information about North America, the idea of moving began to gain wide acceptance. On February 14, 1873, the Kleine Gemeinde decided to send delegates to the new world. They were commissioned to investigate places in North America and, if possible, negotiate a set of privileges with the government of the land. In Borosenko two men, 38-year-old Cornelius Toews from the Blumenhof Church and 60-year-old David Klassen from the Neuboden Church, were elected to represent the two parts of the Kleine Gemeinde in a 12-man delegation to North America. A collection was taken in Borosenko in February, raising 1,300 rubles, and on April

15 Toews and Klassen left for North America.[24]

Footnotes

1 For a complete story of how the Prussian Mennonites moved to Russia, see David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of Their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914" (Ph. D. dissertation, Stanford University, California, 1933) and Adam Giesinger, The Story of Russia's Germans from Catherine to Khrushchev, (Marion Press, Battleford, Saskatchewan, 1974), pp. 183-195.

2 Cornelius Krahn, "Molotschna", The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. III, p. 734, (Scottsdale, Pa., The Mennonite Publishing House, 1955).

3 David P. Reimer, "The History and Character of our Great Grandfather Klaas Reimer," Famielienregister der Nachkommen von Klaas and Helena Reimer, ed. John C. Reimer, et. al., 1958, pp. 16-21.

4 Frank Epp, Mennonites in Canada: 1786-1920 (Toronto, MacMillan of Canada, 1974) p. 179.

5 Harold Dyck, "The Theological Development of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference From Its Roots to the Present Day," (Master of Divinity Thesis, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California, 1977) p. 37.

6 Abraham Friesen, Aeltester, petitionary letters to Johann Cornies, Molotschna Vorsitzer, May 14, 1842, and October 24, 1843, John E. Friesen Collection, transliterated by Mrs. P. J. Loewen, courtesy Jac P. Friesen, Ste. Anne, Manitoba.

7 John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church, (Hillsboro, Kansas, M.B. Publishing House, 1975) p. 26.

8 Heinrich Balzer, "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered in a Treatise of 1833" ed. and translated by Robert Friedmann, The Mennonite Quarterly Review, Vol. XXII, No. 2, p. 80.

9 Ibid., p. 82.

10 Ibid., p. 89.

11 Ibid., p. 91.

12 Ibid., p. 90.

13 Ibid., p. 89.

14 Ibid., p. 91.

15 Ibid., p. 92.

16 Ibid., p. 93.

17 P. M. Friesen, History of the Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (Fresno, California, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978) p. 93

18 Peter Toews, Sammlung Von Briefen und Schriftliche Nachrichten Zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten an der Molotschna: 1900 transliterated by Peter A. Plett and Cornelius L. Toews (Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, 1980) p. 57.

19 Delbert F. Plett, History and Events, (Delbert F. Plett Farms, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1982) p. 28.

20 For an insight into this schism see: Peter Toews, "Anhang Number One," History and Events tr. and ed. by Delbert F. Plett, (Delbert F. Plett Farms, Steinbach, 1982) pp. 50-56.
21 Toews, Sammlung.
22 Harold Dyck, op. cit., p. 49.
23 David P. Reimer, "Die Entstehung und Geschichte der Evangelischen Mennoniten Gemeinde," The Sesquicentennial Jubilee, ed. Peter J. B. Reimer and David P. Reimer (The Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1962) p. 96.
24 Peter Toews, Sammlung, p. 462.

Part I, Chapter 2: Manitoba Before Settlement

The land which awaited the Mennonite delegates was a new one. In 1867, only seven years before the Mennonites came, the Dominion of Canada was officially formed. Its first prime minister, John A. Macdonald, had welded the basis of the new country by bringing together the English of Ontario and the French of Quebec. The capital of the new country was declared to be Ottawa, and the constitution, the British North America Act, promised "peace, order and good government" under the protective hand of the British monarch.

MacDonald and the other leaders, however, were not yet content. They had a grand vision of a British nation, separate from the United States, stretching "from sea to sea". Therefore, only two years after Canada became a dominion, the government purchased the vast western plain from the Hudson's Bay Company and work was immediately begun preparing the West for settlement. Surveyors were sent out to divide the plain into square townships and the Dominion Lands Act, which granted each settler a free quarter section of land, was drafted.

Problems with opening up the West, however, arose. The Canadian government had not taken into account that there already were 7,000 people in the West. These people included the French-Catholic Metis who lived around the town of Fort Garry in the Red River colony. They made a living from the buffalo hunt and from their small farms strung unofficially

along the Assiniboine, Red and Seine Rivers. These people feared that the settlement of the West would destroy their way of life.[1]

The surveying of the Dawson Road between Ste. Anne and the Red River in 1869 was one incident which caused the Metis' concern to mount. In total disregard for the Metis river lots, the surveyors staked the area into townships, giving the idea that, with the coming settlers, the Metis would lose their farms. As tensions mounted, the Metis turned to a young Quebec-trained lawyer, Louis Riel, who would later become the first Member of Parliament for southeastern Manitoba. Riel immediately organized the Metis to stop the surveying by force and declare an independent government for Red River. It was not till 1870, when the Macdonald government passed the Manitoba Act which ensured the Metis their land and formally established the province of Manitoba, that the Metis were placated.

Another group of people who were threatened by the plans to settle the West were the Indians. They had, until this time, lived freely in the forests and on the plains, making their living by hunting, fishing and trapping. Occupying southeastern Manitoba were several hundred Ojibway people, led by Chief Kewetoash. In 1869 Kewetoash officially requested the Canadian government to respect his peoples' land which, according to the chief, was "bounded by ... the Government (Dawson) Road on the north, Pembina Mountains on the west, the Whitemouth River on the east and the American boundary on the south."[2]

It was not until 1871, however, that the government began negotiating the articles of Stone Fort Treaty #1 which was to settle the Ojibways' claim. There was an obvious difficulty which had to be overcome. While Kewetoash's claim represented 70,000 acres per person, the government was prepared to grant only 160 acres per family. The Indians did not seem to understand that the vast areas they wished for themselves would soon be settled by European farmers. Once the government was able to convince the Indians of this fact, they began to fear that if they did not accept the government's offer they might have no treaty at all. Thus they finally signed the treaty.

According to Stone Fort Treaty, the Ojibway settled for a quarter section per family, farm stock and equipment, reserve schools, five dollars a year per person, exclusion of rum traders, and the freedom to follow the buffalo chase and to hunt on all lands till the settlers came. The Indians were told to select their reserves quickly before the settlers arrived. While the implementation of the treaty was slow, by 1874, the Indians of southeastern Manitoba had moved onto the Brokenhead and Rousseau River Reserves.

Therefore, by the time the first Mennonite settlers came, Indians had become confined to their reserves and their previous life as nomadic hunters had come to an end. Blumenorters would never know the Ojibway as a proud people engaged in the buffalo chase. Rather, they knew the Indians as a silent, impoverished people who hunted in the uninhabited areas south of Steinbach, and periodically appeared in

Blumenort to beg.

The place where Blumenort was to be established was vacant in 1874. To the north and west lived the Metis of the Seine and Red River. Far to the south and north lived the Ojibway. Nearby, to the east, stood the fledgling farms of the English-speaking Clearsprings settlers. Thirty miles to the north-west, at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine, thrived the small 4,000-citizen boom-town of Winnipeg, (also known as Fort Garry).

The earliest report of a visit to the Blumenort region dates from 1858, 16 years before the Mennonites came. T. A Dickenson, a surveyor, had been sent out by the British government to locate a possible route between the Lakehead and Red River. After the famous scientist, John Palliser, had passed through this area in 1857, the British government became dedicated to establishing a practical route into the remote West to ferry settlers from the East. During his exploration of this area, Dickenson may have come within one mile of present-day Blumenort. Travelling south of the Seine River in a southeasterly direction, he noted "a beautiful and rich prairie lying between us and [the Seine] and on the south, one mile distant, runs a well-wooded ridge. We would round numerous and large clumps of aspens from five to 30 feet high and willows for seven miles."[3]

Fourteen years later, in 1872, Township 7-6E, in which Blumenort would be founded, was surveyed by the Thomas Cheeseman survey party. Cheeseman thought very highly of 7-6E and his report became the basis of a government commitment to

settle it. He noted the rich clay loams, the wooded ridges and creeks which later attracted the settlers to the Blumenort region. A portion of Cheeseman's report follows:

> The first two northern tiers of this township are level prairie, except the timbered part of it, shown on the map, which is moderately high gravelly land, with some large granite boulders intermixed. The southern part is undulating, intersected with gullies or ravines which effectively drain it of all surface waters. The soil is a deep clay loam, easily worked and well adapted for agricultural purposes. The beds of the gullies, when drained off in summer, produce hay of superior quality. The timber is mostly young poplar of a vigorous growth. But as in other parts, much of it has been destroyed by fire.[4]

By 1873, then, the new province of Manitoba was ready for immigrants who would subdue her rich, unspoiled prairie and help the fledgling province to its feet. By this time the Metis had quietly accepted the government's promises for land, the Indians had moved onto their reserves, township surveying was completed, and Winnipeg was a booming trade town, hankering to do business with immigrant farmers. According to John Warkentin "public opinion was very much in favor of the Mennonite migration [because] Manitoba needed people badly."[5]

In the spring of 1873 Winnipeg was visited by 12 Russian Mennonites who were considering relocation in Manitoba. Their tour leaders were two Ontarians, William Hespeler, a German and Jacob Shantz, a Mennonite, who had been appointed by the Canadian government to try to entice the Mennonites to choose Manitoba. Thus the delegates were royally received in Winnipeg. The governor and his ministers met the delegation and pointed out the agricultural potential of Manitoba. They

also told them about Canada's government. According to one delegate, the officials emphasized "the excellency of the English Government, the purity and wisdom of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, the kind protection which all her subjects enjoyed, and especially the religious freedom which could be guaranteed to the Mennonites; and cordially welcomed them to the land."[6] The two Kleine Gemeinde delegates, Cornelius Toews and David Klassen, were looking for just such an assurance. They trusted a country headed by a monarch more than a republic such as the United States.

The day after the reception, the 12 delegates set out with five teams and a dozen Canadians for the 300 square miles set aside for them 30 miles southeast of Winnipeg - an area which was soon to become known as the East Reserve. They headed southeast along the Dawson Road, crossing the great prairie till they came to Ste. Anne. The day was a long one. They became stuck several times and were forced to walk through swamp land. At Ste. Anne they were offered the use of two upstairs rooms in the Hudson's Bay Store, where they spent the night.

On the next day, which dawned sunny and warm, they headed south, across the Seine River toward present-day Blumenort. Their guide was a Metis from Ste. Anne who knew the country well. A mile east of where Blumenort now lies, they stopped for night. John F. Funk, an American publisher and a close friend of the Kleine Gemeinde, wrote about the night spent here:

> We camped at about six o'clock on the edge of a slough, and not far from some timber. The water which we obtained was not of very good quality; after straining and boiling, however, it made very good tea. After supper we sang several hymns and then, consigning ourselves to the care of Him who never sleeps, we lay down in our little tents, having first spread our buffalo robes and blankets, making a very comfortable bed, and notwithstanding the fact that the mosquitoes troubled us a great deal, we slept quite well ... We had five tents and each tent accommodated six persons."[7]

The third day the delegation continued south and came upon the Clearsprings settlers who had come from Ontario two years before. Funk describes this settlement, located just a mile southeast along the creek from where Blumenort would be founded the following year:

> They had chosen themselves good locations near a stream of water and some timber. There was here a good spring, and we drank freely. Never, indeed, did water taste any better, as we had for several days been deprived of good water.[8]

After just another day of exploring the reserved land, the delegates decided they had seen enough and returned to Winnipeg.

Back at Winnipeg most of the delegates concluded that Manitoba was not a desirable place to settle and returned to the United States for further exploration. Only the Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthal delegates liked what they saw in Manitoba and chose the East Reserve as their future home. Although its agricultural potential was not exceptional, the delegates found in it a place where they could farm in relative isolation from the world, yet be in close proximity to a dependable trade centre.

Their decision to choose Manitoba above American sites was entreched when they visited Ottawa. There they successfully

negotiated the conditions of immigration with the Minister of Agriculture, who was responsible for western settlement. In a letter from the Department of Agriculture, dated July 25, 1873, the Mennonite delegates were promised complege military exemption and control of their own schools. The letter also waived certain provisions of the Dominion Lands Act, 1872, which would have prohibited block settlement and the Mennonite "open field system." It was this letter which the Mennonites dubbed their Privilegium, the letter of privileges which guaranteed them the right to continue the way of life they had practiced in Russia. The promises in this letter attracted the Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthal Mennonites to Canada.

Footnotes

1 W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History, (University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1979) p. 116.
2 Ronald C. Maquire, An Historical Reference Guide to the Stone Fort Treaty: 1871, (Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Ottawa, 1980) p. 8.
3 Correa, Oscar, "A Geographical Study of Township 7 Range 6 East of the Principal Meridian of Manitoba," (research essay, University of Winnipeg, 1978) p. 5.
4 Ibid.
5 John F. Funk, personal diary, Mennonite Reporter, November 25, 1974, p. 19.
6 Ibid., p. 20.
7 Ibid.
8 For a full script of the letter see: E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia, (D. W. Friesen & Sons, Ltd., Altona, Manitoba, 1955) pp. 44-49

Part I, Chapter 3: Leaving Russia

When the delegates returned to Russia on August 7, 1873, with their reports and letter of Privilegium, the members of the Kleine Gemeinde were excited. Not only were they assured of Privilegium; they also would pioneer a new land where a separate and renewed life could be lived. By September there was a great deal of talk in the Kleine Gemeinde about emigrating, and the work of securing immigration passes had started.[1]

Leaving their homeland, however, was not easy. Goods and properties had to be sold at auctions where the buyers knew the emigrants would sell at any price. John B. Toews, who came to Blumenort as a boy, remembered how the goods of their village were sold at an auction sale that went on for three days. Mrs. Heinrich F. Wiebe remembered how the 14 farmers from Rosenfeld, Borosenko, sold their village as a unit to a group of Chortitza farmers who drove very hard bargains. After receiving the total payment the Kleine Gemeinde leaders of the village (which included Heinrich Wiebe) distributed the money to each villager according to the value of his property beforehand. Here, too, there was bargaining, as the wealthier farmers felt they had been underpaid.[2]

Abram R. Friesen, who came from the Molotschna Colony to Blumenhof, Manitoba, in 1875, describes how he helped his neighbor by writing 25 letters announcing their upcoming auction. He also remarks that at his parents' auction things were sold very cheaply and that he was very leery about moving.[3]

Most of the land at Borosenko was bought up by Chortitzer neighbors of the Kleine Gemeinde.

There were other factors which may have discouraged the emigrants. The spring of 1874 was very beautiful, resulting in bumper crops, and reminded the Kleine Gemeinde people of the rich soils and moderate climate they were leaving. John B. Toews has written how they "departed from an excellent selection of beautiful homes, in a very nice and fertile country that was situated beside the banks of the Dnieper River."[5] In a letter that the delegate, Cornelius Toews, is reputed to have received, a very skeptical Mennonite warns him of the icy winter, the desolate wilderness and savage natives of Canada who will surely kill them. Those who leave Russia, according to the letter, shall not expect to find help from there after they leave.[6] In tragic irony, the Chortitzers who remained in Borosenko were the ones who would suffer. The Mennonite Encyclopedia reports that: "World War I and its aftermath devastated these Russian villages. Steinbach (and presumably Ebenfeld) was slaughtered off almost completely in a single night. The bandits caused much depredation in the other villages ... It is to be assumed that this settlement was completely destroyed in World War I.

By June the preparations for the first group to come to Canada were complete. General Todtleben had granted the passports. Claims against the Kleine Gemeinde had either been paid or overturned. Farms had been sold and almost 1,200 rubles had been collected to help the poorer members make the trek.[8] Elder Toews appointed interim leaders to take the first

group of Borosenko emigrants to Manitoba. Canadian officials now awaited the emigrants along the way, in Hamburg, Quebec, and Manitoba.

The Kleine Gemeinde could now bid farewell to Russia. Although they had lived there fewer than 75 years, it was in Russia that they had acquired many of the unique characteristics which they brought with them to Manitoba. There they had established the Kleine Gemeinde church with its emphasis on a simple and separated life. There, too, they had learned how to settle a prairie land by establishing farm villages and working the land in an open field system. Finally, it was there that they were once again reminded of being a pilgrim people who were always ready to seek out a new land if their faith and life-style were threatened.

Despite the difficulties involved in the emigration, the Kleine Gemeinde people were the first Mennonites to leave Russia. Altogether, 200 Kleine Gemeinde families from various parts of Russia moved.[9] They made up only ten percent of the 8,000 Mennonites who would settle in Manitoba. The greatest percentage of the Kleine Gemeinde migrated in 1874 and 1875. In the first year about two-thirds of the church left under the leadership of the delegates Klassen and Toews. The next year the second contingent came, led by Elder Peter Toews.

The journey to Manitoba was a long and arduous one that involved travel by wagons, trains, ocean liners, street cars, river boats, and ox-carts. Several settlers who lived in the Blumenort area remembered this trip and others kept day-to-day diaries of this historic journey.

Peter W. Loewen, a young married man, was in the very first group to leave Russia. His account below is an excerpt of one of the most elaborate existing chronicles of the 1874 move.

Peter W. Loewen Account

On Monday, June 3, 1874, we started our trip to America. We bade farewell to our friends, and then people from a neighboring village drove us to Nikopol. On Tuesday ... we sailed [down the Dnieper River] from Nikopol and arrived at the [Black Sea port town of] Gerson at 6:00 p.m. ... The chests were transferred into the ship going to Odessa. On Wednesday we left Gerson for Odessa. The ride and weather were very beautiful ... We arrived in Odessa at 7:00 p.m. We left the ship with our hand luggage ... drove to Maibuch and stayed there for night. Our crates stayed in the ship during the night. The following morning the ship's agents gave them to us. We then hired vehicles which drove us to the train station. We bought tickets which would take us from Odessa to Bresslau, Prussia. Each ticket cost 18 rubles.

We arrived, on Friday, June 7, at the Austrian border ... Only one crate and one box were checked. Since they found nothing illegal, they simply asked whether we had any tobacco with us. When we answered, "No," they did not check anymore ... One June 8, at 7:00 p.m. we arrived in Tarnopol. We had given the conductor 20 kopecks per family as security, so that he gave our women and children comfortable places and treated them well. In Russia we could receive hot water for coffee and tea at practically every station and stopping place. This we missed on the [Austrian] train.

On Sunday, June 9, we arrived at Breslau ... We had lots of time to rest here. We took a walk in the city where we saw beautiful streets with four and five-storey buildings ... On Monday, June 22, we arrived in Berlin. Immediately we picked up our baggage, stepped into the street car and drove through Berlin to the Hamburg train station. Here ... we boarded the train for the harbour city of Hamburg, where we arrived at about 6:00 p.m. Here we met all the other dear brothers and sisters who had left via Maizer and Compa. We were all given lodging in a huge four-storey building.

We left Hamburg at 10:00 p.m. on Friday, June 26. We sailed down the Elbe into the North Sea on a steam ship and arrived at Hull, England, on Sunday, June 28. Because of the religious English people, we could not leave the ship till Monday ... when our crates were put on the train. We walked to a hotel where the government had provided us with white bread, butter and cheese.

Following this we walked to the railroad station, bought tickets and left for Liverpool ... After arriving in Liverpool, we had supper and went to sleep. In the morning on June 30, after eating breakfast, we walked to the huge seaport and immediately boarded the "Austrian," the ship which would take us across the fast ocean. The first three days on the ocean were very bad, as the wind and weather were against us. Practically all passengers were down with seasickness. Here we really saw God's power and His control. On the land with the train it had seemed as if man ruled nature and everything was done according to man's will. I had the grace to remain free from seasickness so I could serve others, which I should have done much more energetically, It was a pity to see mothers with their children subjected to seasickness, sick in bed, without the help of their husbands because they were in the same situation. On the fourth day the wind subsided, thank God! We had beautiful weather. The wick recovered and started to eat. The English ship was well taken care of and clean, although the interpreter was not worthy of commendation. The food for the most part was tasty and sufficient ...

On Friday, July 17, we arrived healthy and well-protected in Quebec. We stepped off the ship onto [North] American soil ... O God, how great is your goodness! Yes, now we could again enjoy God's nature in freedom. We had time to look at the many beautiful sights in Quebec till 8:00 p.m. ... After the government fed us well [we boarded the train] ... and arrived in Toronto on Sunday, July 19, at 8:00 p.m. We disembarked and, because it was Sunday, we had to unload our own crates.

Here we stayed till July 21, as a decision had to be reached whether we would take the Dawson Road or go via Minnesota. Canadian Mennonites advised us against taking the Dawson Road. Discussions were held with the government via telegraph during these two days, and finally, on Tuesday at noon, the news came that we could avoid the difficult road by paying two extra dollars per adult. Qyickly our crates were loaded and we with our hand luggage boarded the train for a six-hour ride to Collingwood. In Toronto six [Ontario] Mennonite brethren had helped us in all things. Among them was an elder and a minister who served us with God's Word. The senior [minister Peter] Baerg also preached.

At 9 p.m. we arrived in Collingwood, but we could not speak with anyone; everything was in English. The people on the ship, however, loaded our crates as quickly as possible. It had all been obviously prearranged via telegraph, and by 10:00 p.m. we left shore in order to cross Lake Superior to Duluth ... The sailors on Lake Superior were kinder than those on the ocean ... On July 25 we arrived in Duluth. Here Rev.

> Abraham Loewen preached the Word.
> On Monday, at 1:30 p.m. we embarked on the Pacific Railway Co. train and headed for Moorhead, where we arrived on Tuesday, at 6:00 p.m. We stayed outside till we embarked on the steamboat, "International," and left for Winnipeg. On Friday, July 31, we safely arrived in Winnipeg ...[10]

In many ways the journey to Manitoba was an exciting and novel experience, but it also was a very strenuous one and sometimes tragic. There are several accounts of children who died enroute. Gerhard Doerksen's brother Abraham died in Liverpool, England. Peter R. Reimers lost a six-week-old daughter who had been sick when they left Russia. They buried her at sea. Peter's brother, John, sho settled in Steinbach, lost a child as well; two-year-old Abraham, who was also buried at sea. It can be imagined how excited and relieved the immigrants must have been once they saw the shores of the new country. The following is a verse from an anonymous poem copied by David L. Plett.

> Land, Land, hoert man auf einmal schreihen
> Und alles steiget auf dem Deck.
> Und alle sieht man sich nun freuen
> Und jeder Finger ausgestreckt.
> Zeigt hin auf Land Amerika
> Und ruft: Gottlob; bald sind wir da.
>
> Land, Land, someone is shouting loudly.
> And everyone rushes on deck.
> And all are seen to be very happy
> And each finger is outstretched
> Pointing to the Land of America.
> God be praised, soon we'll be there.[11]

Footnotes

1 Abraham R. Friesen, "Tagebuch, 1873," Harry S. Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

2 Ben W. Friesen, story told at Blumenort Centennial Service, August, 1974. Tape-recording by Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort.

3 Abraham R. Friesen, op. cit.
4 P. A. Rempel, "Borozenko," Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1955, Vol. 1, p. 247.
5 John B. Toews, Memoirs, 1961, (Prairie View Press, Rosenort, Manitoba, 1978), p. 9.
6 Anonymous letter to Cornelius Toews, 1874, Ben Wiebe, Steinbach, Manitoba.
7 "Borozenko," loc. cit.
8 Toews, Sammlung, p. 464
9 Peter Baerg, Church Chronicle, Ein Familien Buch, Klaas C. Penner, ed. (Belize, C. A., 1972). p. 12
10 Peter W. Loewen, Diary of 1874 Emigration from Russia to Canada, Mrs. Peter W. Loewen Papers, EMC Archives, Steinbach, Manitoba.
11 David L. Plett, "Denkschrift", David L. Plett Papers, Betty L. Plett, Blumenort, Manitoba.

Part I, Chapter 4: Settling in a New Land

The first eight families who were to settle in Blumenort arrived at Quebec City on July 17, 1874, on the "S. S. Austrian."[1] Two weeks later, on July 31, they arrived in Winnipeg on board the river boat, the "International". This group included the families of 43-year-old Johann Koop, one of the wealthiest farmers in the Gemeinde; 39-year-old Peter P. Wiebe, a senior member of the church ministerial; 39-year-old Cornelius P. Friesen, Blumenort's first school teacher; 51-year-old Mrs. Klaas Carolina Friesen, a widow with five children; 21-year-old Peter W. Loewen, a son-in-law to Johann Koop; 29-year-old Deacon Heinrich F. Wiebe, whose tragic death two years later would rock the community; 33-year-old Abram R. Reimer, Blumenort's first blacksmith; 29-year-old Heinrich F. Reimer, who would become the first preacher in the village; and the 25-year-old bachelor, Heinrich Wohlgemuth, who split with his family to come to Manitoba.

Sometime toward the end of August this group was joined by the families of Peter Penner, 58, and Peter W. Toews, 43. These families had stayed behind because Penner and Toews had been given the responsibility of completing the land transfers in their village and bringing with them the final monies.[2] These families arrived at Quebec City on July 27, on board the "S. S. Peruvian", which carried 521 Mennonite immigrants, mostly from the Bergthal Colony. Besides the immediate families of Peter Penner and Peter W. Toews which came on this ship were those of Penner's married sons, 24-year-

old Martin Penner and 20-year-old Cornelius Penner. Other members of this group included 19-year-old Gottlieb Jahnke, a young Prussian bachelor who worked for Penners, and the family of 33-year-old Peter H. Unger, a brother-in-law to Peter Penner.

The third group of families arrived at the Rat and Red Rivers with the Steinbach settlers on September 13. They had crossed on the "S. S. Hibernian" and gone through customs in Quebec on August 27.[4] These families were all close relatives to the August settlers. They included the families of 66-year-old Abram F. Reimer, the father of the Blumenort and Steinbach Reimers; 39-year-old Abram M. Friesen, a half brother to Cornelius P. Friesen; 36-year-old Peter B. Friesen, a nephew to Cornelius P. Friesen; 26-year-old Abraham Penner, a son to Peter Penner; and 44-year-old Jacob P. Wiebe, a brother to Peter D. Wiebe.

The fourth and final group of Blumenort settlers left Russia on August 2 and crossed the Atlantic on the "S. S. Austrian" which had returned to Europe for a second load of immigrants. This group arrived in Quebec on August 31, and, by September 17, they had arrived at their friends and relatives in Blumenort.[5] They included: 80-year-old widower Jacob Barkman, the patriarch of all Kleine Gemeinde Barkmans; 63-year-old Cornelius F. Friesen, a veteran Molotschna schoolteacher who was of no relation to the other Blumenort Friesens; 28-year-old Peter R. Reimer, a son to Abram F. Reimer and a son who was to become one of Blumenort's most noted church leaders: 40-year-old David Thiessen, who was to leave

Blumenort a few years later; and the young wealthy widow, Mrs. Isaac L. Plett.

The last families to be added to the village roster of 1874 were the results of Blumenort's first weddings. In December of the first winter two couples were married and both settled down in Blumenort. The first wedding, held on December 19, was that of John Broeski, 35, who came from Gruenfeld, and Anna, 25, daughter of Cornelius F. Friesen. The second wedding was held on December 26, when Peter B. Klassen, 22 a son of Delegate David Klassen, walked to Blumenort from Rosenort and married Katherina, 17, daughter of Johann Koop.

There were conflicting reports as to the number of families who settled in Blumenort in the first year. According to a letter written by Rev. Jacob Barkman sometime after the middle of October, there were 27 families in the village.[6] However, according to another letter thought to have been written by Deacon Heinrich Wiebe on November 22, there were fewer families. The letter states the following: "Now I will briefly say that 22 families are living in our village. Rev. Jacob Barkman has moved just more than three miles from us to Steinbach with approximately 20 families. The Gruenfelders live approximately three hours by foot from us."[7] It appears, then, that several of the families who lived in Blumenort in October were waiting to move on to Steinbach. Wiebe's figure of 22, then, seems correct. Two marriages in December would increase this figure to 24 families, or a population of 127 persons.

While settling was made easier by coming in small groups, the first Blumenorters had the awesome duty of choosing a place of settlement, laying out the village plan and finally, converting the wilderness into farms and homes.

The first task facing the settlers when they arrived in Manitoba was to purchase and stock supplies which would be needed to build up their villages and see them through the first months. The first contingent of Kleine Gemeinde families thus proceeded straightway to Winnipeg when they entered Manitoba via the Red River steamer, the "International". On their arrival in Winnipeg on July 31, they were met by William Hespeler, who, according to Peter W. Loewen, "welcomed us, gave us, gave us advice and helped us with our purchases."[8] These purchases included everything from stoves to oxen and plows to flour.

Winnipeg by this time was a thriving town of 3,700, well-stocked with supplies imported from the East and from St. Paul, in anticipation of a wave of settlers. Correspondingly, the prices were high, reportedly as high as they were a generation later.

In a letter which Deacon Peter P. Wiebe wrote on August 7 to Elder Peter Toews in Russia, the expense of having to purchase supplies in Winnipeg was given as a major concern of the immigrants:[9]

> ... everything here is very expensive. Horses which I consider of poorer quality than mine in Russia are $100 and more per animal. Oxen cost $130 to $160 and even $180 a pair. Cows are $50 and even $60 and more. Wagons cost $100. Flour, lard and bacon are also expensive.

> If you plan to come here later on this year, I would recommend that you make purchases in Toronto or even closer by. The cost of the freight will be offset by the savings which you will make. If we had known this beforehand we could have saved many dollars. It would have been quite possible to buy oxen, carpenter tools, and furniture in the States.

Blumenorters, however, were not without money. They were among the Mennonites who reportedly caused the Winnipeg merchants a lot of excitement. The Kleine Gemeinde people who had been known to be moderately wealthy in Russia, were definitely the wealthiest of the early settlers. For instance, the ship carrying the first Kleine Gemeinde settlers carried $63,000 with it, averaging nearly $1,000 per family. The next set of immigrants arriving only 10 days later brought less than $100 per family.

By Saturday, August 1, the necessary purchases had been made, and "The International" returned upstream to the place where Rat River flows into the Red. Peter W. Loewen describes what happened here:

> Here we got off. All travelling by boat and train was now over. Our journey to America was finished, praise God! Now we had to go six miles over land to the Schantz Immigration Shelters. William Hespeler hired some Metis to help haul the crates and people who wanted a ride. They needed three days to transfer everything from the river to the immigration shelters by cart.[10]

Life at the immigration shelters was not easy. Peter P. Wiebe gives the following description of life at the place which came to be known as Schantzenburg:

> About 20 families are still in Winnipeg. The rest of us came back here on August 1, namely to the immigration shelters which Schantz has built. We have moved into two of the shelters, leaving two for the ones who will arrive later.

> Things are very imperfect here. All beginnings are difficult. We have to be careful that we do not become like the children of Israel, whom the Lord led through the Red Sea so wonderfully and protected throughout the whole journey. Soon they wanted meat, and then water. The latter is also our need. Our closest water source is a mile from here and then it is only scarcely enough. We hope, however, to obtain a better water supply soon.[11]

From the immigration shelters the vast prairie and bushland of the East Reserve could clearly be seen. The sight must have left the settlers with an eerie feeling, for this wilderness was their new home. A 29-verse poem copied by pioneer David L. Plett from an anonymous source reflects some of the deep feelings these first settlers must have had. One of the verses describes the first impressions after disembarking:

> With tears I look upon the place
> Where I have chosen to make my home.
> No house, no stove, no chair, no bed,
> No horse, no cow, no meat, no flour,
> No bowl, no spoon; everything is needed;
> How forlorn am I in this world here.[12]

However forlorn the East Reserve may have appeared, the men wasted no time in searching for possible village sites. Already in Russia families who were to found Blumenort had made the decision to settle down together. Most of the Blumenort settlers came from the Borosenko villages of Rosenfeld and Blumenhof and, to a certain extent, followed the Mennonite tradition of resettling as a village. While one exploration group headed southeast from the immigration sheds to establish the village of Gruenfeld, another headed straight east in search of the Blumenort village site.

They looked for a place by a creek, for this assured them a well-drained area, as well as a water supply for their

livestock. They also looked for a place with good soil, void of rocks, so that plowing could start immediately in preparation for seeding next spring. Very importantly, too, they needed a bush close by so that firewood and lumber could be attained for the long winter facing them. If there were a ridge nearby, they would be supplied with the gravel, rocks and limestone needed to build a village. Finally, they needed an abundance of wild hay for their livestock.

They found all these requirements in the northeast corner of the East Reserve. Here they chose a settlement which was bordered to the south and east by Scottish settlers, to the west by Bergthal settlers, and to the north by the French Metis. Had they had a surveyor's map, dating from 1872, they would have seen immediately that their choice was a good one; township 7-6E contained by far the largest area of well-drained grassland in the whole Reserve.

At a place 15 miles due east of Schantzenburg and only one mile from the nearest Scottish settler in Clearsprings, they chose the village site. A creek lay just south of the site and ran from east to west on a flat, clay loam prairie. A mile to the north was a well-wooded ridge beyond which lay the vast hay fields, later known as Greenland.

Once they chose their village site, they also chose a homestead quarter section for the head of each family. According to the Dominion Lands Act, every adult male settler could claim a homestead quarter and receive a patented deed to it if it was improved within 10 years. Because no one intended to farm his own quarter, and because this land had

already been set aside for the Mennonites, there was no rush to register the quarters. The first six Blumenort quarters were registered on September 7, more than five weeks after the settlers arrived in Manitoba.[13] It is presumed then, that before the men walked to Winnipeg to register their lands and pay the registration fee, they had already begun to lay out the village plan and build shelters.

It is interesting to note that the 12 quarters which were registered in the first year were spread out over a 14-square mile area. It is clear that the Blumenort settlers expected the vacant, remaining sections to be taken up by Kleine Gemeinde settlers. Thus it might be concluded that the Blumenort settlers registered quarter sections throughout the north-east corner of the East Reserve to ensure a large Kleine Gemeinde block settlement.

Registering homesteads was the smallest of the settlers' concerns. A village and field plan had to be drawn up so that a community based on the European tradtion could be established. Using the Medieval European settlement plan they brought from Russia, the Blumenorters pooled all registered quarters.[14] This was contrary to the North American custom where each family settled on a homestead quarter section. Jacob Schantz later said that he had "tried to persuade the Mennonites to abolish the village system, but having gotten accustomed to it, it was too great a sacrifice for them at the time."[15]

While the Mennonites were accustomed to the village plan, they had other reasons why they continued it in Canada.

A village settlement meant that the villagers could live close together, assisting one another in building houses, barns, roads, ditches, wells and bridges. In the village, the poor could work for the rich and borrow their oxen and equipment. Here, too, the villagers could join together to educate their children and to worship God. The village also allowed frontier people to share skills and services in everything from blacksmithing to mid-wifery. Finally, a village system allowed the settlers to pool their land to make sure that all the farming needs of each villager were met.

The pooled land was carefully allocated for different uses. Some of it was used for the village site and roads. Two sections of it were reserved for the community pasture. Another part was designated as hay land from which settlers could buy hay. A third part of the village land included a section of bushland from which villagers could purchase fire wood at nominal prices.

The two sections of land in the southern part of the village district were designated to be broken for grain growing. This land was the most valuable, as it was stone-free, well-drained and close to the village. Unlike the pasture and hay fields, this land was to be farmed individually. Following the custom practised in Russia, the land was divided into long, narrow strips called Kaugles, pronounced Koagels in Low German. Farmers were issued an equal number of Koagels at first, although it is likely that the wealthier farmers purchased additional Koagels from the younger and

poorer farmers. Each farmer was given some good, some medium and some poor land. Farmers had their Koagels spread throughout the Blumenort village area. (For a more detailed description of the Blumenort field system, see Part II, Chapter 1).

The land designated as the village site also had to be divided among the farmers. Lots measuring 200 feet wide and 1,000 feet long, covering a five-acre area, were staked out on both sides of the street. These lots called Feuerstellen, were known in Low German as Fiashtaeden. The north side of the street with the more plentiful lots reserved for the more established farmers was designated the Alte Seite (Old Side). The creek side of the street was kept for the young farmers.[16]

On these lots the settlers constructed their first crude summer shelters, called Zarai. A Zarai was basically a large pointed roof made from saplings standing on end and covered with oat sheaves or grass. After constructing these shelters the settlers prepared for winter. The abundant wild hay had to be cut with scythes and put into piles. Even some virgin sod was plowed that summer, using their English-trained oxen and new ploughs.

After haying was completed, work was begun on winter shelters. While a few farmers built frame houses, most of the settlers constructed Semlins. Shallow basements were dug, around which a low wall of sod was constructed. The roof consisted of poplar logs covered with sod or dirt. Inside, the walls were lined with boards, and a small window was installed. The settlers were usually content with a dirt floor for the first winter. After moving into the

Semlins, the settlers converted the Zarais into winter shelters for the livestock.[17]

The need quickly to establish a church and school was very important as well. These institutions were at the centre of their lives. The first known church service in Blumenort was held in the middle of September, possibly in the frame house of Peter W. Toews. The minister who preached this servmon was Jacob Barkman, and he preached a thanksgiving sermon based on Deuteronomy 27:6,7.[18] (Barkman had arrived in Manitoba on September 15 with the Steinbach group, and for the first three weeks after his arrival, he stayed at Peter W. Toews' place in Blumenort.)

School, too, began during the first fall. Cornelius P. Friesen was hired to teach the 24 village students between seven and 12 years old who crowded into Heinrich Reimer's Semlin. By April 10, when school closed, they had attended school for 86 1/2 days.[19]

It was not until fall that the name of Blumenort was finally chosen for the new village. Like the names of the other East Reserve villages, Blumenort was a name which had been in use in Russia. Cornelius Krahn writes that Blumenort was a "popular name among Mennonites of Prussian background."[20] The Molotschna village of Blumenort had been a large one with about 76 families, of which a few were Kleine Gemeinde members.

Why this name was chosen for the large East Reserve village on 22-7-6E is open to speculation. A more logical name would have been Blumenhof, the leading Kleine Gemeinde village in Borosenko and the village from which several of

the Blumenort settlers came. According to Rev. Jacob Barkman the name of Blumenhof had been chosen for the new village by September.[21] However, only two months later, Heinrich Wiebe wrote that "we live in a village which may be called Blumenort."[22]

It appears from this that the first settlers may have envisaged a large, 35-family Kleine Gemeinde village, whose land area would have included most of township 7-6E. By fall, however, it was apparent that there were six quarters of non-village land in the middle of the township which would effectively split the envisaged village district into two parts.[23] Thus it became obvious that the 1875 settlers would have to establish a separate village. Because most of the 1875 settlers were from Blumenhof, Borosenko, this name seems to have been reserved for them. In keeping with the Mennonite custom of naming sister villages by similar names, the village of 1874 was named Blumenort, meaning a place of flowers.

The first year after settlement was a difficult one for the Blumenort settlers. Health was poor, shelters were crude, crops failed, cash was low, and still more settlers came.

Most discouraging, no doubt, were the deaths and sicknesses among the settlers' children. As winter approached, two of Peter Penner's little girls died: Helena died at age one-and-a-half on August 30, and Justina died at just eight months on November 14. Abraham Penner's two-year-old daughter, Margaretha, died on September 19, just days after they arrived in Blumenort. Other children were very sick that first winter; in a letter to Elder Toews, still in Russia,

Deacon Heinrich Wiebe reported that son Jacob was very ill that winter.[24]

Life in the Semlins added to the difficulties. The settlers were not conditioned to such primitive abodes. Mrs. Heinrich Wiebe remembered the first winters in the Semlin for years, and often spoke of them to her grandchildren. Apparently in the winter time, the only window of the Semlin sometimes snowed over and it could become quite dark inside. At such times the settlers used candles or tallow for light and would have to get out and shovel the snow from the window. Sometimes, too, the snow blocked the door, and, on such an occasion, Heinrich Wiebe pulled a board from the inside and pushed it right through the roof as a signal to the neighbors that they were stranded. Mrs. Wiebe also remembered how mice played inside the Semlin during the winter and that the children were entertained by them running along the edges of the Semlin walls. In spring when the heavy snow finally melted, the water ran into the Semlin, which was three feet below the ground. To keep the floor from becoming wet and muddy, Heinrich dug a small water hole under the bed and periodically emptied it.[25]

The cold winter affected everyone. Although Peter W. Toews reported, in a letter to Russia that the weather till Christmas had not "made it difficult to live in" Manitoba, he wrote that the English neighbors had warned him of -40° (Fahrenheit) weather. He went on to write that the weather in January was colder:

Travelling here is usually done on foot and, although

> it is not too cold to walk, it can happen that faces freeze. On the 5th the 17 of us [Blumenort brethren] walked to Gruenfeld for brotherhood meeting. On that walk parts of my face and one of my ears froze a little. Would it be possible for someone there [in Russia] to bring me a big yellow fur coat? It costs approximately 15 rubles, for they are a definite necessity here. Do not take along too little; it takes a long time to obtain a fur coat here. Shoes, however, can be purchased here for six to eight dollars.[26]

The cold winter was most difficult for the cows and oxen on which each settler depended. David P. Reimer gives the following description of the situation:

> The beginning was not easy. Feed was very scarce in the first year. The hay was harvested late, and had suffered from frost. The shelters for the few animals were built very poorly and were too cold for the harsh winter. Because of this, the animals barely managed to endure the winter. The settlers bought cheap flour and fed the poor animals baked bread from it. But strong faith in God's leading and relentless ambition eventually brought success.[27]

Hard work was demanded of everyone throughout the winter. Trips had to be taken by sleigh and foot to Winnipeg and Ste. Anne to buy supplies. Firewood and lumber had to be cut. Peter W. Toews writes to his friends still in Russia that "the closest spruce forest is five miles from our reserve. Almost every day journeys are made there to get wood. Although most of the trees are under one foot thick, 10 to 12 miles from here is a larger forest which also has hard woods of all kinds.[28] When time allowed, some families sent out their boys to earn money for the family. Sometime during the 1870s, possibly in the winter of 1875, a river boat, carrying flour to Winnipeg from St. Paul, froze in the ice near Emerson and 20 sleighs were needed to haul the flour to Winnipeg. Abram M. Friesen sent his teenage son, John, with

a team of oxen and a sleigh, to earn $1 a bag plus a bag of kerosene-smelling flour for the family. Years later John remembered the 10-day journey in the intensely cold weather; when, dressed very poorly, he had run in circles around the oxen and sleigh "so as not to freeze to death." The flour John earned for his family was greatly appreciated as it cost $5 a bag in those days.[29]

Springtime did not come too soon. Klaas W. Reimer, the cheesemaker in Blumenort for several years, remembered how the cattle were released onto green pasture in spring. "The poor animals were so happy to get out and into the fresh air that they tried to jump in the air, but they were so weak they ... often collapsed.[30]

Once spring arrived, the fields were hurriedly prepared for seeding the wheat that had been brought from Russia or purchased in Winnipeg. John B. Toews remembered the difficulties of farming in Blumenort in 1875:

> During our first spring here, we broke up some land, [and] sowed grain by hand. It sprouted and came up so nicely. Then a little later, as a plague, grasshoppers came up too, very densely. It seemed the young grain was a real treat to them; they destroyed every bit of it. We were greatly discouraged; to wait for another year before we might have a little income or some feed to raise a couple of pigs and some poultry seemed impossible. Our driving and farmwork had to be done with oxen.[31]

Many years later Jacob T. Wiebe wrote how they fought the grasshoppers in the first years. "I can well remember how Mother and I chased the hoppers from the garden into small stacks of hay and set a match to them."[32]

That fall the Blumenorters harvested no grain. Only a few potatoes were available. Hay, however, was plentiful,

and the livestock had enough for the next winter. Some seed grain for the next year was purchased with money borrowed from the government at six per cent interest per annum.[33] Existing government reports reveal that Peter B. Friesen, Sr., mortgaged his homestead quarter on December 21, 1876, to obtain $37.21 for seed grain. Heinrich F. Wiebe borrowed $26.01 on the same conditions during 1875 and 1876 to offset the damages of the grasshopper plague.[34] These loans had to be repaid before patents, stating that farmers had improved their homesteads and were qualified for deeds to their quarters, could be issued.

It was a relief, no doubt, to the 1874 settlers when, on June 29, 1875, the second contingent of Kleine Gemeinde families arrived at the East Reserve. Among the members of this group was their Elder, Peter Toews, and many relatives whom they had not seen in a year. This group also brought additional funds. Oral tradition has it that the very settlers who complained about the Cornelius S. Plett family remaining in Russia for an additional year and harvesting the bumper crop of 1874 were the first to accept money offered to them by Plett. That the 1875 group had money is evidenced by the fact that the 28 Kleine Gemeinde families who had crossed on the "S. S. Prussian" recorded an average of $850 per family, the highest for immigrants of that year.[35]

Among the 1875 settlers were seven families who came to Blumenort, from where they proceeded a mile east to establish the village of Blumenhof, meaning flower yard. Three rather significant men were among this group: 55-year-old

Cornelius S. Plett, 57-year-old Heinrich F. Reimer, S., and 58-year-old Johann Warkentin, Sr. Each had been a well-to-do and leading member of his village in Russia. Along with these men came their extended families who included: 29-year-old Cornelius L. Plett, a future preacher; 30-year-old Johann L. Warkentin, and his twin, Isaac L. Warkentin, the noted Blumenhof "doctor"; and 29-year-old Abram R. Friesen, Blumenhof's schoolteacher and a son to Cornelius F. Friesen.

David L. Plett, the son of Cornelius, remembered his first impressions of Blumenort and how they started out to establish Blumenhof:

> It did not look very appealing here. The people who came here last year had sowed and planted some grain, but the grasshoppers ate everything. The people, however, all seemed to be happy and continued working. Another little village was established a short distance to the east of Blumenort which was named Blumenhof. Here our parents built a homestead. A house and barn were built. Pasture was broken. The lumber for the house had to be hauled from Winnipeg with oxen. Father bought two yoke of oxen right away, also a horse and buggy with which to travel. Because I was not quite 12 at that time, I cannot remember everything exactly and can only write in general. For winter everything was finished so far that we could live in a warm house and the cattle could be kept in a barn. The firewood for the first winter was all taken out of the poplar tree bush ... in the north-eastern part of the settlement. This I remember well. We also drove a wagon before winter set in. All travelling was done with oxen. For winter Father bought another horse. Then it was easier to travel to church with two horses. Horses were only used on Sundays to go to church and to go visiting.[36]

Abraham R. Friesen, who became the school teacher at Blumenhof, gives the following account of their arrival: "We settled close to Blumenort in a village which was named Blumenhof after the main village in Borosenko. Here we built a small house, 32 feet long and 15 feet wide. Today, on

September 27, (1875), six people already live in it."[37]

By the end of 1875 ten families had settled in Blumenhof. The last three families were the Peter H. Unger family who had come to Blumenort the previous year and the families resulting from the 1875 marriages of Heinrich Wohlgemuth and Katherina Plett, and Gottlieb Jahnke and Margaretha Friesen. In 1877 the Johann Janzens moved from Scratching River to become yet another Blumenhof family.

The Blumenhof people began their settlement as the Blumenort people had begun theirs. They built a village, although they settled only on the north side of the street. School was started in one of the village homes and on November first, Abraham Friesen was hired to teach eleven students, receiving eight dollars for each student. A week later, the benches and chairs had been built and school had started.

Livestock and farm supplies were purchased in Winnipeg. Peter Unger travelled to Winnipeg several times in the fall of 1875 to make purchases for the Blumenhof settlers. Sometimes equipment could be borrowed from the already established Blumenort neighbors. For instance, Abraham Friesen borrowed an oxen yoke from Peter Friesen in October, in order to plow his field.

By 1875, then, two villages, Blumenort, with 24 families, and Blumenhof, with 10 families, lay side by side in the centre of Township 7-6E. Together the people of these villages turned the wilderness in the northeast corner of the East Reserve into a well-established community.

In 1879, a third Kleine Gemeinde village was founded

nearby. It was Neuanlage, more commonly known as Nieaunloag and meaning 'new settlement'. It was situated just a mile southwest of Blumenort. Its founder, Johann Koop, was a prosperous and well-to-do farmer who, in Russia, had lived in a small settlement called Neuanlage and who in 1874 had registered the homestead quarter section N. E. 17, located in the far southwest corner of the Blumenort village district. In 1877 Koop purchased the adjacent preemption quarter from the government for a dollar an acre. Two years later he left Blumenort and started a new village settlement near the creek which ran between his two quarters.[38] Unlike the beginning of Blumenort and Blumenhof, Neuanlage was established over a period of time by settlers who were all closely related.

In the first year, Koop was joined by his children, the Jacob Koops and the Peter W. Loewens. It was Loewen's house which served as the school for the first years. Three years later two other in-laws, the Johann Koops, Jr. and the Peter Klassens, as well as the Peter B. Friesens moved to the new settlement from Blumenort.

Three villages, Blumenort, Blumenhof and Neuanlage had, thus, been established by 1879. These villages had much in common. Their members were often of one extended family; they were all members of the Kleine Gemeinde, and they lived in close proximity to one another. Because Blumenort was established first, was the largest and most complex village, and was situated between Neuanlage and Blumenhof, it was often seen as the parent village and the centre for the Kleine

Gemeinde members living in this area of the East Reserve.

By 1875 a total of 33 families had settled in the Blumenort area. While life was often extremely difficult, the settlers continued to believe strongly that the north-eastern corner of the Mennonite Reserve should be their home. They had left well-established homes in Russia and come to Manitoba hoping to re-establish their lives as quiet, humble, hard-working, non-resistant, God-fearing people. They sought to do this by transplanting, to as great a degree as possible, their village life from the steppes of southern Russia to the plains of Manitoba. After the first few years the roots of a European village life had been firmly re-entrenched at Blumenort. It was now ready to embark on its first period of history.

Footnotes

1 Ship Passenger Lists: 1874, Vol. 898, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg.
2 John B. Toews, "Erinnerungen aus dem Pionierleben," 75 Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada, ed. John C. Reimer, (Steinbach, 1949), p. 50.
3 Ship Lists, op. cit.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 John B. Toews, "Aus und Einwanderung," 75 Gedenkfeier, op. cit., p. 83.
7 Ibid.
8 Peter W. Loewen, op. cit.
9 Peter P. Wiebe, letter to Elder Peter Toews, August 1874, Peter Toews Papers, Bethel College, Newton, Kansas.
10 Loewen, op. cit.
11 Wiebe, op. cit.
12 David L. Plett, op. cit.
13 Homestead Registration Register, 7-6E, Manitoba Department of Natural Resources, Crown Lands Branch, Winnipeg.
14 Cornelius Krahn, "Villages (Hollaenderdoerfer)", Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, pp. 821-827.

15 John Warkentin, "The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba. A Study in Historical Geography," (PhD dissertation, York University, Toronto, 1960), p. 54.
16 Martin P. Friesen, Map of Blumenort Village: 1896, (Abram P. Friesen, Blumenort, Manitoba).
17 Jacob T. Wiebe, Family Book, Lark Printing, Rosenort, Manitoba, 1976), pp. 15-16.
18 Peter J. B. Reimer, op. cit., p. 40.
19 Blumenort Village Papers, "School Register, 1874-75," Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort, Manitoba.
20 Cornelius Krahn, "Blumenort," Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 1, p. 372.
21 Jacob Barkman, letter to Elder Peter Toews, September 15, 1874. Peter Toews Papers, op. cit.
22 John B. Toews, "Aus und Einwanderung," op. cit., 36.
23 These quarters included the four on section 26, owned by the Hudson's Bay Company, N. W. 23, owned by Jean Baptiste Lapointe, and S. W. 23, owned by Gottlief Jahnke.
24 Interview with George R. Wiebe, Greenland, Manitoba, July, 1980.
25 Jacob T. Wiebe, op. cit., p. 16.
26 Peter W. Toews, letter to Elder Peter Toews, January 15, 1875, Peter Toews Papers, op. cit.
27 David P. Reimer, "Blumenort," The Sesquicentennial Jubilee, op. cit., p. 102.
28 Peter W. Toews, op. cit.
29 Abram P. Friesen, et. al., ed. The Von Riesen-Friesen Genealogy: 1756-1966 (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1967), p. 167.
30 Abe Warkentin, Reflections on Our Heritage, (Derksen Printers, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1971), p. 26.
31 John B. Toews, Memoirs, op. cit., p. 10.
32 Jacob T. Wiebe, op. cit., p. 16.
33 Kleine Gemeinde, Rechnungen: 1874, Prairie Rose E. M. Church, Landmark, Manitoba.
34 Homestead Land Patent Applications, Surveys Branch, Department of Natural Resources, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
35 Philip Wismer, Russian Mennonite Aid Committee Record Book, Conrad Grebel College Archieves, Kitchener, Ontario.
36 David L. Plett, op. cit.
37 Abraham R. Friesen, op. cit.
38 David P. Reimer, op. cit.

INTRODUCTION TO PART II: THE VILLAGE ERA

By 1875 the patterns of a European village settlement had been firmly established in Blumenort and Blumenhof. Blumenort, for example, was a large Darp built along a central street, running from east to west. At the center of the village stood the school house where the children would learn, the church meet and the Schulzenbott deliberate. On both sides of the street were Fiastaeden, or farmyards. From here the men would go plow their Koagels, cut wood in the bush to the east, or gather hay from the village hay Demples. At the Fiastaeden the women kept house, nurtured the garden, and helped milk the cows. In the village, the services of a blacksmith, a store keeper, a miller and a cheesemaker were soon provided.

Blumenort area people kept very much to their own people, the Mennonites. Spaziere was their social life and the "Winnipeg Road" was the connection to the outside. There were joys and tragedies and times of despair. But always there were people with a deep faith and a sense of community to give support in sorrow and to share the joy.

The pattern of this life which they brought from the old country changed very little for most Blumenort area people until 1919. By that year the Canadian way of community, with each family living on a separate quarter section,

(which had been accepted by the Blumenhof, Neuanlage, and Greenland people earlier), finally brought the Blumenort village and the symbol of an era to an end.

Part II, Chapter 1: The Village Landscape

The appearance of the countryside was perhaps the most striking aspect of early Blumenort. Although no photographs showing the unique field-system or pioneer village are known to exist, a mental picture of the landscape can be derived from existing documents and the recollections of old timers.

As in other Mennonite Settlements, Blumenort followed the open-fields system for the first period of its history. Unlike most other settlements, however, a detailed description of the layout of the farmland in Blumenort is available. The following account and map were reconstructed around 1950 by E. K. Francis, with the assistance of John B. Toews. (Although this account was not published in Francis' book, In Search of Utopia, it was deposited as part of the original manuscript in the Provincial Archives in Winnipeg.)

> Blumenort, in the East Reserve, presents a very different picture [than Rosenort, a typical village of the West Reserve]. In reconstructing its land pattern an attempt has been made to show a rather early stage of its development, perhaps within five or ten years after its foundation. The basic plan has been copied from a survey map of 1872. It should be noted that this was broken land with various natural obstacles. The creek in the south was not enough of an obstacle to stop plowland from running across its shallow bed, but it prevented the houses from being built too near the sloping bank, and also determined the course of the road. We cannot say that our sketch reflects the situation exactly as it existed at any one time, for the original village has vanished long since. But with the help of Mr. Toews's amazing memory, and with some general knowledge of champion husbandry and land measurement, we feel that we have been able to recreate a pattern that actually could have existed. The irregularities of the lay-out, which make this example particularly interesting, were suggested by several other geographical peculiarities apart from the creek. We find a rather extensive bush in the centre

> of the village area and a hillock close to the centre of the road near which the houses were located. The village territory of Blumenort included 23 quarter sections of land ... To the west were two fields, marked I and II, at each side of the road. Each field was evidently subdivided into 23 equal strips. In Field I their size was five acres, or about one third of a mile long and 122 feet wide. Ten acres, or about one half of a mile by 165 feet, were allotted to each farmer in field II. Friield III in the southeast corner showed a different arrangement. Here the strips ran crosswise. The direction in which fields were being plowed, and thus their longer side, would usually follow the natural slope of the country in order to provide proper drainage. In this case, the creek suggested a north-south slope, and this actually was the general direction of all the fields except number III, which contained small plots of four acres each running from east to west. Why? The Mennonite name for these strips was Schadruten (literally: damage rods). The principal damage to which fields might be exposed was that done by stray cattle. Now, this field adjoined the village territory of Blumenhof, over whose animals the Blumenort herdsman had no power. Along this section line, too, the main road ran from Steinbach and Clearsprings. The damage possibly suffered by a farmer whose field lay parallel to it, was unpredictable. Thus, justice prompted splitting the risk, and giving every one of the villagers the same small amount of land with a short frontage near the danger spot.
>
> It is noticeable, at this early stage of development, that out of twenty-three quarter-sections, there were only about 713 acres under cultivation, namely:
>
> Messuage (Hooskoagel) - 276 acres
> Field I - 115 acres
> Field II - 230 acres
> Field III (Schadruten) - 92 acres
>
> This made 31 acres of arable land per farmer. All the rest of [the land, which amounts to] over 4 1/2 sections remained unimproved. It made an ideal pasture. The hay and woodland in the northern part provided plenty of feed for the winter as well as timber and fuel.[1]

While the pattern for the village had been established by 1875, much work was required to make the village an attractive and organized place to live. The Blumenort area people were not content to live in crude shelters or even in a village which had a "tired, gray, drab" appearance, as one scholar has described the typical East Reserve village. The

Kleine Gemeinde people were reputed to be a conservative but orderly, neat people.

Cornelius L. Plett, a Blumenhof pioneer, wrote about the village plan at his parents' place in the Molotschna colony. It was such a plan which, no doubt, served as a model for the ultimate village; a model which the Blumenort area villages would never completely achieve.

> Our parents built their home on Feuerstelle number 38. The building had to be done according to regulation, with the houses situated at the same distance from the street, all being the same size, equal in width, length, and height. Bricks were laid to form the walls; the shingles for the roof were also made of baked clay. A barn and a shed for feed storage were attached to one end of the dwelling house. One roof covered all of these buildings. The fences along the street, running through the village, were bricklaid.[2]

There were few large frame buildings erected in the first two years of settlement. Blumenort, however, was the only place in the East Reserve where frame buildings were erected in the first year. John Warkentin wrote that "three prosperous Mennonites in Blumenort purchased lumber in Winnipeg and built frame houses during the first autumn, but none were built elsewhere."[3] Land Patent Applications identified two of these farmers as being David Thiessen, who built an adjoined house and barn measuring 16x24 feet, and Peter R. Reimer, who built at 21x42 frame house in 1874 and added a 26x31-foot barn the next year. The third farmer probably was Peter W. Toews. Rev. Jacob Barkman wrote that, after he arrived on the East Reserve in September, he made his way to Toews where "we took shelter in his already erected and partly roofed dwelling house."[4]

Most families lived in Semlins, at least for the first year. Others were still living in crude structures in 1876. Heinrich R. Reimer, the son of Abraham Reimer, has written that he was born in a Semlin in July, 1876.[5] Jacob Wiebe, the son of Heinrich F. Wiebe, has written that in the spring of 1876 "our father provided better accommodations, building a house, and in the fall he started on the barn."[6] Cornelius P. Friesen, the Blumenort school teacher, replaced his Semlin in 1875, but only with an 18x40-foot strawroofted log house.[7]

From 1875 to 1877 most farmers replaced the Semlins with simple frame structures. Ten years later a second building spree set in when many of 1875-1877 buildings were replaced by complete and well-planned structures.[8] By 1898 nine of the 23 farmers in the Blumenort village had large adjoined house-barn structures.

A good description of the buildings of a Blumenort farmer is contained in the following excerpt from an 1892 application for a patent to Peter Penner, Sr.'s homestead quarter.

> We, Abraham Penner and Cornelius Penner, both of the Village of Blumenort in the County of LaVerendrye in the Province of Manitoba, farmers,
> do solemnly declare that our father, Peter Penner, who died at his home in the Village of Blumenort ... as a farmer on the 27th day of April, A.D. 1884, was the owner of the N. E. 1/4 section 33-7-6E ...
> 2nd - that our deceased father had fulfilled all the settlement duties which the government required in the aforesaid quarter section of land before his death.
> 3rd - that the settlement duties which he had done are as follows: He built a frame dwelling house 23x46 with shingle roof in the year A.D. 1875; the stable, also a frame building, 28x48 feet with hay roof built in the same year A.D. 1875; another frame stable, 14x28 feet [with a] shingle roof has been built in the year 1882;

> a pig stable built of longs 14x16 feet [with a] shingle roof in the year A.D. 1879.
> 4th - that all the cultivating for the aforesaid land is in the plan of the Village of Blumenort and cultivated in the years A.D. 1875, 1876, 1877, and 1878; by the year 1878 he had 30 acres under crop and 10 acres in addition broke [sic]; the total cultivation for the said quarter was 40 acres, all outside the cultivating for his own homestead.[9]

The following is a more detailed description of the buildings of one of the younger farmers from Blumenhof. It was given by Abram R. Plett, a grandson of Cornelius L. Plett.

> The house which Cornelius later built for his family was much larger [than the first Semlin]. It was connected to the barn under one ridge pole so that they did not need to go outside to attend to their livestock. The house was a one-storey affair with a steep roof. It was unpainted and the floors were made of six-inch boards ... The house was insulated in winter by grain stored in the attic.[10]

There were different ways in which farmers went about attaining the materials for building. Some farmers purchased their lumber in Winnipeg. Others got spruce and tamarack from the forest in the east and had it customsawed at Peter W. Toews' sawmill in Blumenort. Shingles were sometimes purchased from Tom Rankin in Clearsprings or from an outfit in Ste. Anne. Still other farmers fashioned most of the materials themselves. One description of how a well-to-do Blumenhof farmer built an addition to his barn in 1877 shows how self-sufficient some of the pioneers were. The description is given by Abraham Klassen of Rosenhof, who worked for his father-in-law Johann Warkentin, Sr. at the time:

> We stayed there in Blumenhof the first winter and the summer of 1878 and advanced the farm. There were other employees there besides us who cut the logs into boards with a lumber saw. There were always a good number of eaters at the table which was somewhat hard for my young

> wife ... There were about five or six men working for my father-in-law all winter. The wood was to be used to build a 30-foot addition to the barn. The shingles necessary for the roof were cut out of cedar wood and trimmed with a knife. As I had learned the art of carpentry, I took upon myself the construction of this addition and also the renovating of the barn. In this manner we worked from early to late.[11]

Foundations for these early buildings were inevitably made from home-produced products. The primary materials used were large field stones. Some of the bigger buildings had three layers of rocks buried under the foundation to support them. Dave P. Loewen remembers unearthing such structures at the village farm site of the Abraham R. Penner farm in the 1940s. On top of these rocks was poured a wide-based foundation which consisted of lime and rocks. The lime was home-produced by the farmers. White limestone was collected in the fields and thrown into a pit in which a hot fire was kept going for about a week. After the rock started crumbling, it was removed and mixed with stones and sand to make a strong, concrete-like base. The finer lime was mixed with sand and plastered on the inside with a wooden trowel and then white-washed.[12]

Few early village buildings were painted. Almost invariably they had shingled sides, protected with linseed oil. The interior of the houses were usually painted white or light blue. In Russia it was said that the Kleine Gemeinde, considering blue the most God-pleasing color, painted all wood on the farm blue, be it wagons, furniture or wooden gables. So common was this practice among the Kleine Gemeinde that the light blue was dubbed the Kleengemeindsche Himmel Blaev.[13]

Along with the house and barn, a summer kitchen, work shop, hog barn and small granary were eventually built. These buildings would usually encircle the central yard of the Fiastaed. The front part of the Fiastaed contained the gardens. The garden always was a source of pride for the woman, who did most of the work in it. A daughter of the storekeeper, John R. Reimer, still remembers the garden of her grandparents, the old Abraham Reimers.

> When Mother would turn her back to do the sewing, I would sometimes sneak out of the house and run through the fruit garden, past the gates on the border to visit Grandmother's Anna, who would often babysit during the Sunday morning church service. The gate was hard to open because the rock tied to it was meant to keep it shut. The garden had tall black cherry trees, plums, and sour cherries. The cranberries grew wild. (There were so many of them the cows were given free access to the areas that had them.) Some villagers would select the best trees from the wild ones in the bush, tasting them for quality in the summer, making them with a white cloth and then in spring they would transplant them. There also were goose berries, and Zurump (Sorrel). In the Gemuese Goadi we had vegetables very similar to the ones today, except that we had melons and watermelons. Tomatoes were not thought fit to eat, although we grew them in the garden. There were onions, cabbages, and potatoes.
> In front of the Fiastaeden there were three trees, either maple or poplar. Sometimes they appeared a little scrawny.[14]

The back side of each Fiastaed contained a three-acre Strou Hock (straw pen) where the cattle and horses which needed to be kept near the barn were corralled. Here, too, the threshing was done each fall after the farmer had brought his sheaves from the field and made a huge stack. Some of the Fiastaeden on the south side of the street were cramped for space because of the creek. Thus, bridges were built and straw pens erected on the other side.[15]

Roads were another important landscape feature of the village. The most important road was De Gauss (the street) along which all the Fiastaede were built and trees planted. In Blumenort this road ran from east to west, roughly paralleling the creek. To the east the road led to Blumenhof and Steinbach. To the west it led to Hochfeld, Blumengart, Oak Island and eventually Winnipeg. Blumenort also had an important crossroads. It bisected the village right between the school house and the herdsman's hut, leading north to the graveyard, the community pasture and eventually to the vast hayfields in the Greenland area. Behind the Fiastaeden were smaller roads known as Koagelwaeaj. These roads led to the fields. All roads were named for the place at which they aimed.[16]

Early roads were built by farmers working for the village. Low-lying earthen roads, with small drainages on either side, would be constructed by scraping dirt together with hand-controlled, ox-drawn Schleepe.

On wet days the road, although hard, rounded and packed by the cattle, was so sticky people could not walk on it. Pioneers talk of one village busybody who would crawl on "all fours" during the wet periods to get to her place of visit.

In winter the villagers depended on snow trails along which horses pulled the sleighs. The most difficult travel time was early spring when the snow trails began melting and neither sleigh nor wagon could be used.

Footnotes

1 E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia, extensive unpublished draft, 1955, Provincial Archives of Manitoba.
2 Cornelius L. Plett, "Denkschrift," translated by and in the possession of Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort, Manitoba.
3 John Warkentin, "The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba: A study in Historical Geography", (PhD. dissertation, York University, Toronto, 1960), pp. 72-72.
4 75ste Gedenkfeier op. cit., p. 75.
5 Heinrich R. Reimer, Family History, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg, p. 4.
6 Wiebe, op. cit., p. 17.
7 Abram P. Friesen, op. cit.
8 Peter F. Unger, "Denkscrift," ca. 1930, Abe P. Unger, Landmark, Manitoba.
9 Abraham and Cornelius Penner, letter of patent application, September 6, 1892, Crown Lands Branch, Province of Manitoba, Winnipeg.
10 Rosabel Fast, "A History of the Plett Family" (research paper, University of Manitoba, 1978), p. 5.
11 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, (Delbert F. Plett Farms, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981), p. 22.
12 Interview with Peter A. Plett, Landmark, Manitoba, August, 1980. His father-in-law, Klaas P. Reimer, had such a pit on his yard in the Blumenort village.
13 P. M. Friesen, loc. cit.
14 Interview with Mrs. John C. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba, August, 1980.
15 Interview with Jacob W. Friesen, Steinbach, Manitoba, July, 1980.
16 Ibid.

Part II, Chapter 2: Government and the Villagers

No society exists without government. In the Blumenort community, as elsewhere, there were two types of government: the informal and the official. (By informal government is meant the group of men in the community who wield influence; who cause decisions to go one way rather than the other; who comprise the governing class. By official government is meant the bodies which are duly elected to lead the community.) There were three such official bodies; the Schulzenbott of the village, the Gebietsamt of the East Reserve and the Lehrdienst of the Kleine Gemeinde church. Each of these bodies played an important role in the early period of Blumenort history. While each helped to create a well-organized and functioning society, each had a different area of concern. This chapter deals firstly with the men of influence, and secondly with the Schulzenbott, and Gebietsamt.

The most influential men in the village invariably were from the 25 percent of the villagers who were the owners of large farms and the patriarchs of extended families. It also appears that the leading group of farmers in the first two decades after settlement had held that position in Russia.[1]

The leading men in Blumenort appear to have been Peter W. Toews and Peter Penner, Sr. They had been commissioned to take care of the last financial details in their village in Russia, and in 1883 their farms were the only ones in the Blumenort village to be assessed at over $1000. Of the 11

most highly assessed farms in 1889, eight belonged to members of the extended Toews and Penner families. Two men who assumed leading positions in the 1880s were Peter and Abraham R. Reimer. Their rise may be attributed to their influential fathers-in-law. In 1893 many of the Penners and Wiebes moved to Greenland and the extended Reimer family became more prominent in Blumenort. By 1906 half of the villagers assessed at over $1500 were Reimers.

The leaders in the village organization and the church were drawn from these three extended families. The early representatives on the church ministerial were members of the extended Toews family, while the members after 1882 were from the Reimer and Penner families. Similarly, five of the confirmed village Schulzen were members of one of these three families.

The situation in Blumenhof, a smaller but more prosperous village, was similar to that of Blumenort. Here the leading families were those of Cornelius S. Plett and Johann Warkentin, S., both of whom had been quite well-to-do in Russia and both of whom appear to have been Schulzen of their respective villages. In 1883 the Warkentin and Plett families held five of the six farms assessed at over $900; in 1889 six of the ten and in 1898 eight of the ten. It was from the extended families of these two men that four members of the pre-1910 ministerial were chosen. The known Blumenhof Schulzen were also members of the Plett or Warkentin families.

The third village within the Blumenort community, Neuanlage, also corresponded with the analysis above. Johann Koop, the

founder of Neuanlage, had been a very prosperous farmer in Russia. This was a position he maintained in Manitoba where in 1883 his tax assessment was the highest in the entire Blumenort community. He was also noted to have been successful in establishing his five sons and sons-in-law as well-to-do farmers in Neuanlage. One of these sons was elected a minister in the 1890s.

There was, therefore, a definite class of men of influence who held the leadership positions and who also were among the most affluent. These men were among the 25 percent of the farmers who, in 1883, were assessed for more than $900 each or for a total of 43 percent of the land, buildings, machinery and livestock of these communities. For the same year 25 percent of the community's poorest farmers were assessed at less than $500 each, or a total of 14 percent of the community's total assessment. Within this group of villagers could be found the school teachers, the herdsmen, the newlyweds, and those with few family connections.

The body most directly involved in the day-to-day affairs of the village was the Schulzenbott, guided by the village Verbindungsschrift.[1] The Schulzenbott was the governing assembly of the village, headed by the Schulz. The Verbindungsschrift was the village constitution adopted by the Schulzenbott in 1878. The original document for Blumenort still exists and a translated copy of it appears below.

Die Verbindungsschrift der Dorfsgemeinde Blumenort: 1878

Regarding the following Articles: Which have been examined and considered acceptable as a general assembly of the villagers; and which were thereafter enacted as binding; and which all of us - participating as a Community in Brotherhood - wish to subscribe to by our own hand; as follows:

Article One: In accordance with our earlier custom, we wish to constitute a village community, and to take the lands registered individually in the names of each villager into common use; in order that all the individual available endowments, such as woodland, cultivated land and pasture, can be equally enjoyed.

Article Two: All those who bind themselves to this community oblige themselves to participate equally in all the affairs of the village; such as roads, fences, and in general, all the labours which will be undertaken on said lands as a community.

Article Three: The purchase of breeding stock, the operation of a school and other recurring expenses, and various accommodations which claim monetary expenditures shall be paid by each Feuerstelle in equal portions.

Article Four: In the event that someone becomes a member of the village community by the purchase of a village farm but does not dwell on it, the same shall be obligated to pay a part of the expenses of the village, in accordance with Article Three.

Article Five: If anyone wishes to transfer his village farm to another, such transaction shall not take place unless the transfer is to someone that the village agrees to accept.

Article Six: Because it is necessary in all circumstances in a village to have a Schulz who will summon the neighbors to assemble in order to discuss matters; we, therefore, obligate ourselves to give punctual obedience to such a leader, and to be present at every meeting of the assembly, if possible.

Article Seven: We also obligate ourselves in the pasturing of livestock: Namely, that as a community we will engage a herdsman who will herd the cattle. And consequently, also, no one shall have the right to pasture his livestock individually, in order to thereby avoid the wages of the herdsman, or to attempt to gain better pasture.

Article Eight: The costs of construction of a school are to be distributed equally to each village farm, whether it be a Feuerstelle or one without dwellings.

Article Nine: Should someone purchase an additional village farm, the same will thereby also be obligated to perform and carry out the obligations to the village community pertaining thereto.

When everyone has subscribed his name, there shall be twenty-two signatures. 1890[2]

It was the Schulz and the Schulzenbott which ran the

village on the basis of this constitution. The Schulz, sometimes also called the Vorsteher, was the mayor of the village who was elected by the Schulzenbott. The known Schulzen for Blumenort include Abraham M. Friesen and Peter P. Wiebe who served during the 1880s; Cornelius R. Penner and Abraham R. Penner who served during the 1890s, and Heinrich E. Plett and Peter R. Reimer, Jr., who served between 1900 and 1910. The Blumenhof Schulzen include Johann Warkentin, Johann L. Plett and Cornelius L. Plett.[3]

In all cases the Schulz was one of the more progressive farmers in the village. His work included calling and chairing village meetings, organizing village work, hiring the village herdsman and keeping in touch with the Gebietsamt, the Municipal Office. He was also in charge of measuring Koagels, allotting hay fields, and regulating the cutting of firewood in the village bush. The wages for these services were small. An 1899 record, for instance, shows that Cornelius Penner received $10 for serving as Schulz for one year.

The Schulzenbott was the organization of all land-holding village farmers over the age of 21. Such a farmer was known as a Wiat, or more formally as a Landwirt. Those who did not own land were called Anwohner, people not really a part of the village.

Schulzenbott meetings seem to have been held monthly. These meetings always were a social event for the farmers. But it was here that important decisions on village policy were made and where village work was organized. It was here

that the Blumenort village constitution of 1878 was adopted, and it was here that it was finally decided to disband the village in 1910. Decisions had to be made on a variety of problems.

It was at the Schulzenbott meetings as well where debts and credits were recorded. All farmers were expected to do a share of work for the village, for which they were remunerated. Such work included fencing, well and ditch digging, road work and grave digging. On appointed days all farmers would join forces to complete these jobs. There were special jobs for which farmers could volunteer and earn extra credit. These might include wintering the bull, repairing the schoolhouse, building the village corral, administering the village hay harvests, dehorning and castrating cattle, mowing weeds or hauling manure from the school barn. Credit could also be earned by responding to an emergency. For instance, Peter R. Penner received 25¢ for chasing stray cattle from a village grain field in 1899. Volunteers who came to help fight a fire in 1902 received 35¢.

Debts were incurred by using goods and services rendered by the village. Firewood from the village poplar bush on sections 28 and 27 cost 25¢ a load. Hay from the village hayfields cost 40¢ a load. Debts were also incurred when surplus village property, such as an old bull or an old water trough, was purchased. Renting the village milk wagon or using the services of the village bull cost money as well.

It seems that these debts and credits were recorded on an honor system and it is quite likely that each farmer would

declare what work he had done or what he had purchased at the Schulzenbott meeting. Around 1900 work was valued at about 10¢ an hour or $1 a day.

At the end of the year the Schulz, would hire one of the farmers with good mathematical ability to do the actual calculations, for 25¢. The credits or debts of each farmer were then taken into account when the final tax assessment was made. Separate calculations were also made as to how much each farmer owed for hay, bull services, cattle grazing, school firewood, road upkeep and special village projects.

The East Reserve Gebietsamt became the Hespeler-Hanover Municipality in 1883. Its job was to organize municipal-wide road work, pass by-laws and tax the villagers.[4]

In Russia the Kleine Gemeinder had respected the powerful Molotschna Agricultural Society but considered it wrong to become involved in a government backed by temporal power. They had also refused to participate in Volostamts elections. This belief continued in Manitoba where the Kleine Gemeinde did not get involved in the municipal level of government and willingly allowed the Bergthaler people to dominate it. In fact, not a single Kleine Gemeinde was present at the organization meeting of the Hepeler-Hanover Municipality on January 1, 1883, when Gerhard Kliewer became the first Reeve, or Vorsteher.[5] Peter Rempel, a Bergthaler from Hochfeld, was elected the councillor for township 7-6, which included the Blumenort area.

Letters notifying the Blumenort Schulz of municipal

meetings came, nevertheless, and regulations made by the Municipality were recorded in the village account books and conveyed to the villagers.

These letters show that road work was usually organized by the municipal office. After the Hespeler-Hanover Municipality was organized in 1883, roadmasters were hired to inspect the roads in each township and to work alongside the village Schulz to make sure that work crews were organized to perform the necessary work. At least three Blumenort area men, Cornelius Penner, Johann Janzen and Gottlieb Jahnke, served as roadmasters at one time or another during this period.

All men between the ages of 18 and 60 had to work two days a year on the road indicated by the roadmaster. An 1888 municipal minute book reveals that Blumenorters were required to improve the Winnipeg Road in the Blumengart area.

Because this work was statutory labor (Sharwerk), no one was paid. However, if farmers brought their own equipment, they were reimbursed: A farmer received $1 a day if he brought his own horse and an additional 30¢ for bringing a wagon, 50¢ for a plow and 20¢ for a harrow or earth scoop. Those who considered themselves too busy to render statutory labor had to pay $1.25 before the work commenced. Those unable to work due to health reasons had to be officially excused by the municipality and pay 13¢ a day. (Peter B. Friesen was thus excused from road work in 1899.)

In most cases Sharwerk was directly organized by the municipality. An exception to this was the work done in the Blumenort area around the turn of the century. In 1894

the independently-minded Blumenort Schulzenbott was given the sole responsibility for road and bridge building in the area. Thus, in October, 1896, when a bridge was needed at the west end of the village, the Municipality, acting without precedent, allowed the Blumenorters to organize this venture alone. The municipal office gave the necessary wood and nails and accredited the work done as statutory labor. The bill for any additional costs incurred was to be sent to their Councillor, Peter Hiebert, who would promptly reimburse Blumenort.

Road building was not the only concern of the municipal office. Sometime around 1890 the Municipality organized a cattle pound for township 7-6. The pound was run by William Mooney, Sr. and Peter Keating. Here stray cattle found in grain fields could be redeemed. There is no evidence to suggest that Blumenort people ever used the pound. Another thing Blumenort never asked the Municipality to do for it was to resolve quarrels. This the municipal office did for some of Blumenort's neighbors. For instance, in 1899, the municipal office was called upon to resolve a dog-shooting incident. The matter was settled when the "killer" agreed to pay the claimant $5 and promised not to shoot dogs again.

To finance its operations, the Municipality taxed each village, which in turn taxed its members. At the end of each year the Schulz received the land tax assessment from Schoenthal. Blumenort belonged to the most highly-taxed group of village areas. Steinbach and two Bergthal villages, Bergthal and Blumengart, located about six miles west of

Blumenort, were also in this group. In 1893, the land of these villages was assessed at the high price of $1.25 per cultivated acre and $1 per acre in meadow. In addition to the land tax, each household was taxed for its possessions. As early as 1883, all buildings, furniture, livestock, machinery, and individually-held land were assessed. Each year all the farmers from Blumenhof, Neuanlage, Hochfeld and other nearby villages came to Blumenort to pay their taxes. Blumenort, along with Steinbach, Grunthal and Niverville, was visited each fall by the municipal secretary who set up office in the school and took in the money.

Footnotes

1 The financial status of these men was derived from an examination of "Hanover Tax Assessment Rolls: 1881, 1883, 1896, 1906," Municipality of Hanover, Steinbach, Manitoba.

2 Blumenort Village Papers, "Der Verbindungsschrift der Dorfsgemeinde Blumenort, 1881," op. cit. Transliterated by Mrs. P. J. Loewen, translated by Delbert F. Plett.

3 The information of the functioning of the Village "Schulzenbott" and the duties of the "Schulz" were gleaned from the Blumenort Village Protokoll und Rechnungsbuch: 1890-94, 1899, 1902-03, 1907-09, Bernard P. Doerksen and the Blumenhof Village Protokoll und Rechnungsbuch: 1874-1889, J. J. Penner, Steinbach, Manitoba.

4 The information of the functioning of the Hanover Municipality, 1883-1910, came from Hanover Municipal Council Minutes, 1883, translated notes by Lydia Penner, Steinbach, Manitoba, and from the "Gebietsamts Briefen", Blumenort Village Papers.

5 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.

Part II, Chapter 3: Farming the Village Land

Farming in the East Reserve was not eady. In the first year, after the thick prairie sod had been broken and the expensive seed grain planted, grasshoppers came and devastated the crop. In the second year a June frost set the crops back.[1] In the years following, the East Reserve received 30 inches of rain per year when 20 inches was the norm.[2] Seeding in some areas became impossible, and many of Blumenort's Bergthal neighbors moved across the Red River to the West Reserve.

Times slowly began to improve, and by 1910 giant strides had been taken to improve farming. Along with grain growing, farmers raised a variety of livestock, and by the end of the century were marketing milk for cheese. Even though most farms were small, there were some that were very large by that day's standards. Farming, even for the poorest, was a hard but enjoyable and challenging endeavor.

One of the best ways to obtain a view of the farm economy in the very first years is to examine diaries of farmers from that time. The following excerpts come from the diary of Abraham R. Friesen, who settled in Blumenhof in 1875 and became its first school teacher. The diary reveals both the difficulties of farming in 1877 and the hope and faith which allowed the farmers to overcome their difficulties. Very important as well are the descriptions here of the interdependence of the pioneers.

Excerpts From Abraham R. Friesen's Diary

1877	
May	Beautiful weather during seeding time.
May 21	Much water in creeks.
June 6	Much rain and water.
June 22	Grain stands very nicely; would that God might keep us spiritually healthy.
June	Sold 21 1/2 lbs. butter.
June 24	Rain with hail.
July	[Despite the hail] grain stands exceptionally well.
July	Grain begins to head during first part of July.
July 14	Would that God might grant the fruit of our hearts to be as rich as our grain.
July 15-17	Rain
July 20	Potatoes harvested. Went to the forest for berries.
July 25	Made hay; 43 stacks.
August 22	Cut wheat.
September 1	Frost.
September 10	Threshed 165 bu. wheat, 47 bu. oats, 4 bu. barley.
October	Sold wheat for 15¢/bu.
October	Hired Isaac for one year. Promised him $30.00, 5 bushels of wheat, 1 acre of wheat, 1 pair of shoes for summer, 1 pair of moccasins for the winter.

By the 1880's the farmers' early difficulties had been overcome. Both personal diaries and tax records show that the farm economy of the Blumenort area was strengthening. Peter Unger writes of a building spree in the area beginning in 1882 which saw the flimsy structures of the first years replaced with more substantial buildings. Tax records for 1883 show that the average farmer in the Blumenort area was cultivating 34 acres. Two farmers, Johann L. Plett and Johann Koop S., were cultivating more than 80 acres. Most farmers had at least two horses, three cows and two hogs. Once again there were exceptions, as some of the bigger farms reported having four horses and ten cows.

An invaluable insight into farming during the 1880's can be obtained from the following excerpts from the diary of Abram M. Friesen, who seems to have been quite an active farmer in Blumenort. The following excerpts cover the year beginning in April, 1884, and ending in April, 1885:

Excerpts From Abram M. Friesen's Diary

April 10	Hauling wood again. Son Klaas went to clean snow out of the ditch at the east end of the village.
May 1	Fixed the fence at the "Haus Kagal".
June 5	Finished seeding.
July 1	I got weanlings from Abram Penner. In the afternoon we started plowing the summerfallow.
August 4	Mowed grass at the hay field.
September 1	Mowed barley for us and also mowed one acre of wheat for Abram Penner by noon.
October 3	Finished threshing at our place. We received 296 bushels of wheat, 83 bushels barley and 232 bushels of oats. [Abram M. Friesen had 40 acres of his 320 acres in cultivation in this year.]
November 12	Went for firewood.
December 1	Went to Winnipeg. Sold potatoes at 75¢ a bag; six bags for a total of $4.50; eight bushels of wheat at 37¢ a bushel; 167 pounds of pork at 6 1/2¢ a pound; 2 1/4 dozen eggs at 30¢ a dozen. Total sales $18.80.
January 10	Took seven bags of wheat to the mill.
February 12	To Winnipeg with 14 bags of wheat.
March 12	To Winnipeg. Sold 22 2/3 bu. potatoes at 40¢/bu.
April 7	Cleaned the snow out of the ditch at the east end of the village.[4]

Another insight into the farm economy during the 1880s comes from Abram F. Reimer's diary. He writes following entry for May 17, 1888: "Abram Reimer and Abram Penner [his son-in-law] came home at 8:30 p.m. from the city. They received 20¢ a bushel for potatoes, 30¢ for each chicken; for the two fat pigs $32.50 in total. The eggs were sold for 12¢ a

dozen."[5]

The local farm economy continued unabated into the 1890s. Farmers were raising a growing variety of farm products and regularly selling them for cash. It seems that even the poorest farmers had surplus products on their farms from which they could earn enough money to buy goods from the stores which were being established around them.

By examining the financial records of two Blumenort-area farms from 1895, a picture of farming from that time can be obtained. The records show that both Peter B. Friesen, a poorer farmer from Neuanlage, and Cornelius L. Plett, a semi-retired farmer of average wealth from Blumenhof, raised products which were sold for cash in Blumenort and Winnipeg.[6]

These products were sold in small quantities throughout the year. Both Friesen and Plett would sell a few bushels of wheat (from 2-30) almost every month, thus generating a steady income. Eggs, butter and meat would be sold whenever they could be produced. Except for the milk, which by 1895 could be sold to the Blumenort Cheese Factory, these products were taken to Winnipeg by the farmers. The record of 1895 shows that Cornelius L. Plett drove to Winnipeg at least once a month with products for sale. For the money received, the villagers purchased a variety of items which included cloth, lumber, steel, brandy and apples.

While most farmers relied on mixed farming well into the 20th century, two products greatly gained in importance during the 1890s: they were wheat and milk.

According to geographer John Warkentin, grain growing had become profitable in the higher areas of the East Reserve around Blumenort, and some settlers had even become commercial grain farmers by 1891. In 1887 Blumenort farmers began talking about bumper crops, although they complained that the price, at 35¢ a bushel, was too low.[7] Some money must have been made because, between 1883 and 1895, a great deal of virgin sod was broken; cultivated acreage in Blumenort, Blumenhof, and Neuanlage, increased from 1200 acres to 2800 acres between these years. This represents a 133% increase in the amount of arable land at a time when the population increased only 36% (from 240 to 336.)[8]

During this time the price of land rose slowly, in close correlation to the price of wheat. Homesteaders had each received a free quarter-section in 1874 and many had purchased an additional quarter for a dollar an acre. Within five years of their settling, Blumenort-area farmers were selling their land amongt themselves for $3.00 an acre. By 1890, when grain growing became profitable, land prices had risen to over $6.00 an acre. During the next fifteen years, as the local price of wheat slowly crept from 35¢ a bushel to 66¢ a bushel, the price of land increased to $10.00 an acre. Then, in 1904, wheat jumped to 88¢ a bushel, and land began to sell for as much as $25.00 an acre.[9]

Although wheat was a profitable cash crop, farmers never depended on it alone and gladly welcomed the coming of the cheese factories. The first cheese factory in the East Reserve opened in Steinbach in 1889. Its effects were felt by local farmers who reported receiving $100 annually for their milk. In 1893

Klaas W. Reimer, the owner of the Steinbach plant, established a cheese factory in Blumenort. Farmers now had another major source of income, receiving as much as 72¢ per hundred pounds of fluid milk sold. The factory had quite an effect on Blumenort farmers. The demand for dairy cows rose sharply. Tax records show that the number of cows in the area increased from 127 in 1883 to 432 in 1906. Village minutes indicate that farmers were placing a growing importance on breeding stock, good pasture and a dependable herdsman.

By the turn of the century many farmers in the Blumenort area had established large and self-sufficient farms. Tax records for 1898 offer support for this fact. For instance, they show that in the Blumenort area 12 farmers were cultivating 80 acres or more, and four of these more than 120 acres. They also show that nine local farmers had dairy herds of more than 10 cows and calves. Seventeen farmers had six or more horses. One Blumenort village farmer recorded owning 45 pigs, while a Blumenhof farmer had 31 sheep.

These records not only show the profitableness of local agriculture; they also indicate the continued reliance of farmers on mixed farming. A total crop failure in 1900, no doubt, assured local farmers that mixed farming was the mainstay of the community economy.

In 1906, the last year for which complete farm records for tax purposes were gathered, mized farming was still unrivalled. The 48 Blumenort-area farmers were cultivating over 3600 acres, averaging more than 75 acres per farmer. The average number of livestock held by each farmer was sick horses, nine milk cows,

seven cattle under three years and 12 hogs. By 1906, sheep no longer were kept in the area.

As farming became more prosperous from 1874 to 1910, the methods of farming and the types of equipment used went through several complete changes. In the first years plowing was done by ox-drawn wooden plows, and the seed was broadcast by hand and worked into the soil with wooden-toothed harrows. The grain was cut by hand, using a scythe or a reaper which cut the grain and made loose bundles which would be gathered and tied by hand. Flails were then used to seperate the kernel from the chaff. Wheat was bagged and hauled aboard the reliable Red River carts.

By the end of the century things had drastically changed. Steel plows were purchased, and some were even manfactured by the Blumenort blacksmith, Klaas P. Reimer. Reimer had also patented a seeder box on top of a discer, and by 1900 he had purchased a Cockshutt shoe drill.[10] Binders, cutting five-foot swaths and tying sheaves, had replaced the reaper in the Blumenort area as early as 1888 when Jacob P. Wiebe bought one.[11] At first the cheap canvases stretched and the knot-tier caused trouble. In a few years, however, the Deering binder was noted to have overcome these problems, and it became the most popular machine in the area.

Threshing machines were operated by Blumenorters as early as 1878, when Jacob P. Wiebe purchased a threshing machine powered by Peter W. Toews' upright Watrous steam engine. By 1884 there were at least four horse-drawn threshing machines in the area. In Blumenhof the Janzens and Warkentins owned one and the Pletts

the other. In Neuanlage Johann Koop and Peter Klassen owned a threshing machine, and in Blumenort Cornelius Penner, who seems to have taken over his father Peter's, owned another. A few years later Klaas P. Reimer purchased a thresher as well.[12]

These early machines were very primitive. Until 1910 neither nor straw-blower came with a threshing machine. The first feeders and blowers were manufactured locally by Klaas P. Reimer.[13]

Municipal assessment rates show that by 1883 most farmers in the region owned a grass mower, a steel plow, a set of harrows, a hay rake and a small feed crucher. Most farmers also owned at least two sleighs and two wagons. By this time an assortment of wagons, each serving a particular purpose, had replaces the Red River cart. For instance, the Saulkje was a light, two wheeled, one-bench wagon. The Bauge was a similar wagon with four wheels. The Democrat was the same type of wagon, but had two benches. The luxurious Tap Bauge appeared later, but because it had a roof, it was generally frowned upon as being too "worldly".[14] For heavier loads, farmers relied on the "Express" wagon which easily could be converted to a Fracht wagon, used to haul livestock.

The energy source on the farms was changing as well. At first oxen were used almost exclusively. Although this animal was unpopular among the Mennonites, William Hespeler had recommended it be used because it was cheaper, stronger and hardier than a horse and required no oats. Thus, in spite of the fact than an ox needed water after every two rounds of plowing and was much more stubborn, stupid, and slower than a horse, the

Blumenort area farmers greatly depended on the ox in the first years. By 1883, however, there were only 10 oxen in the village of Blumenort. It is apparent that the horse had replaced the ox after the first decade of settlement. By the end of the century there were 200 horses in the Blumenort area. So much did farmers begin to rely on the horse that is was said, Ein gutes Pferd ist Gottes Segen. (A good horse is a blessing of God).[15]

By the end of the century steam engines were beginning to appear in the Blumenort area. While Peter Toews owned an upright Watrous as early as 1878, there is no other record of a steam engine until the 1890s, when Klaas P. Reimer, Johann Janzen and the Blumenhof Pletts bought similar upright engines costing over $1,000 apiece. A few years later self-driven steamers made their debut. Klaas D. Reimer remembers that, in 1895, he watched a steam engin, owned by A.S.Friesen of Steinbach, drive through the Blumenort village. By 1902 there were enough steamers in the East Reserve to warrant a new by-law in Hanover, prohibiting steamers from crossing bridges unless reinforcement planks were put across it first.

By 1904 Heinrich E. Plett and Peter P. Reimer of Blumenort were custom-threshing with their 22-horsepower, two-cylinder Watrous. Sometime later they purchased a second steamer, a 25/75-horsepower Case, which they used for plowing. By 1904 both Jacob L. Plett and David L. Plett from Blumenhof also had 15/30-horsepower Cases. Around 1910 Klaas P. Reimer purchased a new self-drawn Watrous and David Plett a new 22/50-horsepower American Able. Farm boys agreed that the American Able was the best sounding steamer, especially if it had a heavy load.[16]

Wind power was another early energy source. Almost every farm in the village had a small windmill mounted on the rooftop. In Blumenort the largest windmills were owned by Heinrich E. Plett and Klaas P. Reimer, who lived at opposite ends of the village. Each had a huge 16-foot propeller mounted on a wooden beam attached to the roof of the barns. The Plett mill was used to power the grain crucher; the Reimer mill was used to pump water, cut firewood and turn a 15-inch grain crusher.

Recollections of the elderly give another glimpse of farming in the Blumenort region during this era. Pioneers remember early farm life as one of color and romance. The following accounts are based on interviews and information from diaries. They tell of the different types of work that farming demanded.

In the spring-time seed was cleaned, and plows and harrows readied for field work. Seeding was undertaken as early as possible to avoid the August frosts. The elderly Abram F. Reimer put the following entry into his diary on March 23, 1888: "During the day it was 14°R. above and at night 6°R. above. Martin Penner began seeding wheat the day before yesterday, March 21. Yesterday Cornelius Penner, and the elderly Cornelius Friesen began sowing wheat." Cornelius L. Plett's diary reveals that seeding for that year was done from April 10-19. Klaas D. Reimer's diary of 1908 reveals that seeding in that year began as early as March 27, when Isaac J. Loewen sent out his son to seed. Despite a snow storm two weeks later, which dumped so much snow on Blumenort that people brought out their sleds again, Loewen's grain (having a head start on weeds), progressed well.

Klaac Reimer notes that their grain, seeded later, was infested with weeds.

Haying was the most important summer job. At first Blumenort had village hayfields which farmers used jointly. Each year the hay land was divided into lots by a hay commission, appointed by the village Schulz.

In later years, as more and more land was put under cultivation, farmers were forced to go out further for hay. Jacob W. Friesen remembers how both the Blumenort and Blumenhof farmers headed out several miles to the north to the vast plain around Greenland, called the Brittesteppe. Here the farmers rented or purchased 240-acre blocks of hayland from the Ste. Anne Metis. The Brittesteppe was usually covered with vast sheets of water in spring but produced luscious grass in summer. The hay was cut by horse-pulled grass mowers, allowed to dry and then forked onto the hay racks. After a day or two of harvesting hay with the Greenlanders, the wagons returned south in a caravan which often contained more than 40 wagons. Upon reaching the village, each farmer pitched his hay onto huge hay stacks close to the barn.[17]

Grain cutting was not an easy job before the self-binders became available in the 1880s. Before that, cutting had to be done with a scythe or the clumsy reaper. In his memoirs, Abraham Klassen who worked for his father-in-law, Johann Warkentin of Blumenhof, from 1877 to 1878, describes the work of cutting grain:

> The whole summer through I worked, together with other employees, in the raising of a rather average crop, a

> share of which I received as my wage. Because it was wet, most of the grain was cut with a hand scythe... but in the end we also used a binder or a mowing machine. This machine was fashioned in such a way that two men stood on a platform and in turn bound the grain in sheaves which they dropped off the rear.[18]

The most exciting work was that of the threshing crews. Each fall, twenty enthusiastic men, backed by the mammoth steam engine and amazing threshing machine, invaded Blumenort's and Blumenhof's farmyards. They threshed what grain the farmer had and then moved on to the next farmyard. Many of Blumenort's youths worked for these outfits. They found it most exciting when threshing in the local areas had been completed and they could leave thewatchful eyes of their mothers as they headed out to the other areas around Niverville or Ste. Anne or Friedensfeld.

Peter K. Plett remembers working for his father, David L. Plett. The Pletts ran a threshing outfit for over 20 years, from 1901 to 1924. During this time they had two steamers, first a Case and then an American Abel, and at least two different threshing machines. A new threshing machine had to be purchased around 1918 when fire destroyed the old one. Apparently sparks from the steamer ignited the straw pile next to the thresher, and although the crew tried, it could not pull the machine away from the blaze in time to save it.

Peter Plett recalls that it required 20 men to operate his father's outfit. Hocki threshing was the most common method used by Plett. It required a crew of twelve men, operating six teams, to haul the sheaves from the various parts of the field to the threshing machine.

Here another crew, headed by the Separaeta Maun, ran the thresher. One man tossed the sheaves onto a platform in front of the thresher where two girls, standing on either side, cut thw twine and pushed the grain to the Ensatta Maun, who carefully fed the straw into the cylinder. At the read of the thresher, where the straw was pushed out, the boys forked the straw onto a huge stack. The grain poured out onto a wagon on the side of the machine. Here the Bagga Maun scooped the grain into large canvas bags, which bore the farmer. The farmer would see to it that these bags were hauled to the upstairs of his barn or house, or to the granary if he had one.

A third crew operated the steam engine. For mechanically-inclined youths, the most envied job was held by the engineer, even though he had to get up at 5 a.m. to get the steamer going. In winter he rose even earlier to keep a fire going under the steamer to keep it from freezing. He was assisted by the heaterman and a water carrier.[19]

Jacob W. Friesen was another young crew member in the early years. Like Peter K. Plett, he worked his way up to become the Separaeta Maun. Friesen worked for Peter P. Reimer, the boss of the Plett and Reimer Co. This outfit included an American Able Advance threshing machine, first powered by a Watrous and then by a new 25-horsepower Case. This outfit, as all others, also included the tender wagon which carried straw for the steamer while in transport, and a caboose which housed the crew.

Friesen remembered that when barley or oats were threshed, "Plett and Reimer" used the Hoopes Drashi method. Using this

method the crew threshed sheaves which the farmer had previously stacked in a pile in his farmyard. This meant that the crew did not have to engage in the monotonous work of gathering sheaves from the fields. It also meant that the farmer had the straw in his straw pen where he could feed it to his cows.
For wheat, "Plett and Reimer" used the Hocki Drashi method in which the threshing was done at the Koagels. The boss would choose one strip of land on which to do the threshing. His workers would then haul sheaves to the threshing spot from the surrounding Koagels.

The typical threshing day, according to Jacob Friesen, began at six a.m. Three hours later the crew stopped for Nein Brot, today known as coffe break. At 12 noon the engineer blew the whistle on the steamer, signalling dinner-time to both the crew and the women in the house, who had prepared fried ham and potatoes for the hungry workers. At four p.m. the crew stopped for Faspa, and then they returned to work till eight p.m. when supper was served. It is said that Plett and Reimer usually shut down long after other outfits did, apparently to keep the boys out of mischief. Usually by this time the threshing for one farmer was finished and the crew prepared to move on to the next farmer in the village. Only at the Grout-Formasch, the big farmers, would threshing take more than one day.

The most vividly-remembered threshing stories come from times when the outfits left Blumenort to thresh for Bergthalers and French people in the outlying regions. The following story was told by Jacob W. Friesen many years later:

There was always competition with other threshing gangs

> to get the well-paying jobs out west. We were offered a good job by Niverville once which we young men really wanted. So we looked forward to finishing at C.W. Brandts. We knew that the J.R. Friesen outfit would be heading west as well, and we wanted badly to be there before them. We were almost finished at Brandts when we spotted the Friesen outfit, a mile to the west, heading toward Niverville. As we waited downheartedly, we suddenly saw the Friesen steamer vanish, leaving only its smoke stack showing. It had fallen through the bridge or headed off the road into a deep hole. It took a very long time for Friesens to get their outfit going again and by that time we were well on the way to Niverville.
> We headed straight west to the Manning Canal which had been built through there around 1907. At the canal we had to go along the canal road for a while. The road was so narrow and high that our caboose kept veering off and would have tipped over had we boys not hung onto the caboose sides from the outside. Here, too, we once broke a frontwheel spoke of the steamer. There was no way of fixing it on the road. So we emptied the water tank which was on the tender wagon, and took off one of its wheels and put a log in its place. The tender wagon wheel fitted onto the front axle of the steamer although it looked strange to have such a tiny wheel up front. (On the Case there was a lot of weight up front as the boiler was located in the mid-tractor area.) In winter when it was humid the snow packed nicely and we could drive. In fall we had to look for high ridges to travel on.[20]

After the Giroux Railway Station opened in 1892, Blumenorters began hauling their grain there instead of to Winnipeg. John C. Reimer remembers pioneers telling him of lines of 10 teams and wagons heading east through the Blumenort village from Hochfeld and Blumengart on their way to Giroux. Because horses liked to follow one another very closely, there was always the danger of collision if the front wagon suddenly stopped. When this happened the <u>diestal</u>, or wagon tongue, would ram the back of the wagon ahead, breaking the end board and causing tempers to flare.[21]

The winter was also a time when certain farmers tried to catch up with work they had failed to finish during fall. In the early years the Blumenhof settlers found themselves with a bad drainage problem. It was decided that a four-foot-deep

ditch, running west to join with the creek at Blumenort, should be dug. Each farmer was given a certain section of the ditch to maintain. The story goes that one farmer, who was always procrastinating, found that winter had arrived and that his portion of the ditch remained undug. Luckily he was a very strong, big man and found that ditch-digging for him was easier in winter than in summer. In winter he could use a crowbar, breaking off chunks of the frozen gumbo and throwing them aside. In the summer this gumbo was very sticky and digging it almost impossible.[22]

As young married couples established their places in the villages, or as those who established communities at Neuanlage or Greenland moved out, houses had to be moved. In those days houses were not easily built and, although moving required much work and imagination, people did it, nevertheless.

Klaas P. Reimer is said to have moved a house alone one winter with the use of only one horse. He apparently took a long cable and attached it to an upright crowbar firmly entrenched in the ground. The crowbar had a steel arm to which Reimer hitched his horse and had it walk around and around the upright bar, slowly winching the house along. While the horse made his rounds, Reimer would walk ahead and dig the next hole for the crowbar. This way, he moved the 26 x 18-foot house a quarter mile in four days.

Moving was not always quite so tedious. In 1888, when Johann F. Reimer purchased a house in Blumenhof and moved it to Blumenort, 20 oxen and four horses were hitched together to form 12 teams. They, in turn, were hitched to six wagons on which the house was put.[24]

Jacob W. Friesen, as a boy, had a particular fascination for times of moving. He remembered how the cheese factory moved from the west end of the village to the east end in 1900 by using every horse in the area. The team of horses seemed to him to be half a mile long. Mr. Friesen also told the following story of how Heinrich F. Reimer and Klaas P. Reimer moved a house from Blumenort to Hochfeld in 1904:

> I was given permission to observe the moving and to follow the house till our last Koagel, a mile west of Blumenort. The house was pulled along on several long beams by three steam engines. There was J.R. Friesen's 18-horsepower Watrous, David L. Plett's old 15-horsepower Case and Jacob L. Plett's newer 15-horsepower Case. The going was tough because the outside beams travelled along in the soft loam on the side of the road. A mile west of the village the earth was so soft the house came to a standstill. Henry R. Reimer, trying to put a round beam under the main beam so that the house could roll on it, got his arm stuck under the beam. The jacks had been left on the west side of Blumenort from where they had started that morning. Luckily, Johann J. Loewen, who owned the Koagel second from the west, was plowing his field with his two heavy, long-tailed horses. Klaas P. Reimer walked over to Loewen and convinced him to lend the party his horse to go back to Blumenort to get the jacks. After getting the jacks and lifting the beam to free Henry R. Reimer's crushed arm, Klaas P. Reimer used his lighter team to rush Henry to the famous Grunthal chiropractor, Johann Peters.[25]

Trips to the bush were undertaken to get both firewood and lumber for construction. Firewood was taken from the village poplar bushes around Blumenort. When these bushes began to be depleted around the turn of the century, villagers had to go out further for firewood. There is evidence to suggest that the Blumenort village purchased the 160 acres of NW 28-7-6E from a Bergthaler, Johann Doerksen, in 1904 for the purpose of obtaining firewood. In Blumenhof each individual farmer had a strip of bushland on section 36, in the northern part of the district where firewood was cut.

To get lumber and fence posts the farmers travelled even further. Good stands of lumber were obtainable in the forest 10 miles east of Giroux. Here Blumenort acquired timber rights near those of William Hespler.[26] As soon as a good sleigh road was made in winter, the young men began making frequent trips eastward by sleigh and oxen. They would travel in convoys, leaving early before dawn and returning after the sun had set.

With time, activity in the bush to the east increased. By 1880 there were three sawmills in operation in the bush, and a strong demand was beginning to rise for the Red Tamarack. More and more fences were needed as livestock increased, and farmers in Blumenhof, Neuanlage and Greenland began fencing in their own property. It was said that a Tamarack post could last 25 years. Jacob W. Friesen remembers the trips to the east as a boy:

> Most of these posts were gotten from a place 14 miles east of Girous. We'd also harvest dry wood at places where a forest fire had gone through, clearing all underbrush. This made it easy, but it was terribly cold. Our faces had to be covered. We'd go out for days at a time and when we'd run out of food, we'd eat cooked rabbit meat which we had snared.[27]

Many years after the first trips to the east were made, going to the bush still meant danger. Jacob C. Penner, a son to Klaas F. Penner, remembers the constant danger of tearing the harness or breaking the sled in the bush.

> Whenever we'd go to the bush, I would take string and leather in case something would break. If I'd break anything on the harness, it would usually be fixed with this. If anything on the sleigh broke, we'd use birch-wood and string.

One of the more romantic lines of work in the village at this time was herding. For this job a herdsman was hired. The Blumenort herdsman in 1888 was a Mr. Kaiser, who was paid $90 plus

110 bushels of wheat and 20 loads of hay. The money he was paid came from the 80¢ per cow which each farmer was taxed. Ten years earlier, the Blumenhof herdsman had received $50, four loads of firewood and board for the furation of his employ.[30]

Jacob W. Friesen, a former Blumenhof herdsman, had a particular fascination for the job, and had vivid recollection of it 60 years later:

> The herdsman had a very lowly job. People would work out only if they had to, for working out was a disgrace. It meant that you were poor. Jacob Dueck, a young fellow from Altona, was the herdsman between 1900 and 1906. He rode a very beautiful black horse and had his dog with him. Early in the morning he would ride through the village, sounding his horn to wake everyone. By six in the morning the cows had to be milked and on the road, ready for the trek to the meadow two miles to the north. The people who missed the drive had to chase their own cows to the meadow. This was always a very embarrassing affair for them. By seven at night the cattle would be back at the gate, half a mile north of the village.
> In 1910 I was 18 and our family was responsible for the herding. Because the pasture was fenced in by this time, we did not have to be with the cows all day. When the wind was strong from the south, the cows would always be in the furthest-north end of the pasture. I developed a system by which to forecast the direction of the wind. At night the part of the sky in which the stars would flicker most indicated the direction of the wind. Sometimes a cow which was calving would hide herself in the densest part of the northern bush. Then we would have to go look for her after dark, even though we were afraid of the timber wokves and other wild animals of the bush. The cattle were given water at a well just northwest of where Cornelius W. Brandts later moved. It was a very good well, as the water level was usually quite high. But when it was wet the ground became boggy, and the cows could get stuck. So a lot of work was put into planking the area just around the well. These planks had to be changed off and on, as the cows would in time trample them to pieces.
> Sometimes herding was fun. After I had delivered the cattle at the east end of the village by Klaas Reimers, I would let my white horse have her head and race her through the village to our place near the west end. Abram P. Loewen, who was a Penner in that he loved horses, noticed the speed of my horse and challenged me to a race against his larger black horse. One day when I had to go looking for stray cattle, he rode along. When we finally found the cow and

> calf and had guided her along the path to the main gate, we raced on the quarter-mile stretch of very smooth prairie just south of the bush. I had a head start because my horse was very sensitive to a slight kick in her side. I rode hard to the gate on the "Middle Road", not daring to look back. At the gate I stopped, but Abram, not knowing of the gate and trying to catch up, saw the gate only at the last moment. His horse veered sharply. The make-shift stirrups which he had fashioned for the race held him momentarily, but he fell and was hit on the head by a hoof and knocked unconscious. I was terribly scared and thought he might be dead. But he slowly regained consciousness, and, without a word, got up and walked the rest of the way to the village. I rode to retrieve his horse but never spoke of the incident with him.[31]

One type of work which always brought farmers together was the lifting up of the walls of a new building. Abram F. Reimer's diary for April 1, 1888, reads: "This morning Peter Friesen from Neuanlage came here and asked Abram R. Reimer, Peter R. Reimer, Abram M. Friesen and Cornelius Friesen to come and help raise the barn and hayshed in the afternoon."

In the late 1880s many farmers began replacing their old hand-dug wells with deep artesian wells. It seems that by this time the water quality in hand-dug wells had gradually deteriorated. Especially was this the case in Blumenhof where poor water was a factor in the village dissolution in 1889 and led farmers there to spend money on expensive deep artesian wells. Such wells were made in Neuanlage and Blumenort, too, and were often drilled by Johann L. Warkentin. In September, 1888, Peter Loewen of Neuanlage had Cornelius Toews drill a 275-foot well. A few months later Abram M. Friesen began drilling one for himself. The problems involved in this type of work can be seen from the following excerpts from Friesen's diary:

> January 14, 1889: set up the well-drilling machine. January 15: not much progress made because of various problems; only 10 feet. January 26: more trouble with the well-drilling machine. January 23: went to Steinbach to have a part welded for the drilling machine. February 2: reached 83 feet. February 13: the well drill became

> stuck at 93 feet. February 15: tried to free the drill without results. February 18: went along with young Wiebe to Janzens to talk to a Mr. Master in regard to freeing our drill. February 19: Master drove with young Wiebe to Winnipeg, where they had a special piece of equipment made to get the drill out.[32]

By the turn of the century most hand dug wells had been closed. Klaas D. Reimer tells the story of how, during winter, two girls, Helena Reimer and Elizabeth Penner, went to visit the old Cornelius Friesens who lived on the east end of the village. When they returned they chose to walk through the garden and across the snow drift at the boundary fence. Suddenly one of the girls broke through the snow and sank down deeper than the snow itself. Luckily she was rescued by her friend. In the spring the mystery of the fall was solved when Klaas P. Reimer, harrowing the garden for Friesens, found that his horses refused to cross a certain spot. Checking the spot more carefully, Reimer discovered that is contained an old manure-filled well.[33]

Footnotes

1 Abram R. Friesen, op. cit.
2 John Warkentin, op. cit., p. 146.
3 Abraham R. Friesen, op. cit.
4 Abraham M. Friesen, diary 1884-1894, translated by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.
5 Abraham F. Reimer, op. cit.
6 Peter B. Friesen, "Rechnungen: 1890-1919," Albert Friesen, Kleefeld, Manitoba and Cornelius L. Plett, "Tagebuch: 1895," Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.
7 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
8 Tax Rolls, op. cit.
9 "Land Transaction Abstracts: 7-6E", (1874-1910), Land Titles Office, Province of Manitoba, Winnipeg.
10 Interview with Klaas D. Reimer, Belize, C.A., December 1980.
11 Abram M. Friesen, diary, July 23, 1888.
12 Tax Rolls, op. cit.
13 Interview with Henry F. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba, July, 1980.
14 Interview with Peter P. Loewen, Belize, C.A., December, 1980.
15 Ibid.
16 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
17 Ibid.

18 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, p.22.
19 Interview with Peter K. Plett, Blumenort, Manitoba, August, 1981.
20 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
21 Interview with John C. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba, July, 1980.
22 Henry F. Reimer, op. cit.
23 Ibid.
24 Abram F. Reimer, "Tagebuch, 1886-1888", transliterated by Mrs. P.J. Loewen, EMC Archives, Steinbach.
25 Jacob W. Friesen, Ibid.
26 Abram M. Friesen, op. cit.
28 Interview with Jacob C. Penner, Belize, C.A., December, 1980.
29 Abraham M. Friesen, op. cit.
30 Abraham R. Friesen, op. cit.
31 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
32 Abram M. Friesen, op. cit.
33 Klaas D. Reimer, op. cit.

Part II, Chapter 4: Women and Homemaking

Village women did a great variety of work. While they kept the homes, they were also expected to help with every aspect of farm work. They cooked, washed, sewed and cared for the small children. But they also chopped wood, fed the pigs and worked on the fields. All this made the women's work hard but interesting. Most of the following information was gleaned from interviews with elderly women who recalled the work of their childhood.

Except for the very first years, the gardens of the villagers provided an abundance of food. The gardens, planted in front of the houses, provided the villagers with both vegetables and fruit. The early vegetable gardens contained potatoes, sorrel, watermelons, turnips, beets, carrots, beans, cabbage, onions and cucumbers. Tomatoes were grown, but only so they could be pickled green. Mrs. John U. Brandt remembers a family who threw out their tomatoes when they discovered they had turned red. Corn and peas were unknown during the early years, the latter first being grown in Blumenort in 1916.[1]

Great importance was also placed on the fruit garden. A variety of fruit was grown here, including currants, gooseberries, choke cherries, plums and sour cherries. The large bush to the north provided the villagers with cranberries, saskatoons and nuts. Sometimes fruit was purchased in Winnipeg. The most commonly-purchased fruit was apples, which were purchased by the wagon load and then redistributed among the neighbours. Purchased

fruit was not cheap. The elderly Abram F. Reimer wrote that he purchased a 25-pound watermelon in Winnipeg in 1888 for 50 cents, half a day's wages.[2]

Much work was required to prepare the food. For breakfast crackles (Gjreeve), head cheese (Bunt Kjees), or porridge (Gjret) had to be prepared, and a coffee substitute, made from roasted barley (Prips), brewed. The midday meal or dinner was the big meal and most often it would consist of fried smoked ham and boiled potatoes. Sometimes beef, previously cooked in water, was served cold with salt. Beef, however, considered a lower-class meat which could be purchased for three cents a pound, was served less frequently. The stock from cooked beef and pickled pork would be used to make Somma Borscht, which included potatoes, cabbage, onion greens and sorrel. For supper or Faspa, left-overs would be served; potatoes and eggs would be fried and bread and jam served. Very frequently a fourth meal consisting of cold, pickled meat and fresh rolls would be served at night. On Groute Sindach, the Sunday on which the church service was held in Blumenort and many visitors from other villages were expected, dinners would include Plume Moos, boiled potatoes fried in butter, and cold ham.[3]

The meat used in these meals was always home-butchered and cured. Each fall, families would have butchering bees to procure their meat supply. Between October 22 and November 5, 1884, for instance, Abram M. Friesen helped butcher hogs at Peter Friesens, Abram Reimers, Abram Penners, Jacob Wiebes, Peter Reimers, John I. Friesens, Widow Peter Penner and Peter Wiebes. Presumably some of

these families helped the Abram Friesens when they butchered hogs.[4] Another example of a butchering bee was one held on November 29, 1895, at the Cornelius L. Pletts, when they butchered two pigs and two oxen with the help of Abram L. Pletts, Gerhard Doerksens, Berhard Doerksens, Heinrich Pletts and their parents, Cornelius S. Pletts. In that same month Cornelius Pletts helped each of these families butcher pigs, cows, oxen, calves and chickens.[5]

Every part of the carcasses of these animals was used. The most popular meat was pork. It provided them with a variety of meats. Hams were smoked and hung up in the hay loft where they could be aired. The fatty sides of the carcass were cut into smaller pieces and put into a salt brine to make Paeckel Fleisch. The skin and meat from the head and neck were cooked and ground into Bunt-kjees. This, in turn, was put into a barrel of whey, along with the hocks, ears and tonque, in order to sour and become Zilt Fleisch. The liver was ground with other meat to provide liver sausage, and items such as the brain were fried and eaten with apples as a delicacy.

The aroma of freshly-baked goods was a sign to all villagers that a household had women who provided good food. Friday and Saturday were baking days. White bread (Bulje), brown bread (Broht) and rolls (Tweeback) were commonly-baked goods. Flour for baking was custom-milled in Steinbach. It was the husband's monthly job to clean a portion of wheat and take it to Jacob Barkman's mill in Steinbach for milling. Because families were large, baking was usually done in a big way. Mrs Peter K. Plett remembers how, as a young woman, she worked at C.W. Brandts and one

day used 100 pounds of flour in baking for the family.

Sometimes special treats were baked. Mrs Isaac J. Loewen is said to have often baked gingerbread and platz. White cookies would be baked for Christmas because by that time it was cold enough to freeze them outside. When pie was made, it would be baked in a large Tweeback pan and eaten as the main course at the next meal.[6]

Pickles cucumbers or watermelon was another "treat" served with many meals. A large wooden barrel was filled with water, salt, oil and shokeberry leaves. The cucumbers and watermelon were then added and allowed to ferment. This barrel was often stored in the Schien (hay loft), or in the granary.

One thing the Blumenorters did not often use at meal times was an alcoholic drink. Although the Kleine Gemeinde did not have rules against its use, it was largely restricted to medicinal purposes. In the mornings of pig butchering, however, it was customery to drink some whiskey.[7] It seems that when Kleine Gemeinde threshing crews worked for other Mennonites where they would be offered something alcoholic to drink, they usually accepted.[8] Whiskey and brandy were purchased by the case in Winnipeg after a day of business. The case would be taken back home where the bottles were distributed among the men's married children.[9] A bottle of whiskey or brandy around the turn of the century cost one dollar.

Beside cooking, it was the women's duty to keep the house and clothing clean. Washing was usually done with collected rain water in summer and melted snow in winter. Klaas D. Reimer vividly remembers the latter method being used in the 1890s.

As a boy he once stood too near the Miagrope in which his mother had made a fire, burning his face and hair. His mother apparently grabbed him and threw him right into the pot of melting snow. Mr. Reimer carried a scar from the incident in 1892 for the rest of his life.

The house, too, had to be kept clean. In the early days the rough board floors dirtied easily, and detergents had not yet been invented. The floors had to be scrubbed with ashes mixed with water and then sprinkled with sand to keep the boards clean.[10]

Sewing was another important and necessary job. Only items like shoes, felt boots, moccasins, leather mitts and an occasional pair of pants were bought in the store. Textiles, buttons, elastic and thread for sewing could be purchased in Winnipeg, Steinbach, or at the Johann Reimer store in Blumenort.

Several women in Blumenort were noted seamstresses and sewed to make some extra cash. For a shirt they earned 10¢ and for a pair of pants 12¢.[11] The most famous seamstress was Mrs Abraham F. Reimer. According to her grandson, Cornelius R. Penner, she was "often called away from home on business." In the course of her profession she did such work as tailoring men's suits, making men's caps with patent leather peaks, and even making hoop skirts for the nobility (probably in Russia).[12] According to her husband's diary, Mrs. Reimer also made various types of coats. In March, 1888, she sewed a gray woolen coat for her son-in-law, Abram Penner, and in September of that year she made a fur coat for Heinrich Reimer of Gruenfeld in only four-and-a half days.[13]

Because her husband had trouble providing for his family, Mrs. Reimer would sew diligently, day and night, often beginning

Sunday nights as soon as the sun was set. She was very accurate and used patterns to make the bodices. Some of the dresses she made for the rich were so fancy her daughters begged her to make some for them. But Mrs. Reimer always said that such dressed were too fancy for Kleine Gemeinde children.[14]

Poorer and younger women were often compelled to work outside the home as servants. The daughters of poor families frequently went to live in with a wealthier family who needed a servant (Kjeaksche) to look after the small children and help with housekeeping. The children of Klaas P. Reimers remember that their mother, Anna Friesen, had worked for others "at a very early age; her work and loneliness being very hard for her sometimes."[15] John I. Dueck has told the following story of how his widowed mother-in-law, Mrs David Friesen, sought work in Blumenort in order to provide for her children:

> One day the threshing crew came to Klaas F. Penners, and mother went there to help cook for the gang of men who threshed. She left eigth-year-old Elizabeth at home with the task of baking bread. When she burned the bread, Elizabeth remembered that Klaas F. Penners always had good dinners. So she took her young siblings in hand and went to Penners to ask her mother whether they might stay for dinner. Her mother told her that if she had burned the bread she had better go back and eat it. But Mrs. Penner was moved and packed some food for the Friesen children and sent it home with them. Mrs. Penner was a daughter of Deacon Abraham Reimer, who always emphasized the good of helping widows."[16]

Alfred Friesen once related the story of his mother, Mrs. Klaas I. Friesen, a daughter of Peter H. Penners, who worked away from home as a nine-year-old girl. The story goes that, in 1881, when the American evangelist, John Holdeman, visited Blumenort and came to the place where young Katherina was employed, he admonished her parents for making their daughter work as a servant

at such an early age.

While men and women had their separate jobs, there were several types of work they shared. They worked together to bring in the potatoes or to butcher hogs. When the need arose, they willingly helped each other out. John B. Toews claims to have kneaded and baked bread regularly. Once in 1893 he even sewed for his aging mother and then sewed a pair of pants for himself, although at that time all the clothing we wore was made by women folks."[17]

On the other hand, women before marriage helped out their fathers. Peter R. Penner's daughter Katherine, Mrs. John U. Brandt, remembers that, one year before she helped stook sheaves from 100 acres. Henry R. Reimer's daughter Suzanna, later Mrs. C.K. Plett, claims that she milked cows, stooked hay and chopped wood. By the time she started school at age seven, she was required to milk at least one cow. Later she even ploughed the fields. Wondering what the neighbour's stylish girls would think of her doing such a mean task, she would stop at the far end of their Koagel and pretend to have trouble whenever she saw them coming along the road.[18] Other examples of women on the farm come from the Jacob L. Plett family diary. The following entries are from the Jacob L. Plett family diary, 1907:

May 23	Father and Helena (age 15) left for Winnipeg at 3 a.m. and returned home on the 25th.
May 26	The firls started hoeing in the garden (which they continued on the 27th, 28th, and 29th.
July 7	The girls went to Steinbach.
August 28	The girls have gone to the Ekron farm to set up sheaves.
September 21	The girls helped David and Klaas haul sheaves together.
September 24	Margaretha (age 17) went to Klaas Friesens to haul sheaves.

Footnotes

1 Transcript of interview between Betty Plett and Mrs. John U. Brandt, Blumenort, Manitoba, August, 1980.
2 Abraham F. Reimer, op. cit.
3 Transcript of interview between Betty Plett and Mrs. Peter K. Plett, Blumenort, Manitoba, August, 1980.
4 Abraham M. Friesen, op. cit.
5 Cornelius L. Plett, op. cit.
6 Mrs Peter K. Plett, op. cit.
7 Peter A. Plett, op. cit.
8 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
9 Abram R. Reimer, op. cit.
10 Rosabel Fast, op. cit.
11 Abram R. Reimer, op. cit.
12 Cornelius R. Penner, "Biographic von Margaretha R. Reimer," trans. John C. Reimer, Reimer Famileinregister, p. 288.
13 Abram F. Reimer, op. cit.
14 Interview with Mrs. Peter K. Plett, Blumenort, August, 1981.
15 Abram P. Friesen, op. cit. p. 176.
16 John I. Dueck, story told at the Blumenort Centennial service, 1974.
17 John B. Toews, Memoirs, 1961, (Prairie View Press, Rosenort, 1978), p. 15.
18 Transcript of interview between Betty Plett and Mrs. John U. Brandt and Mrs. C.K. Plett, Blumenort, Manitoba, August, 1980.
19 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, p. 96.

Part II Chapter 5: Trades and Services

While the pioneer village was not a business centre, the needs of the farmers in the area made it inevatable that some trade activity would arise. These ventures, however, were not true business enterprises. They were more often operated to provide a service and to help the economic well-being of the whole community, rather than to provide a livelihood of increase the living standard of one individual. Of the half-dozen business ventures that did exist in early Blumenort, only the Klaas W. Reimer cheese factory was operated as a true business, and this outfit was forced to close when local farmers formed a cheese co-operative in 1900.

All other ventures were operated by local farmers as side-line undertakings. These included a saw mill, a blacksmith shop, a general store, a feed mill and several steam engine services.

One of the trades that was in greater demand in the early years was that of carpentry. Ten years after the first settlement, many of the crudely-build houses and barns from the first years needed to be rebuilt. The year 1880 began a prosperous decade, and many new buildings were erected. One of the leading carpenters of this era was Rev. Peter R. Reimer. A house he built early in 1889 was fitted with several glass doors which he had fashioned himself.[1] He is particularly remembered for his philisophy of carpentry, and is said to have told his clients that he would build their house as if they would die at 100, but they should live in it

as if they would die tomorrow.[2]

The main sawmill in Blumenort appears to have been owned and operated by Peter W. Toews and his son, Peter B. Toews. John B. Toews, another son, remembered that at first, settlers had no sawmills. They had to saw all the wood using a rig and a six-foot handsaw. Later, A.S. Friesen from Steinbach sometimes visited Blumenort area with a portable sawmill which was powered by two horses.[3] It is likely that the Toews family began operating their sawmill in 1879, when they purchased a steam engine. In 1879 the Toews sawmill was overhauled at Abram Reimer's blacksmith shop for the high cost of $7.90.

The sawmill was located on the eastern edge of the village near the small poplar bush south of the creek.[4] At times, too, it was moved around on skids from farm to farm, cutting boards for the neighbours. Pine would be cut in the forest east and brought back to Blumenort on sleighs, where boards would be sawed. Most of the sawing took place in winter when logs were obtainable and farming slower. The whole Toews family took part in the venture. Peter W. Toews managed the operation while his son, Peter, was in charge of the sawing and John was in charge of Watrous upright steam engine.[5] The sawmill was in operation at Blumenort until 1900, around which time Peter B. Toews moved to Ste. Anne. (The only other Blumenort farmer who is known to have custom sawed is Martin Penner, who despite losing a finger while sawing lumber in April, 1888, continued this business for some time.[6]

The main blacksmith shop in Blumenort was operated by Abraham R. Reimer, who had been trained as a blacksmith in Russia.[7] Reimer operated a very busy shop from 1879 to 1891, when he suddenly died.

Reimer's account book for 1879 shows that his blacksmith shop did a variety of work for farmers from a wide area. In that year he had 24 regular customers from the Blumenort and Blumenhof area. Most of these farmers visited the Reimer shop about once a month. They came most frequently to have horseshoes made and plowshares sharpened. For a horseshoe Reimer charged about 40¢; for sharpening a share 15 ¢. Farmers also came to have harnesses repaired, wagons built, runners put on sleighs, hand tools made, bolts and nuts made and wheels repaired. They came to buy wire, oil, tin cans, nails and shingles.[8]

After Abraham R. Reimer died in 1891, his 29-year-old son, Klaas P. Reimer, continued the business to a limited extent. While he did the regular blacksmith work of sharpening plowshares, he was particularly noted for devising and making mechanisms such as thresher-feeders and blowers, steel plows and seeding mechanisms. He was a believer in repairing. He is known to have fixed a cracked steam engine block by strapping and welding a steel clamp around it. His shop was located across the road from his farmyard. It was equipped with a huge forge and bellows which belched out hot air to heat up steel so that it red hot, making it ready for welding.[9]

Although Klaas was, no doubt, one of the finest blacksmiths in the area, he concentrated on farming and, by 1895, some farmers in the area were taking blacksmith work to Steinbach.[10]

In 1893 Klaas W. Reimer, a medal-winning cheese and buttermaker from Steinbach, opened a cheese factory in Blumenort. Although Reimer ran the cheese factory and married a Blumenort woman, Mrs. Jacob R. Reimer, in 1902, he always lived in the Steinbach

area from where he managed all three of his factories.

The cheese factory was, no doubt, the most important business in the community. It gave a real boost to the farming industry around Blumenort. Even though the factory was not open in winter when the cows were dry, farmers welcomed the new opportunity to increase their small incomes.

The factory was located across the street from Henry E. Plett's, on the west end of the village. It was a low building with a low, sloping roof. On one side there was a lean-to which contained the boiler. Close by, a big well was drilled to provide the factory with water. In 1898 or 1899 the factory was moved a mile east, where it could serve the Blumenhof farmers and be on the main road leading to Steinbach. After the factory closed around 1917, the building was sold to Peter F. Unger. Later, Henry P. Unger used it for a chicken barn.

Around 1910 Klaas W. Reimer sold the factory to a cheese co-operative, former by the Blumenort-area farmers. Feeling that the profits Reimer was making should be kept in the Blumenort area, the Farmers decided to force Reimer out of business by threatening to build their own factory. At a meeting in 1910 the farmers unanimously decided to offer Klaas W. Reimer a certain price for his factory. They commissioned three men to negotiate with Reimer. These men turned out to be such astute businessmen they got the factory at a lower price than the farmers had actually decided to pay.[11]

A cheese factory board was then elected to manage the factory and make sure that the cheese was sold. This meant that the whole board would sometimes travel to Winnipeg to strike deals with

the wholesalers. Times were good, and although the cheese was usually number two grade with large holes and tended to age fast, there were no government restrictions, so it sold well.

The board also had to hire cheesemakers and a secretary. The known secretaries included Abram L. Plett and Peter F. Unger. The secretary's job included taking care of the books and helping the cheesemakers on heavy days. The cheesemakers varied from time to time. Klaas W. Reimer had made much of the cheese when he owned the factory, but he also trained cheesemakers. One of them may have been Herman Krebs, a Dutch immigrant who later moved to Greenland when he married a Penner girl.[9]

A day at the factory began by firing up the boiler. If it was Monday it would be very busy, as farmers tried to get rid of all their weekend milk. At first the Blumenort village used a milk-wagon to collect the milk. Each morning the wagon came down the street, picking up the cans of milk from the milk tables on the street at each Fiastaed. Later the Blumenort farmers joined the Blumenhof farmers in delivering their own milk to the factory. By 8:30 a.m. the yard at the factory would be full of wagons carrying the long, slender 20-gallon milk cans. The wagons drove to the side of the building where a small crane would lift the cans out of the wagon into a platform. From here the cans were emptied into the two large 6,000-pound vats inside thebuilding. After the cans were emptied, they would be filled with the farmer's portion of whey and lowered back into the wagon. Often the farmers stayed around for a while to talk to their neighbors about crops, the grasshoppers, barn-raising or the latest Tauffast. At nine a.m. the factory whistle blew, and the receiving port

would close. As steam billowed out and surrounded the factory, the cheesemaking process began.[12]

The factory continued running until about 1914, the beginning of World War I. John G. Barkman remembers going to work at the cheese factory by bicyclye in 1917, when it opened briefly for about two weeks, after having been closed for about two years.[13] It seems that Winnipeg was running quite short of milk around this time and even had to import it from the United States. The demand for milk in Winnipeg eventually drove the price for cream so high that farmers could make more money from cream than they could from cheese. When this happened, the cheese factory was forced to close.

For the greater period of time the Blumenort village did not have a store. The Kleine Gemeinde people had not been involved in trade in Russia, and the church leaders were opposed to being involved in a business which would bring their people in close contact with the outside world. By the 1890s the idea of village stores had become acceptable after Klaas Reimer from Steinbach opened a store, although at first it was against the advice of the Kleine Gemeinde leadership. By 1896 Blumenort had a store, operated by Johann R. Reimer.

The following account of Blumenort's first store had been written by its owner's son-in-law, John C. Reimer:

> When Father was 19 years of age, his father, Abraham Reimer, died. That left him the oldest son at home to look after the farming duties. At the age of 22 he married Maria Dueck, who was then 20. Soon after, they bought a village lot with buildings and some acreage and began farming. Father was not strong physically and hired help for the summer months. He was very anxious to make his living and in October, 1896, he started a store in their house, to supplement his farming activities.
> It was a general store in the full sense of the word, carrying

> groceries, hardware, dry goods, shoes and some clothing and medicine. Farm products such as eggs were taken in trade. Sometimes the customers paid cash, but all customers had charge accounts which were paid when they had money. The store had a mail box where the customers could pick out their mail when somebody brought it for the villagers from the Steinbach Post Office.
> According to his record books, Father often sent cash by mail to pay the wholesalers in Winnipeg. His trade increased and extended to surrounding villages until August, 1902, when he died after being sick in bed for three months. Mother carried on with the business until spring, 1903, when she married Cornelius B. Loewen of Steinbach.[14]

The lay-out of Blumenort's first store had been described by John R. Reimer's daughter, Maria (today Mrs. John C. Reimer):

> The store was in the first big room. There was an outside entrance to the store on the east side, although you first had to walk through a tiny porch. Along the wall opposite the door were the shelves of merchandise. At the wall to the left was the counter where cloth was measured and items weighed, and at the end of this counter was the till, which would ring if one would press the wrong buttons. At the other end of the room was the candy barrel, from which Mother would often give us candy.[15]

The 1902 account book for the Reimer store has been preserved, and in 1981 it was translated by George T. Reimer of Steinbach. It shows that, in just one year, 73 people had charge accounts at the store. The customers were Kleine Gemeinde people from Blumenort, Blumenhof, Neuanlage and Schwagershog, Bergthal people from Hochfeld and Holdeman people form Greenland. The most frequent patrons of the sotre included: Mrs Abraham Reimer, Sr., Klaas P. Reimer, Peter R. Reimer, Peter Reimer, Sr., Heinrich E. Plett, Abraham Penner, Sr., Peter B. Kroeker, Cornelius P. Friesen and Heinrich Falk.[16]

At one time a number of farmers in the Blumenort area each had a horsepowered grain crusher.[17] As farms expanded, some of the more industrious farmers set up large wind-driven crushers. One of these farmers, Henry E. Plett, began to crush grain for

his neighbors and soon had a thriving feed business which continued for 40 years. Plett operated the mill from his Fiastaed on the west end of the village. He set up his wind-powered mill shortly after he married in 1889. His first outfit was driven with a 12-foot windmill, but around 1900 he purchased a new 16-foot "Ideal" windmill which powered a 12-inch crusher.

The windmill was made entirely of metal except for the huge 24" x 20" wooden mast on which it rested. The mast was attached to the east end of Plett's barn and rose 10 feet above the barn. The crushing stones were located on the second floor. These stones lay flat and were powered by a direct drive from the chaft of the windmill. Bags of wheat would be hooked and hoisted through the second-storey door and poured into the crusher. After the grain was crushed, it would run down through a chute to the first floor where it was rebagged and reloaded into the farmer's wagon.[18]

When the village broke up in 1910, Plett moved his barn and windmill to his new farmstead, a mile to the northeast. Here he continued using the windmill until he purchased a gasoline-powered Case tractor in 1918 to power the feed mill. Plett's grain cruching business grew into Plett Feed Service. This company experienced its peak in 1940 when a new feed mill was built at Plettenville.

As mentioned earlier, the first steam engine in the area was an upright Watrous, purchased by Peter W. Toews in 1879. Not only was it used to power the Toews sawmill; it also appears to have powered Jacob P. Wiebe's threshing machine. The second man in the area to own a steam engine was Peter Penner, Sr. By 1883 he owned

a steam engine similar in make to Toews'. It likely was used to power Martin Penner's sawmill and Wiebe's threshing machine from time to time. During the 1890s, several other similar outfits sprang up in Blumenhof and Blumenort.

It was not until the turn of the century, however, that the self-propelled steam engines were brought into operation in the Blumenort area. The owners of these steam engines custom-threshed, plowed and moved buildings. Because a steam engine at this time cost over $1,000, few farmers could afford them. Besides this, the steam engine was much too big and clumsy to be a practical farm tractor. However, the farmers who owned steamers provided a valuable service to the community.

At least four steamer outfits were in operation by 1904, and each outfit had a particular area to serve. Plett and Reimer was tha name of the Blumenort area steam engine outfit. It was also known as CPR, presumably for Case Plett Reimer. The company was begun in 1904 by five brothers-in-law: Henry E. Plett, Peter P. Reimer, John F. Unger, Cornelius P. Reimer and Abram P. Reimer. Each was the son or son-in-law to Rev. Peter R. Reimer. These five men decided to start a company after the village dicided a-gainst a community-owned steam outfit. Around 1906 three of the original partners had left the partnership to spend more time on their farms. This left Henry E. Plett and Peter P. Reimer to carry on the service. Their first steam engine was a 15/30-horse-power Watrous. When an additional steamer, a 25/75-horsepower Case, was purchased, the Watrous was used only for threshing, while the Case was used for pulling an eight-bottom plow.

The big shed where the threshing outfit was stored was

located across the street from Henry E. Plett's place and later moved to the Peter P. Reimer place in Neuanlage. It was a long shed which allowed the steamer, the tender (the water and straw wagon) and the threshing machine to stand, one behind the other, as they would in transport. Here the mechanically-interested Henry E. Plett boys came to do repairs on the steamer.

Both David L. Plett and Jacob L. Plett from Blumenhof had Case steamers and custom threshed in the area. They divided the Blumenhof, De Krim, and Ekron areas between themselves. After they had finished threshing in this area, David Plett would generally move north to Ste. Anne, while Jacob Plett generally moved south to thresh in the Friedensfeld area.[19]

The demand for the services of these companies continued to be high until the gas tractor became popular in the 1920s.

Both Blumenort and Blumenhof had farmers who in their spare time repaired and made shoes for their neighbors. During the 1880s Abram M. Friesen of Blumenort fixed shoes, not only for his neighbors, but for Blumenhof and Clearspring families as well. On April 4, 1884, for instance, Friesen either fixed or made shoes and boots for five different customers and charged them each 15¢. Friesen also fixed watches for people from the surrounding areas.[20]

By the turn of the century, Gerhard D. Doerksen of Blumenhof was also repairing and making shoes. He had a complete supply of shoe repair equipment, much of which is still used by his son, Henry P. Doerksen of Blumenort. Doerksen used special shoe nails ordered from a Chicago firm, a shoe-fitter made by the Malleable Company, a Montgomery-Ward forged shoe hammer and

a wooden block on which he fitted and nailed the shoes. For his work he would charge from 5¢ to 70¢, depending on the amount of work. In 1900 he mended a pair of shoes and put a new sole under one of them for 30¢. His most frequent customers were the Gottlieb Jahnke girls who, their Kleine Gemeinde neighbors suspected, must be doing a lot of dancing.[21]

Footnotes

1 Abram F. Reimer, diary, February 28, 1889.
2 John C. Reimer, et. al., Famlienregister, op. cit., p. 127.
3 Abe Warkentin, Reflections on Our Heritage, (Derksen Printers, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1971), p.52.
4 Klaas D. Reimer, annotated map of Blumenort ca. 1896, June, 1980, Ben F. Reimer, R.R.1, Steinbach, Manitoba.
5 Interview with Frank P. Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba, August, 1981.
6 Abram F. Reimer, diary, April 19, 1888.
7 There is evidence in Abram R. Reimer's account book to suggest that Reimer purchased the smithy from Johann L. Plett, his wife's step-father, in 1879 for $180. Around the turn of the century Ben D. Doerksen of Blumenhof is said to have also operated a blacksmith shop.
8 Abram R. Reimer, op. cit.
9 Peter A. Plett, op. cit.
10 Cornelius L. Plett, op. cit.
11 Interview with Abe. P. Unger, Landmark, Manitoba, August, 1980.
12 Ibid.
13 Interview with John G. Barkman, Steinbach, Manitoba, August, 1980.
14 John C. Reimer, correspondence with author, August, 1981.
15 Interview with Mrs. John C. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba, July, 1980.
16 Johann R. Reimer, Store Rechnungsbuch, transliterated by George T. Reimer, courtesy John C. Reimer, Steinbach.
17 Tax Roll, 1883.
18 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, p. 57.
19 Ibid, pp. 148-155.
20 Abraham M. Friesen, op. cit.
21 Interview with Henry P. Doerksen, Blumenort, Manitoba, August, 1981.

Part II Chapter 6: Education in the Village

Education has changed greatly since the early years. During the first era (1874-1910), the school was very much a part of the village. The school teacher was a local carpenter hired by the Schulzenbott. The schoolhouse stood in the centre of the village in Blumenort and at the east end of the village in Blumenhof. The school policy was put down by the church minstry. The school curriculum aimed to help children become farmers and church members. The school received a government frant, but only for as long as the government stayed at arm's length. In the second era (1910-1945), all this would change.

The Kleine Gemeinde philosophy of education had three basic tenets: that education was of utmost importance, that education should be kept simple and that education whould be kept in the control of the church community. They considered the letter that the Federal Government had given their delegates in 1873 a guarantee that these tenets could be followed in Canada. This letter had listed their rights, including "the fullest privilege of exercising their religion . . . without any kind of . . . restriction whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children."[1]

The Provincial Government had a practice of letting churches run schools. In fact, since 1870, all schools in Manitoba were controlled by either the English Protestant or the French Catholic school boards. Thus it was not an unusual event when the Province

of Manitoba allowed the Mennonites to run their own schools.[2]

Some of the ideas that the settlers had about education are expressed in the memoirs of Peter F. Unger (1875-1951) of Blumenhof:

> The schools in the first years were kept very simple. The teacher required no special training. Yet from the beginning (1876) there were District Schools supported by the government. The municipality, however, did not support these schools because the Bergthaler Church was against them. The government inspector visited the schools now and then. Also, reports had to be sent in (to the inspector) regularly.
> However, only German and the necessary subjects were taught. For Christmas the students had to learn beautiful poetry and recite it at home to their parents.
> Spring was exam time , , . and Prufung was held. To this [the parents as well as] the neighbors and preachers were invited. The students had to read only the Fibel (Reader) and the Bible. They were made well acquainted with Bible history, and they had to memorize the Catechism. The goal of the parents and the teacher was to have the children come to a Christian understanding of things.[3]

Within three months after Blumenort was settled, a school was started. Cornelius P. Friesen was hired to teach. Friesen was a capable 30-year-old man who kept a well-stocked library, knew carpentry and some medicine. His wage for the first year was a flat $50.00 plus oats, hay and firewood. After being hired, Friesen quickly went to work fashioning crude benches and tables for the school. Heinrich F. Reimer's Semlin was partitioned off as a classroom and a wooden floor was installed. It seems that Reimer's Semlin was bigger than most, as it had been built with the anticipation that his parents would inhabit part of it. When they postponed their coming until 1875, part of Reimer's Semlin was made available for Blumenort's first school. Here 20 students assembled at the beginning of November, 1874, to put in 86 1/2 days of class time until the last day of school on April 30.

School was held in the Heinrich Reimer Semlin and in other

residences until 1880, two years after the church ministry directed that a church meeting-house be built in Blumenort for the Blumenort area. In that year a building of logs and a thatched roof was erected and used for both the school and church.[4] This school came in for special mention in the 1885 Public School Inspector's Report as being the only Mennonite School in Manitoba to have at least two blackboards.

In 1888 a large new church and school building was built. The Baumeister for the building was John F. Reimer, who had just moved to Blumenort form the United States. The elderly Abram F. Reimer describes in his diary how the village farmers donated lumber and hauled earth for the construction of the meeting house. On July 1 the last worship service was held in the old building and the next day it was torn down. At first the new building was too large to serve as a school, and so a folding wall was used as a partition to make two classrooms.

Blumenhof hired a teacher and started its school in 1875, the first year of its settlement. Abraham R. Friesen, a literate man with interest in astronomy and medicine, signed the following contract. The contract was discovered in Friesen's extant diary:

> On this date (November 1, 1875) the following contract is made between one named Abraham Friesen and the Village Organization (of Blumenhof): he, Friesen, undertakes to teach the children for six months, that is, from the first of November until the first of May, and for each child five dollars cash is promised to him for which he makes himself responsible to teach the children diligently in the established school curriculum, and this he has signed with his own hand.[5]

Three years later Friesen's wages increased to a flat $50.00 plus 22 bushels of barley and 11 loads of firewood. Unlike Blumenort, Blumenhof had a high teacher turnover. In a period in

which Blumenort had five different teachers, Blumenhof had 15 teachers.

At first, school in Blumenhof was taught in a private home. Then in April, 1882, a decision was made to build a schoolhouse at the very east end of the village. It was a small building 22 x 24 feet with a fence around it.[6] In 1890, a year after Blumenhof broke up, the school was moved a mile to the north of the former village site. In 1903 a new school was built at the present site of the Blumenhof cemetery. No changes were made until 1917, when the school was remodelled to make it a two-classroom building. A folding wall allowed the building to be turned into a meeting house for Sunday church services.

When the Neuanlage settlement was begun by five Blumenort families in 1879, school was held in the home of Peter Loewen.[7] It was not till 1893 that a schoolhouse was finally built. The first teacher here was a David Klassen.

Students in outlying areas would often be boarded in private homes in Blumenort where they could attend the village school. Peter P.D. Reimer remembers boarding at his grandparents, Rev. Peter Reimer, Sr., in Blumenort, while his parents lived at Schwagershof, two miles south of the village. Mrs. Klaas J.B. Reimer and Mrs Abram T. Loewen (nee Helena and Elizabeth Loewen) boarded at the Peter R. Reimers, Jr., in Blumenort because there was no school near De Krim, where their parents, John K. Loewens, lived.

School policy was set up and enforced by the church ministry. Shortly after Elder Peter Toews arrived from Russia, the Kleine Gemeinde school system was reorganized and a new set of regulations

were adopted. On this occasion Elder Toews wrote a strict letter to all the Kleine Gemeinde teachers, emphasizing the importance of school and the authority of the church. Below is a copy of that letter:

A Letter to the Molotschna Mennonite School Teachers of the East Reserve

It is known that in our new homeland our church ministry will also be our school board, and at a church assembly all fathers and foster-fathers will be advised of their duty to have their children that are of school age acquire a proper education. Whereas children in a group can teach each other, learn from one another and compete with each other, they would make much more progress in a school than they ever would by interrupted instruction in the home. Furthermore, the school board considers the already established Teacher Conference, where the teachers also can learn from each other, good and commendable. We therefore support the conference, and teachers should not miss the meetings for minor reasons.

We will make it our duty, in the future, to visit the conferences as well as the schools, and the teachers will, therefore, be supervised in the teaching of reading, grammar, singing and especially knowledge of the Bible. Therefore, it is only fair that, in the future, each village will be obliged to subject a teacher to the security of the church and school board before he is hired.

The teacher should be an example in word and deed, in courtesy, manners, obedience, respect, love and friendliness to everyone. No new ideas should be introduced by the teacher without the support of his colleagues and the investigation of the school board.

We do not foresee a slighting of these regulations; instead, we are of the opinion that the teachers will take proper notice of them.

In the name of the ministry,
Gruenfeld, January 3, 1876 Peter Toews (Elder)[8]

Ten regulations followed the letter. They included the following summarized points:

1. The school will be supervised by the church ministerial, who will appoint capable teachers.
2. The curriculum will include reading, writing and arithmetic, and some penmanship and simple singing.
3. A building for school shall be provided and villagers shall give their support to ensuring that all children receive an education.
4. The school expenses will be supported by all villagers who will pay land tax and tuition for their own children.
5. All children shall attend school; this includes boys ages 7-14 and girls 7-13.

6. Only non-villagers may teach their children at home, but they must be taught well or else they will be sent to the village school.
7. School will run from November 1 to May 1. Absenteeism will not be permitted.
8. Teachers must meet for convention three times a year to exchange ideas.
9. Final examinations (Pruefung) in April will be conducted by the church ministerial.
10. Teachers shall be paid twice a year: January 1 and April 1.[9]

The Schultzenbott also played an important role in education. It not only hired the school teacher; it made sure the schoolhouse was in good repair and well supplied with firewood. It was a board of school trustees elected by the the Schultzenbott which set the school budget and handled all funds. The first known school board in Blumenort was elected in 1888 and consisted of Abram M. Friesen, Martin Penner and Jacob S. Friesen, secretary. The earliest available school budget dates from 1890. In that year the budget stood at $125.55, the total amount of which was received from the Manitoba government. Of this money $105.70 went to the school teacher, $14.95 to heat the school house, and less than five dollars to pay for educational materials.[10]

In 1878 the Government took the Mennonite people by surprise when it offered to help support their church-run schools. The original letter sent to Blumenort by the Protestant School Board making this offer is still extant. In return for simply listing their school with the government and allowing it to be inspected twice a year by a Mennonite Public Schools inspector, each school would be entitled to a $80-$100.00 grant.[11]

This letter caused a dilemma in Mennonite circles. Blumenort's Bergthal neighbors, not trusting the government, rejected this offer. Strangely, the Kleine Gemeinde church accepted the grant and Blumenort was listed as School District No. 62, and

Blumenhof as School District No. 64. For 25 years this arrangement was maintained.

During these years, however, the Blumenort-area people began to feel threatened by government support. In 1890 the Manitoba Public Schools Act was passed. The Protestant and Catholic School Boards were replaced by the Department of Education, and minority language rights were abolished. Manitoba was to be an English-speaking province. Only when French Canadians opposed this act and brought it to the attention of the Federal Government was it amended. The amended act stated that in any district school which had at least 10 students whose mother tongue was not English, bilingual education could be offered, and religion could be taught by extending the school hours.[12] But even this deal was to become a threat to the schools that had accepted support in 1878.

A second threat was the Mennonite Public Schools inspector. The inspector had been hired by the government to try to increase the level of education among Mennonites. It is clear that the government had little regard for the education in Mennonite circles. According to an 1889 government report: "Teaching in Mennonite District Schools is nearly useless and too religious."[13] It seems that education was deterioting around the turn of the century, because "the teachers got their training only from the village school one generation after another."[14] This may also have been the case in Blumenort. While C.P. Friesen and Abram R. Friesen were literary men, John R. Reimer and Gerhard Giesbrecht were teachers because their health did not allow them to farm.

While H.H. Ewart, the school inspector after 1890, fully

supported the idea of Mennonites controlling their own schools, he insisted that district teachers should have "at least some command of English and some knowledge of Anglo-Saxon institutions."[15] Thus, with the promise of a higher school grant, he attempted to lure teachers to the Gretna Normal School. Sometime around 1890, Corlelius P. Friesen is said to have walked to Gretna to spend a summer at the Normal School.[16] Heinrich R. Reimer, who was teaching at Neuanlage at this time, also responded to Ewert's plan. He wrote the following some years later: "I obtained my interim certificate through Mr. Heinrich Ewert during the first year (1901), after I had written exams for two to three hours in Gretna."[17] In addition to upgrading teachers, Ewert campaigned for more district schools. However, Ewert tried so hard that he aroused a backlash from the conservative Mennonites. So great was the opposition to him that the new Roblin government fired him in 1903. Amidst this opposition Blumenort considered changing back to a completely private church school. On March 30, 1903, at a Schulzenbott meeting in Blumenort, it was questioned whether or not the village should forfeit the legislative grant and hire a teacher with their own money. No final decision, however, was made at this time.

In 1907 a new threat developed when the Roblin government passed the Flag Act. This act required all district schools to fly the Union Jack. Blumenort, along with all other Kleine Gemeinde villages, quickly deregistered their school. A December 13 meeting between the church leaders and Premier Roblin brought no results, so the legislative grant was turned down. According to David P. Reimer, the fear of the flag was coupled with a fear that "soon religion and language would be injured."[18] One Blumenorter

went so far as to declare that "they will have to murder us before we will fly their flag."[19] For 10 years the Blumenort-area schools refused to be connected to the government in any way.

According to David P. Reimer, the early school curriculum was geared to make children "become familiar with Bible stories and the Bible, the New Testament, and Catechism, and with. . . the spiritual songs and tunes."[20] The Bible was the main textbook and was used as the reader after the first grade. Any history was limited to Bible stories. Catechism, a list of doctrines which described man's relationship to God, was memorized. All students were expected to know these doctrines to prepare themselves for the eventual baptism and joining of the church. Students were also expected to learn the songs of the church. Choral Buecher, which had numbers indicating notes, were used to learn the songs, and melodies of the Grosze Gesang Buch used in the church. In keeping with simplicity and humility, the church ministerial forbade the learning of new songs, and harmonious singing. For Christmas, students were expected to memorize long poems of 100 lines each. Although there were no Christmas programs in the first years, these poems were recited in school and to one's grandparents at family gatherings.

Students were also prepared for secular life. Teacher Gerhard Giesbrecht's school records for 1907 show that mathematics, geography and calligraphy were important subjects. Out of 124 periods, 25 periods were dedicated to drawing and calligraphy, 25 periods to mathematics and 18 to geography. The balance was used for reading and writing.[21] As early as 1886 John B. Toews, who had never formally studied English, is said to

have instructed the language at the Neuanlage school. By 1900 English was made part of the curriculum in all Kleine Gemeinde shcools to meet the requirements of the Public School Inspectors. Although is seems that English was dropped from the school curriculum in 1906, it was reintroduced into Blumenort two years later by Henry R. Reimer.

One of the subjects of that time was the art of calligraphy or Schoenschriften. It was a matter of great pride to be able to write gracefully and distinctly. Cornelius P. Friesen emphasized Schoenschriften very much. He had students make his own booklets by drawing Frakturen, a complex of circles and curls, which in their whole constituted a picture.[22]

School children always remember the most about school. The teacher and the lessons, the times of singing and mischief, have been well remembered by several Blumenort senior citizens. Below, are the recollections of four students who attended school in the Blumenort village before 1910:

Jacob W. Friesen attended school from 1898-1902. The following is a free translation of some of the stories he told of those years:

> When I was six years old, I started to go to school. Gerhard Giesbrecht was my teacher. He was a worthy teacher. For his time he was well schooled. I remember attending school with boys like Aaron Reimer and Abram D. Reimer. If I had to, I could name all my classmates from that time. The first year at school I studied the Fibel (a promary reader). But I used it only three months, when I could start using the Bible as the textbook. In one winter I read through the whole Bible. After we moved to Neuanlage, I learned English. My teacher was Henry R. Reimer. We did not learn to speak English. We just did translations, reading and writing. At Pruefung I had to read an English story to the parents. The story was "The Monkey and the Cheese"; the old almost had to laugh because they found this very strange."

The school year ran only six months. It ended already in April because our parents needed us at home. Quite often in springtime the reads were too muddy to travel, anyway. I went to school only four years until I was 11. My father was sickly, so I had to take over the farm when I was 13. There were lots of little pranks played in school in those days. I remember that I would always walk home with Cornelius R. Plett - we were the only students who lived at the west end. The snow on the road here was usually higher than the fence. One can imagine how high the read was. Now as it was, Friesens like to tease and we began to push each other into the deep snow so that we could hardly get out. We didn't know what would happen the next day because the teacher had that good thing about him that he stood watching on the street until the last child was safely at home. The next day he always knew exactly what each one had done (on his way home). I hoped that maybe I would get away with my behaviour. But the next day after school the teacher stopped me. At least I did not get strapped. I just got a lecture on not shoving on the road, and then he let me go home.

The next winter there was another bit of fun I remember. The big boys had apparently done something quite bad. Now, the teacher was not good on his feet; he had a crippled leg, and he stood there by the stove. He had the blackboard pointer which was suitable to smack a student over the rear. And so these boys were supposed to walk past there. But the third jumped so quickly that the teacher missed and hit the stick over the stove. One piece of the stick broke off and flew up against the clock, knocking it from the wall. Then suddenly the fun was over.

The teacher did not often strap the students. If a student would not have learned his lesson he would have to stay after four o'clock. Many of the students enjoyed learning; is seemed to come naturally to them, especially David P. Reimer. But others learned little. One boy who had grown very tall by 13 was sent back to school by his father because he couldn't even write his name. The teacher was very frustated with him. Once when this boy was commanded to do his lesson on the board, he came away from the board with every single word, no matter how small, spelled wrongly. Every one of us was astoniched that this boy who seemed as high as the ceiling, who had the privilege of sitting in the back with the older and better students, would do this. When the boy admitted to have done this intentionally, he was warmed up with a stick. This incident seemed to have changed him totally.

When I was mischievious, I would always be subtle about it. As a younger student sitting in the middle, I would make the older boys laugh by whispering funny things to them. Because laughter was forbidden in school, they would rise, leaving the building, and make as if they were blowing their noses, for which they had permission to go outside.

Suzanne Reimer (Mrs. C.K. Plett) attended school from 1905-1909. She remembered the following:

> My first teacher was Gerhard Giesbrecht, but only for part of the year. Then my father, Heinrich Reimer, became the teacher. He was stricter with me than with the rest because I was his daughter. We were not allowed to lean our heads on our hands, and whispering was forbidden. I attended school for four years. We started English the last year I was in school.[24]

Katherina Penner (Mrs J. U. Brandt) attended school from 1906-1912 and enjoys talking about her school days:

> We always walked to school. My teacher was Mr. Heinrich Reimer and he was very good. I don't remember that there were any class divisions for catechism. One boy memorized only those parts of the catechism which he would be required to recite. When this was found out, he was put into a class by himself. He now had to memorize all catechism at his own speed. On Fridays we always had Bible drills and art, English was taught only to the oldest students.[25]

Elizabeth Loewen (Mrs. P.K. Plett) attended school from 1908-1915 and remembers that, even then, students sometimes misbehaved:

> I wasn't even six years old when I started school, and I went for seven winters. My only teacher was Heinrich Reimer, whom I loved very dearly. I always enjoyed it most when the Bible stories were read, I also enjoyed learning the catechism from memory. As we got older, we also read from the Testament.
> Outside, during recess or noon hour, the boys and girls did not play together. A board walk, crossing the yard to my grandparents, the Abe R. Penners, divided the yard. The boys played on the north side while the girls played on the south side.
> Inside, all the students sat on benches without backs. Each bench could seat four students. The poorer students sat close to the teacher, at the "bottom side". Those who learned well could reach the "top side".
> Once the teacher said that we should take the song books out. So we all took them and waved them in the air. To punish us, the teacher made us hold the books in the air. I felt badly because I had done something that displeased the teacher, so I went to him to apoloaize and promised him not to misbehave again.
> When Elizabeth Schellenberg and I sat together, we were always talking. Once the teacher said to us, "Let's see

who can be quiet the longest," I really tried. But Elizabeth bumped me again and again, hoping I would talk. I became so angry I finally bit her in the arm. It hurt her and she hollered out my name. The teacher who had been writing at the board turned around, and I hastily explained what happened. The teacher said nothing and turned back to his work. [26]

Footnotes

1
2 Francis, op. cit., p. 45.
C. Henry Smith, The Coming of the Russian Mennonites, (Berne,
3 Indiana, Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), pp. 230-236.
4 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
5 Abram P. Friesen, et. al., cit., p. 167.
6 Abram R. Friesen, op. cit.
7 Blumenhof Village Rechnung and Protokolbuch, op. cit.
John C. Reimer, "History of Our School Since 1874,"
8 Sesquicentennial Jubilee, p. 170.
9 Ibid., P. 157.
10 Ibid.
11 Blumenort Village Papers, "Schule Rechnung: 1890-1900,"
12 Ibid.
13 Morton, op. cit., p. 127.
Sessional Papers, Department of Education Public School
Inspectors' Report, 1889, Provincial Archives of Manitoba,
14 Winnipeg.
15 John C. Reimer, "History of Our Schools Since 1874," p. 164.
16 Francis, op. cit., p. 172.
Interview with Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba,
17 January, 1982.
18 Heinrich R. Reimer, op. cit.
19 David P. Reimer, op. cit., p. 104.
Transcript of interview between Betty Plett and Klaas C.
20 Penner, Belize, C.A., August, 1980.
21 David P. Reimer, loc. cit.
Blumenort School Register, 1907, Heritage Centre, Winnipeg,
22 Manitoba.
23 Blumenort Village Papers.
24 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
25 Mrs C.K. Plett, op. cit.
26 Mrs. John U. Brandt, op. cit.
Mrs. Peter K. Plett, op. cit.

Part II Chapter 7: The Church of the Village

The church was by far the most important institution of early village life. The ideas that had given birth to the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia were brought to Manitoba. The church was to be a simple, caring, visible body of believers. It maintained a rigid control over new ideas and new ways of living. It actively sought to keep the community both spiritually and physically healthy. It led the believers in a search to understand life and prepare for the Judgement.

Three important things shaped church life in the Blumenort area between 1874 and 1910. First, the community was blessed with church leaders, and this it became a church center the very first year. Second, the Holdeman Revival in 1881 ended the one-church community. Third, the Ministerial Conference held in Blumenort in 1899 ensured that few changes would be made in the church for a long time to come.

It was during the first 35 years of Blumenort's history that it gained the reputaion of being a community with strong church leadership. Although deacons and ministers were elected by the whole East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood, the men who were elected from the Blumenort area provided strong leadership in the community. An example of such a man from the very first year of settlement was Deacon Peter P. Wiebe. Although a deacon, Peter P. Wiebe had by 1874 been a member of the church ministerial for 10 years, making him, during this period of Kleine Gemeinde his-

tory, a senior member of the church leadership. (For the story of Blumenort,s first deacons, see "Helping the Village Needy.")

It was not till the first Kleine Gemeinde election on the East Reserve that a minister was elected from Blumenort. He was 31-year-old Heinrich F. Reimer Jr., whose father, bearing the same name, had settled in Blumenhof in 1875. The election, held in Blumenort on January 22, saw Reimer elected a deacon and then at the same meeting, elevated to the position of preacher with an overwhelming majority.[1] Few details are known about Reimer's ministry. It is known that he married the couple, Johann I. Friesen and Helena Penner at the Blumenort schoolhouse in April, 1880.[2] Two years later Rev. Reimer joined the Holdeman Church where his office as minister was not reconfirmed. In 1888 the Reimers moved to Gruenfeld.

Peter R. Reimer became the first Kleine Gemeinde minister to be elected from the Blumenort area after the Holdeman Secession. He, too, was an 1874 homesteader. He was skilled in furniture-making and later became quite a substantial farmer.[3] He was elected to the ministry on March 1, 1882, at a Brotherhood meeting in Steinbach. This was at a time when the Kleine Gemeinde church was in disarray following the Holdeman split. Elder Abraham Friesen, the leader of the American Kleine Gemeinde, came from Nebraska in February to help reorganize the Manitoba church. At the election Peter Reimer, and two Gruenfelders, Abraham Kornelsen and Jacob Dueck, were elected deacons. At the same service Peter Reimer and Jacob Dueck were elevated to the position of minister.[4]

Peter Reimer was to become an influential and leading

minister in the East Reserve. Because Jacob M. Kroeker, the Elder after 1882, lived at Rosenort, an Assistant Elder for the East Reserve was appointed by the church leadership. The first such leader after 1882 seems to have been Rev. Peter Baerg of Gruenfeld. By the late 1880s, however, Peter R. Reimer appears to have assumed this responsibility. He is noted to have been a preacher who stressed the rewards and advantages of the Christian life, while his counterpart, Cornelius L. Plett of Blumenhof, is said to have "stressed the dangers and likely punishment for not accepting salvation and living a Christian life." It is also said that "Peter R. Reimer delivered his sermons in a hollow resonant voice, while Cornleius L. Plett spoke in a deep hoarse voice."[5] Peter Reimer is remembered as a man of piety, but one who also had a sense of humor.[6]

Cornelius L. Plett became the second Kleine Gemeinde minister to be elected from the Blumenort area after 1882. The election, held in May 1891, was called after Deacon Abraham R. Reimer's sudden death. At this election both Cornelius Plett and his brother, Peter L. Plett, were elected deacons. The ministerial election which followed ended in a tie between Cornelius Plett and Abraham Dueck. A lot was cast to break the tie, and Plett became the minister.[7]

Until this time, Plett had been an active farmer in Blumenhof. After the election, however, he decreased the size of the farm to spend more time in the ministry. His diaries show that he undertook a lot of travelling and visitations.[8] In 1910 he was chosen to deliver the sermon at the opening of Steinbach's new church. Two years before this, the Pletts

had moved to Friedensfeld and, in 1916, they moved to Satanta, Kansas, where Rev. Plett became the leading minister in the Kleine Gemeinde Church there. Here he served in the ministry till his death in 1935.

Peter Baerg was the most experienced minister to live in Blumenort during this time. He had already been a minister when he joined the Kleine Gemeinde in the Crimea in 1867.[9] In the 1874 migration he settled at Gruenfeld where he became the head minister for the East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde.

Although Baerg had not grown up in the Kleine Gemeinde tradition, he was a very loyal and influential leader of the church. He had been quite close to the leaders of two groups who left the Kleine Gemeinde at different times. But in both the Krimmer Mennonite Brethern split of 1869 and the Holdeman split of 1882, Baerg remained a leading force in the mother church.[4] One of Baerg's last duties was to preach the sermon at Elder Abram Dueck's ordination in 1895.[10] He died in Neunlage in 1901.

Peter W. Loewen from Neuanlage became the third Kleine Gemeinde minister to be elected in the Blumenort area after 1882. By December, 1893, a real need for a minsterial election had arisen. Rev. Peter Baerg was too old to carry out his duties. Rev. Abraham Kornelsen from Gruenfeld had been killed in May after he was struck on the head by a horse. And, in October, Rev. Jacob Dueck died after a lengthy illness. In the election of 1893, the brotherhood chose Peter Loewen and Peter R. Dueck as preachers.[11] Three years later Peter Loewen officiated at the occasion of a double wedding in Blumenort. On November 1, 1896

he is said to have married the Peter I. Wiebes and the Gerhard W. Reimers at a single service. In 1903 he preached the church dedication service in the new Blumenhof school.

While an existing letter shows Rev. Loewen to have been a kind and optimistic man, he is also remembered to have been a man of order. The story goes that during one service in which he was preaching he noted a discipline problem with one of his sons in the congregation. Stopping the reading of his sermon, Rev. Loewen stepped from the pulpit, walked over to his son, led him outside for correction and then calmly returned to resume the sermon.[12] Peter Loewen served as a minister until he died in 1919, after a lengthy struggle with diabetes.

Several of the early Holdeman Church ministers also came from Blumenort and area. When the Holdeman Church organized in the area in 1882, it followed the tradition of electing ministers and deacons at general brotherhood meetings. Martin Penner, Sr. from Blumenort was ordained as a minister on January 11, 1882. Heinrich Wohlgemuth from Blumenhof was chosed and ordained a minister in 1894. During the following decade, three young men who had grown up in the Blumenort area were elected preachers. They included Isaac Penner, son of Peter Penner, Sr.(1904), Jacob T. Wiebe, son of Rev. Heinrich F. Wiebe (1910), and Cornelius P. Wohlgemuth, son of Rev. Heinrich Wohlgemuth (1910). Peter T. Wiebe, son of the former Kleine Gemeinde deacon, Peter R. Wiebe, was elected a deacon in 1904.[13]

There were a total of four church offices one could hold in the church. Each one was for life and each one was filled in an open election at general brotherhood meeting. These positions

included the Elder (Aeltester), minister, deacon and songleader. This was also the church hierarchy. Only deacons qualified as candidates for the ministry and only ministers could be elected Elder.

Usually only the wealthier members were chosen for a church office. It was expected that the church leaders would pay their own expenses, and thus only those rich enough to spare time for the church were considered. In fact, there was saying that a person wishing to be a minister of deacon had to own a Divea Schien and not just an Ovezied.[14] (The former was a large two-storey hay loft built at a right angle to the barn which only the wealthier farmers could afford.)

The first church services in Blumenort were usually held in the homes of villagers owning large houses. On special occasions, however, larger buildings were required. According to the family of Abram L. Plett, their father was baptized in 1878 at a service held in Peter W. Toews' large hayshed.[15] In 1880 a log meetinghouse was built which served the church community until 1888. In that year a new roomy building was erected which met the Blumenort area's need until 1918.

Sunday morning church services known as Andacht, simply meaning devotions, were held in Blumenort only once a month. On the other Sundays the church met in Rosenfeld, Steinbach and Gruenfeld. After 1888, when Rosenfeld stopped hosting services, Steinbach began having two worship services a month. In 1903, another change in church rotation occured when Blumenhof began having services on the Sunday that Gruenfeld also had its service.[16]

The Holdeman church had a similar rotation system, and in

many cases it used the same building the Kleine Gemeinde did. After 1881 Holdeman church services were held in the Blumenort and Blumenhof schoolhouses at least once a month on a Sunday when the Kleine Gemeinde service was held elsewhere.

The Sunday on which Blumenort hosted the service was called Groat Sindach, or Big Sunday. On such a day villagers prepared for many visitors and the farmers close to the school opened their barns to visitors' horses.

The worship service, known as Andacht, reflected the simple and sincere faith of the Kleine Gemeinde settlers. Inevitably their services were alike and began at 10 A.M.

The service began when the songleader, who sat up front, suggested a number and began singing. Once the congregation recognized the melody, they followed suit. At the end of each stanza the songleader drew out the note, while the congregation waited for him to connect with the first note of the second stanza. This was called singing Ah Dei. The early songleaders in Blumenort included Isaac J. Loewen, Cornelius L. Plett, Abraham M. Friesen, Abraham R. Reimer, Peter L. Plett and David L. Plett. The story goes that each songleader had his favorite melody and latecomers could often tell who was leading the singing by the melody coming from the school.

After the singing the Elder and the ministers, who had gathered in a front room for a short ministerial meeting, filed in along the aisle. Upon reaching the centre of the room, the leading minister stopped and said the blessing; "The peace of the Lord be with us." After they had filed to the front and

taken their seats, they gave an opening admonition with several prayer reminders. Following the lead of the minister the congregation turned and knelt in silent prayer. In keeping with Matthew 6:5-15, audible prayer was not practiced until the 1930s. A rustle from the minister rising signalled the end of the prayer.

Next came the sermon. It was always written out in full and took almost and hour to read. The sermon ended with an "amen" and another silent prayer. This prayer ended with the words, "May God hear our prayers," and the service ended with a song and a benediction from Numbers, Chapter six.[18]

The sermon inevitably reflected the thinking of the preacher's Mennonite forefathers. The church was to be a true, visible practising discipleship as its Anabaptist forefathers had taught. Subsequently, the sermons often quoted the writings of Menno Simons, Dirk Phillips, Piéter Pieters, The Martyr's Mirror, and the lyrics of the Grosse Gesangbuch (The Big Song Book).

Most of the preaching of this time included admonitions to the brethren to accept life as a trial and to live with eternity in mind. Discipleship of Christ and a humble adoration for God's mercy were also emphasized. Reflecting these ideas are the following lyrics from the Grosse Gesangbuch, which were not only often sung but also quoted in the sermons.

"Till here has our God brought us
Through His abundant goodness
Till here He has through night and day
Kept and maintained our joy.

"Come let us sing where many have passed
and walked through lands of fear and pain.

How many of these have reached their death,
Yet none has missed the joy of heaven."[19]

Also reflecting these ideas is the following excerpt from the central part of a sermon preached by Rev. Peter R. Reimer in Blumenort on February 9, 1888. He stressed the point that the Christian must remain aloof from the affairs of the world.

> In I Peter, verses 11 and 12, it says, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest amongst the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation..."
>
> Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. If we look at our text carefully, we will realize, from the very first words of the apostle's wonderful admonition to his beloved brethren, that we are to be like strangers and pilgrims here. With these words the apostle clearly testifies of the faith and hope that we shall have for something better, yes, for a better and everlasting home, that we can hope for if we oppose all passions of the flesh which fight the soul...We can be completely certain that if we do not oppose these fleshly lusts that we cannot be righteous pilgrims...and that we belong to this world. And if we shall cling to this world with our desires, worldly outlook and arrogant ways, we cannot be unattached pilgrims. The Scriptures reveal that those pilgrims who have gone before us into everlasting peace were quite different. They were strangers here on earth and lived in fear and waited for a city with a foundation built and created by God. These pilgrims allowed themselves to be truly content and let it be known that they were visitors and strangers on earth.
>
> Therefore, beloved, let us pray with David, and join in with the man after the heart of God when he calls to God for help in Psalm 39: "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before Thee: verily every man at his best is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them. And now, Lord what wait I for? My hope is in Thee." (Psalm 39:4-7, KJV)[20]

It was at Bruderschaft (Brotherhood Meeting) that all church business was discussed. Bruderschaft was called by the Elder from time to time. Often it was held on Sunday afternoons in the

village which had hosted the worship service that morning. On other occasions it was called by the Elder at short notice to consider a church-related or moral issue which might arise suddenly. Up to 150 men from various villages attended.

The Elder always chaired the meeting on the basis of an agenda prepared by the ministerial. Any minister or lay person, however, could present to the brethren an issue about which he was concerned. When a straying church member needed to be disciplined, it was at Bruderschaft where he was excommunicated and banned. If a disciplined member had a confession to make, this was where he was heard and reinstated as a member. At times Brudersohaft was used to settle disputes between two conflicting brethren. Decisions were made concerning the church's preparedness for a communion service. Before an issue could be resolved, the Elder sought a consensus of feelings among the brethern. If no consensus could be reached, these meetings broke up with the issue still unresolved.[23]

Over the years many different types of matters and concerns were discussed at the Brotherhood meetings. Usually they concerned matters of lifestyle. In 1887, for instance, the idea of owning stores was discussed and forbidden. Around this time as well the practise of buying buggies with roofs was officially discouraged. Similar actions were taken in respect to telephones in 1905 and automobiles in 1910. Sometimes the threat of government was discussed. In 1906 the Brotherhood decided that church members should not take municipal office jobs and in 1907 the Brotherhood decided to de-register the Kleine Gemeinde schools after the provincial government passed the "Flag Act." Even

community delinquency was dealt with. In 1910 both the practice of youths owning rifles and the medieval wedding practice of charivari were pointed out as practises which should be "worked against."

Weddings usually did not constitute separate services. Marriage ceremonies were generally carried out at the end of a regular Sunday morning service. Occasionally the sermon of the service was a Truh Predigt, one which included admonitions about family life. No reception or special marriage meal was allowed. (See Part II, Chapter 8).[25]

Funerals were gatherings held in the afternoon, about two of three days following death. At first they may have been very simple devotional services held in the home of the deceased. Here passages from the Bible were read and many songs from the Big Song Book sung.[26]

Once the villages were more established, funerals became more elaborate. They even became times of much getting together from faraway places. Preaching at funerals began around the turn of the century, but eulogies or obituaries which praised the deceased were strictly forbidden. The coffin was never brought inside the church. This practice was changed later only after serious opposition. Even then the bodies of excommunicated members were kept outside.

In the first year the dead were buried in scattered graves. By the fall of 1875, however, Blumenort had an extablished graveyard. Blumenhof, also, had an official graveyard. Between 1889 and 1901, however, Blumenhof buried its dead in scattered graves. Several graves are known to have existed at the David L. Plett

farm in the middle of Section 26. Neuanlage settlers buried their dead near the yards of the deceased until at least 1913. In all cases, no permanent grave markers were put up, and only scanty records of deaths kept. Several years after the old graveyard in Blumenort was no longer used, Isaac P. Loewen established the site of a dozen graves with iron markers. The markers, as well as Klaas F. Penner's burial records, were of invaluable help when the Centennial Monument was erected at the site of the old graveyard in 1874.

The following description of early coffins was given by Peter A. Plett at the Blumenort Centennial Service in 1974:

> The dead were prepared in a way entirely different from today. The casket was less of a box, more like a shallow trough from which one could nicely see the face from the side. I watched many times how they prepared the casket. In the bottom they made a mattress from jute bags filled with straw. Then they dressed the body in white cloth. The caskets for children were painted bright yellow, while the caskets for the older folk were painted black. They were made of raw, unfinished wood. The covers slanted down from the middle so that the bodies fitted nicely underneath.[27]

According to another local source, flowers were sometimes picked and put into the coffin.

Baptisms were usually held only once a year. The first baptismal service in Blumenort was held on a very snowy Sunday on October 24, 1875. On this day, eight converts from various Kleine Gemeinde villages throughout the East Reserve were baptized by Elder Peter Toews. They included Jacob B. Toews from Blumenort and Aaron Penner and Aganetha Warkentin from Blumenhof. The others were: Abraham Unger, Jacob Bergmann, Margaretha Giesbrecht, Margaretha Loewen and Anna Goosen.[28]

Young people usually waited until they were 19-21 before seeking baptism. Often they would talk about a spiritual struggle

and a conversion experience which preceded baptism. Peter F. Unger wrote about his conversion in 1884 at the age of 19. "Through the preaching of Rev. Peter Reimer one Sunday, I was stirred and saw my situation outside of God's grace. This caused me to struggle greatly. But the loving Saviour, who so willingly helps each repentant sinner, also helped me. I received peace through His shed blood."[29] Henry R. Reimer wrote the following about his experience: "I gave my heart to the Lord in my 20th year (1896), something which I was ashamed to make known at first."[30] Jacob W. Friesen remembered: "I renewed my life at 21(1913) after a lot of internal struggle. But after that I felt like a new man and life became very good."[31] In those days "salvation" was not talked about openly, for such was a sign of spiritual pride. Young people would signal their spiritual readiness by being baptized.

There seem to have been two different ways in which young people were prepared for baptism. Abram F. Reimer writes that, during the Ascension Day service in 1888, Rev. Jacob Dueck of Gruenfeld invited the youth who wished to be baptized to indicate it soon. From other sources it is known that the youth indicated this desire by visiting the minister's room just before a Sunday morning Andacht. This was a traumatic experience for most young people, and one elderly man, looking back, remembers that he just entered the room and waited for the ministers to do the talking. A special Sunday afternoon was set aside, during which the baptismal candidates would receive special doctrine instruction. Four weeks after the formal invitation, on a Sunday morning service the young people, seated on the front bench, were formally asked the

doctrinal questions. These questions enquired about their knowledge of Christian doctrine, which they had learned years earlier in their catechism classes in school. A few days after this, a special service was held, in which the candidates, dressed in black, were baptized by the Elder. On the afternoon of the same day Abendmahl was held.[33]

The other way in which people were prepared for baptism was through a series of annual meetings. Such meetings were held during any time of the year. In 1882 they were held in February; in 1886 in July, and in 1891 also in February. Excerpts from Abram M. Friesen's diary reveal the procedure of such services for the February, 1891, meetings:

Friday, February 13 - Worship services here in Blumenort; in the morning as well as in the afternoon.
Sunday, Febraury 15 - Worship service in Blumenort and Bruderschaft in the afternoon.
Monday, February 16 - Worship service and Bruderschaft in Steinbach.
Tuesday, February 17 - Worship service and in the afternoon the youths were instructed for baptism.
Wednesday, February 18 - Baptismal service in Blumenort. In the afternoon we prepared for communion.
Thursday, February 19 - Communion service in Blumenort in the morning and in Steinbach in the afternoon.

Communion services, known as Abendmahl (the Lord's Supper), or more commonly simply as Einigkeit (Unity), were usually held after the annual baptismal services. Sometimes they were held twice, one day after another in different villages, to make sure all could be served.[7] Prior to communion came the Vorbereitungs Predigt, the sermon which led the members to examine themselves, making sure they were spiritually prepared for the taking of the

bread and wine. After this came a time of silent prayer and soul-searching. After the bread and wine had been administered, members washed one another's feet in accordance with John 13:15 and greeted one another with the "holy kiss" in symbol of service and fellowship.

Fervent religion life was not only practiced in church. It was seldom that children under 14 or women with children would attend church and their families would have devotional times together at home. This would usually entail a time of singing from the Big Song Book just before bed-time at 9:00 p.m. Sometimes, too, the father would talk of Woat Nehme and read portions from the Bible. Devotional books were also read by the family. The two most popular books read were: T. J. van Bragh't's Martyr's Mirror (1680) and Pieter Pieterz' Ausgewahlte Schriften (1865). Church records from the turn of the century reveal that these books were bought in large quantities and resold to the church people. Other widely-read books included: John Philip Schalabie's Die Wandelnde Seele and, of course, Menno Simon's writings.

More specific examples of early home devotional life come from the writings and interviews of several early Blumenorters. A son of Abraham R. Penner remembers that, as in all Kleine Gemeinde families, there was only silent prayer at home. It was not till the 1920s that audible prayer became acceptable in the Penner home through the influence of the EMB ministry in Steinbach. The children of Mrs. Jacob R. Reimer (later Mrs. Klaas W. Reimer) remember how their mother loved telling them stories and teaching them to pray. A son of Jacob B. Friesen remembers

that his parents would often have biblical discussions with their visitors and that he would be tempted to join the discussion because he knew the Bible so well from school. It was not acceptable, however, for a boy to tell his parents these things, so he was quiet. A son of the Peter F. Unger family remembers that while "there was little family devotions, when there were thunderstorms, our father would get us together downstairs and he'd read the Bible or lyrics from the Big Song Book to us." Finally, a son-in-law of Peter R. Reimer remembers an admonition fathers would often give their sons when a wrong had been comitted. The father would quietly and very simply say, Daut vel vie nich (That we don't want to do), and the message received.

The Kleine Gemeinde church did not remain static during this early period in Manitoba.[35] In fact, the most important historical event for Blumenort between 1875 and 1910 was a church event. In 1881 almost 40 Blumenort-area people, about ahlf of the adult community, decided to leave the Kleine Gemeinde and join the Church of God in Christ Mennonite, more commonly called the Holdeman church, or even Toewsgemeinde.

This decision followed a series of brotherhood meetings and house visitations in 1881 by John Holdeman, a 51-year-old church reformer from Ohio. He had visited Manitoba in November, 1879, on the invitation of Elder Peter Toews, who felt deeply that the Kleine Gemeinde needed to be spiritually renewed in order to be the true Church of God. During his stay in Manitoba, Holdeman preached in the various Kleine Gemeinde churches and made house visitations, always sharing his message of spirit-

ual renewal. During this time he was also in close consultation with the ministerial, who not only gave their blessings to Holdeman's work but considered uniting the Kleine Gemeinde with Holdeman's reformed church in the United States, the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.[36]

After Holdeman returned to the United States, he wrote Elder Toews that the union would not be possible because the Kleine Gemeinde was too schism-ridden, too formal, too quick to baptize anyone and not spiritual enought to constitute the "True Church." What was needed in the Kleine Gemeinde was a complete new start, with each person being re-baptized and then individually joining The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.[37]

The Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood had been so impressed with Holdeman's preaching that they commissioned Elder Toews to visit Holdeman's church in Kansas. Accompanying Toews on this trip was his cousin, Cornelius S. Plett, of Blumenhof. Toews and Plett came away with very different impressions.

Back in Manitoba it became apparent that there was a growing division of thought on the matter of joining with Holdeman. Toews felt strongly that Holdeman's analysis of the Kleine Gemeinde was correct. Many years later Toews wrote why it was that he had concluded that the Kleine Gemeinde was not the "True Church."

> I was reared in the Kleine Gemeinde church and as a young boy was often taken along to church services. Hence, I began to realize at a very early age that the true church of God existed, especially since...the Kleine Gemeinde had withdrawn from the main body of Mennonites...I did not doubt that the Kleine gemeinde was the remnant of the people of God whose pleasure it would be to give the Kingdom of God.
>
> Through baptism I joined the Kleine Gemeinde, and I believe that I was converted at that time. When I was only 25, I was chosen to the ministry. Because the church was divided at this time and the storm in it often rose high, I was not at peace. In studying an Anabaptist writing in 1874, I discovered that there was a difference between the true church and the Kleine Gemeinde...

> What finally led me to break with the Kleine Gemeinde was the fact that many of the members, among them ministers, had been baptized without being converted. According to the teachings of the Scriptures, the members of the body of Christ of the Church of God must be baptized by one spirit into the body of Christ. The Kleine Gemeinde, although they say that they have left [the dead church], accept the baptism of other Mennonites without doubt, whether converted or unconverted.
>
> Also I did not find anything of the 'testimony of Jesus which is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev. 19:10) in the Kleine Gemeinde, [although] I believe that those who were in authority in establishing the Kleine Gemeinde were such that, had there been more light available regarding this matter, they would have accepted it.[39]

Opposing Elder Toews were men like Rev. Peter Baerg, the senior minister in the Gemeinde and a close friender to the Elder. Baerg wrote the following account of why he did not support the idea of joining Holdeman's church:

> [During Holdeman's first visit] things were noted here and there that made our side doubt whether our faith was not, in fact, quite different from his. A union with him would mean a violation with the foundation of our faith and our consciences. Holdeman believed that Christ would not appear in the next 20 or 30 or 40 years while he prophesied, and that, before this, a number of Jews would be converted. Also, there were portions that were very strange for us and not in unity with the faith of our forefathers. For instance, his going out [from the Old Mennonite Church] or beginning, was mostly based on dreams, visions, and a study of history which Menno and Philips rejected...And so there were 12-15 points on which we did not agree.[40]

Things came to head on July 17, 1881, when Peter Toews announced that he could no longer serve the Kleine Gemeinde with communion or baptism, and, with the support of many brethren, invited Holdeman back to Manitoba. In November Holdeman, accompanied by a fellow minister, Mark Steiler, returned to Manitoba for another series of meetings. John M. Penner, has written that Holdeman's preaching was "convincing and lifegiving."[15] Early in 1882 Peter Toews was re-baptized by Holdeman, and in the succeeding weeks almost half of the Kleine Gemeinde followed.

One of the things which those who joined the new church often spoke of was spiritual renewal and an assurance of salvation. John B. Toews, along with Aaron W. Reimer and John T. Wiebe, was the first youth to join the Holdeman Church. Many years later he wrote about the experience.

> [My repentance and conversion] were taken quite seriously, but my faith and trust in God seemed so weak. I couldn't realize the fact that God had forgiven me...I was under the impression that God might give me a clearer vision of 'thy sins are forgiven thee' than He had given several others converts...Through the winter and springtime the good Spirit more or less had His way with me and I grasped sufficient faith that God had forgiven my sins. My feelings of condemnation were gone.[41]

The members who remained in the Kleine Gemeinde had other feelings. Peter Baerg wrote that "the remaining members of the church stood fast, like sheep which have been chased about." Cornelius P. Friesen, the Blumenort school teacher, gave his impression of the division by quoting Psalm 30:31, Matthew 7:24-27, and I Corinthians 3:4, each of which emphasizes the idea of steadfastness and a firm spiritual foundation.[42] Jacob Kroeker of Rosenort, who was to become the new Kleine Gemeinde Elder, wrote that the schism "really jurt me and affected me because we loved all the brethren very much and they meant much to me. And suddenly we were called to separate if we could not accept their faith and be baptized again. So...we were like sheep without a shepherd."[43]

The immediate aftermath of the division was far-reaching reorganization of the existing church institution. The people who had been rebaptized and testified of spiritual renewal organized as the Manitoba chapter of Holdemsn's American church. It chose Peter Toews as its Elder and Martin Penner of Blumenort os one of

its ministers.

Reorganization for the Kleine Gemeinde was a more difficult matter. Only three ministers and two deacons remained in the Lehrdienst of the old church. Thus, an urgent message was sent to Nebraska requesting help from Abraham Friesen, the Elder of the Heuboden Kleine Gemeinde Lehrdienst of the old church. Thus, in an act of reconciliation the remaining leadership urgently asked for help from the Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska, which had been a separate Kleine Gemeinde church since 1866.

On February 10, 1882, the Nebraska Elder, Abraham Friesen, along with Rev. Johann Harms, (a brother-in-law to Peter Loewen of Neuanlage) arrived in Rosenhof, Manitoba, and began conducting church services and brotherhood meetings to reunite those who had remained in the Kleine Gemeinde and to seek a union with the Nebraska church. Four days later Elder Friesen moved on to the East Reserve, where he held similar meetings in Gruenfeld, Steinbach and Blumenort. In the morning Friesen preached on the articles of faith which would re-unite the Manitoba (Blumenhof) and Nebraska (Heuboden) churches. In the afternoon Jacob Kroeker preached.[44]

The aftermath of the Holdeman Secession thus resulted in two reorganized churches, both with close ties with their American counterparts. The most important social consequence of the secession for the Blumenort area was that the community was no longer a socially homogeneous one. A total of 26 adults in Blumenort and 13 from Blumenhof had joined the Holdeman Church.[45] In the Blumenort village only eight of the nineteen families remained in the Kleine Gemeinde. In Blumenhof seven of the thirteen families remained and in Neuanlage all remained in the Kleine Gemeinde.

Yet much can be said for the strong ties which remained between the two peoples. It was 12 years in Blumenort and 30 years in Blumenhof before the Holdeman people began looking for sepatate places to live. During that time the two churches chared the school house for church activities. Members from both churches participated fully in the Schulzenbott and the Waisenverordnung. Around the turn of the century the predominantly Kleine Gemeinde group in Blumenort relied on Holdeman teachers for education, and on the Holdeman doctor from Blumenhof for medication. Similarly, Holdeman people patronized Abram Reimer;s blacksmith shop and Johann Reimer's general store. In both Blumenort and Blumenhof the Toews, Penner and Plett threshing outfits brought the Holdeman and Kleine Gemeinde farmers together in a common endeavor. Finally, the fledging Holdeman Church depended on the Kleine Gemeinde for financial assistance. Church records show that the Holdeman Church borrowed $135 at 5 percent interest from the Kleine Gemeinde for the first two years of its existence and paid in installments over the next five years.

Another church event of lasting importance to Blumenort was a conference of Kleine Gemeinde leaders held at the village meeting house in July 1, 1899. The conference was held to establish a united voice on a series of issues which were plaguing the church. The turn of the century was a time of change in the Kleine Gemeinde.. Many new things that the church would have opposed in Russia were now accepted. In Blumenort and Steinbach church people were operating stores. Farmers were leaving the villages to live on their legally-owned homestead quarters. Students were beginning to study English, and teachers were attending

Normal School. Funeral services were being held in churches and, at Sunday morning weddings, special sermons would be heard.

There were some changes, however, that the church tried to stop. These were things that affected the basic belief that humility and simplicity were the most important attributes of a true Christian. During the 1890s, new ideas held to by American evangelical Mennonites were beginning to be accepted by some local people. In 1897 four Steinbach families left the Kleine Gemeinde to establish a "progressive, accommodating church," known as the Bruderthaler Church.[46] In the eyes of the Kleine Gemeinde Lehrdienst in 1899, the church needed to show a united commitment to oppose foreign ideas. Below is a summary of the six resolutions discussed at the conference.

> First - no government office, whether small or big, shall be held, and no election shall be participated in...According to Christ's own words, no one can serve two masters...Matt. 7:12.
>
> Secondly - we find no scriptural basis to allow for the attendance of services led by a minister who is not a Kleine Gemeinde,...and so we should guard ourselves against those who are leaving us and have left us. Matt. 7:15-21.
>
> Thirdly - we cannot accept non-Christian weddings, as they are not done "in the Lord", and the same holds for church brethren attending these weddings. I Cor. 7:39
>
> Fourthly - singing practices which use part-singing we view as more harmful then helpful because they lead away from the simplicity of Christ. We consider it forbidden for church brethren or their children to visit Sunday Schools where lessons do not agree with our confession of faith. II Cor. 11:13.
>
> Fifthly - photographs and picture-taking we hold to be unscriptural; first, they serve to honor mortal and wordly man; secondly, they lead to idolatry; and thirdly to adultery and non-Christian weddings (read the writings of Peter Peters and Dietrich Phillips).
>
> Sixthly - freely delivered sermons at funerals and all new practices except an ordinary sermon we consider unscriptural ...these practices were not used by the early Christians but were begun by the Popery, as was the prayer and preaching at the grave. Matt. 6:5-7.[47]

In a show of unanimity, the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde tentatively accepted the above six resolutions in 1899. When they were officially accepted two years later, they ensured that the direction of the Kleine Gemeinde would not change appreciably until the end of World War II.[48] Because four of the 16 delegates were from the Blumenort area and the conference was held at the Blumenort Church, it might be fair to suggest that the religious ideals reflected in these six resolutions were not foreign to the ideas held by local leaders. This conference entrenched Blumenort as the stalwart supporter of conservative Kleine Gemeinde ideals.

Footnotes

1 Peter B. Friesen, "Kleine Gemeinde Wahlliste," Albert Friesen, Kleefeld, Manitoba.
2 Abram P..Friesen, et. al., op. cit., p. 137.
3 Abram P..Reimer, "Biographe von Peter R. Reimer," Reimer Familienregister, pp. 215-218.
4 Peter Baerg, church chronicles, 1882, transliterated by Menno D. Loewen, courtesy Klaas C. Penner, Belize, C.A.
5 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, p. 64.
6 Interview with Peter J.B. Reimer, Rosenort, Manitoba, January, 1978.
7 Peter Baerg, op. cit.
8 A photocopied collection of C.L. Plett's diaries and correspondences has been compiled by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.
9 Peter Toews, Sammlung.
10 Baerg, op. cit.
11 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
12 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
13 Histories of the Congregations (Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, Publication Board, Hesston, Kansas, 1963), p. 164.
14 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
15 "Obituary of Abram L. Plett," Familienfreund, October, 1934, p. 13.
16 This information was derived from the records of church offerings in Kleine Gemeinde Rechnung 1883-1923, Blumenort E.M. Church, Blumenort, Manitoba.
17 Ibid.
18 Interview with Peter J.B. Reimer, Rosenort, Manitoba, January, 1978.

19 This song is quoted in several early letters and sermons. It was sung at the Blumenort Centennial Service, August, 1974. Tape recording in the possession of Bernard P. Doerksen.
20 Peter R. Reimer, sermon, 1899, Klaas Reimer, Riverton, Manitoba.
21 Cornleius L. Plett, sermon, 1900, Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort.
22 Peter W. Loewen, letter to Johann L. Harms, 1895, transliterated by Delbert F. Plett, original at Bethel College, Kansas.
23 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
24 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
25 One exception to the Sunday morning wedding was the wedding of Jacob B. Toews and Margaretha Loewen at the Loewens' home in Hochstadt on a Tuesday afternoon in 1876.
26 Jacob W. Friesen recalled that Peter Baerg's funeral was held in a home in Neuanlage.
27 Peter A. Plett, speech at Blumenort Centennial Service, July, 1974.
28 Abraham R. Friesen, op. cit.
29 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
30 Henry R. Reimer, op. cit.
31 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
32 Abraham F. Reimer, op. cit.
33 Peter Baerg, op. cit.
34 Abraham M. Friesen, op. cit.
35 For a detailed history of the Holdeman Church se Clarence Hiebert, The Holdeman People the Church of God and Christ: 1859-1969, (South Pasadena, California, 1973)
36 Baerg, op. cit.
37 Hiebert, op. cit.
38 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, p. 25.
39 Peter Toews, op. cit., translated by Delbert F. Plett.
40 Baerg, op. cit.
41 John B. Toews, op. cit., p. 11
42 Cornelius P. Friesen, preface to sermon preached by Elder Abraham Friesen, in Manitoba, in February, 1882, Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.
43 Jacob Kroeker, Chronicle, David L. Plett Papers, Peter K. Plett, Blumenort.
44 Baerg, op. cit.
45 John M. Penner, A Concise History of the Church of God (Gospel Publishers, Hesston, Kansas, 1951), p. 84.
46 Leland Harder, Steinbach and Its Churches (Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, 1970), pp. 45-48.
47 "Blumenort Conferenz, 1899," edited and transliterated by Klaac C. Penner, Belize, C.A.
48 Harold Dyck, op. cit. pp. 93-94.

Part II Chapter 8: Culture: Low German and "Spazieren"

Culture refers to customs, language and art which make a group of people different from others. Although the way of living of the Kleine Gemeinde villagers was very simple, a unique and deeply-rooted culture had developed through the years. Klaas Reimer had been against laughter, bright colors, funeral eulogies and wedding festivities. This thinking was carried from Russia, to Manitoba, where sports, music, photographs and even history were opposed on the grounds that they would undermine the simple life-style. Through the years in Manitoba these ideas changed.

The culture found in Blumenort in the first years was controlled by the church, the school and the village way of life. Their language, families, social life, writings and courting practices show what the village culture really was.

Low German is a dynamic, expressive and sometimes crude language. It was used at all times except in school and church. Low German was used to name people, to tell folk stories, to reminisce and to conduct business at the Schulzenbott or Bruderschaft.

Low German had been adapted way back in Prussia. It was the language spoken in the low areas of the north, and, because it was very much like the Dutch, the Mennonites began using it. When they moved to Russia and on to Canada, the Mennonites brought the Low German along. Wherever it went, it picked up new words. Thus by 1900 the language heard in the Blumenort area was a Low

German with a sprinkling of Dutch, Russian, High German and English.

Even the way of pronouncing Low German changed in time. Blumenorters pronounced their words differenctly from their Bergthaler neighbours. The reason for this was that the Kleine Gemeinde had originally come from the Molotschna colony and the Bergthalers from the Chortitza colony.

Many families in the Blumenort area were known by Low German pseudonyms. (Bie Nomis). Such names were usually quite expressive and often disliked. But in Blumenort, where there were fewer than a dozen common surnames and Christian names, pseudonyms became an accepted way of identifying people. (It is hoped that by offering some examples of such names, no one will be offended.)

Bie Nomis sometimes indentified people by their physical characteristics. Groute Toewse and Kleine Klauses naturally referred to the Toews family which had big boys and finely-built Klassens from Neuanlage. Other Bie Nomis identified families with a location. Everyone knew who the Hochfeldsche Reimasch or the Greenlandische Pannasch were. Sometimes a person's occupation identified him. To hear of Stoa Reimasch or Docta Warkentin was common. Names were not always complimentary. There was frequent talk of De Goaschtriche Friees, Foola Reima and Bulli Panna. Maternal names sometimes helped to identify a certain family; in Blumenhog there were Rose Friesens and in Blumenort Eidse Friesens. Sometimes even a person's personal characteristics were used. Aupel Mosse Reima enjoyed apple pudding and Raka Platt was a hard worker. Most often, however, the English equivalent to Senior or Junior was used. Everyone in

Blumenort knew who Olla Kjnals or Yunge Johann Koope were.

Poetry was by far the most common form of writing. In this literary genre people expressed their feelings and gave their views of life. It was the form of literary expression. Poetry was written from the time a child mastered Schoenschriften and memorized Wienachtsgedichte to the time grandparents moved to their children's Fiastaed and compiled their Familienbucher. It was a respected and encouraged form of expressing one's feelings when mourning a death or remembering the past. Often these poems were read or sung at family gatherings.

This tradition has been maintained, and, even today, elderly members of the community carry on this memorable tradition. Below are four poems, each written locally. The first two are serious poems about death originally written in High German. The second two, written in Low German, try to portray everyday life in the past.

The following poem was written by Mrs. Isaac Penner (nee Margaretha Toews - 1860-1933), a sister-in-law to Heinrich Wiebe, upon his tragic death.

In Memory of Heinrich Wiebe

The Lord has allowed it to be shown
How soon it is finished with us;
How quickly this time on earth
Can be changed to the time of eternity.

Oh listen to what has happened!
Oh listen to what has happened!
Suddenly the Lord has called one of us
Out of this Valley of Sorrow.

Eighteen hundred and seventy-six
Once, on a beautiful day,
Twelve sleighs set out from Blumenort
To the forest in the east.

They left, thinking they'd all see us again,
But the Lord had planned it differently;

When they at last were ready to return
They drove west without a dangerous thought.

But oh! What happened soon?
A terrible storm they met
Which covered up the way;
So terrible it is hard to tell.

Now they strayed this way and that
And did not know which way was home.
But they continued pressing onward
From one unknown place to another.

Some men became discouraged
And some stopped looking hard,
Believing the end was very near.
Each man saw death before his eyes.

But others calmly persevered;
They would not rest or stop;
They searched and then it happened -
They'd found themselves near Blumenhof.

So they continued on in hope,
But oh! what happened there?
One man he lost his way
As others arrived at neighbor's homes.

He was in very grave danger;
Heinrich Wiebe was his name.
A wife, three children he left
When the storm ended his life.

We hope that God accepted him in grace
As he ended his pilgrim walk out here;
This now is our only comfort
We've laid him in earth's dark lap.

Four years was he a deacon,
Five-and-twenty was his age.
Out of the midst of life
God calls us to eternity.[1]

The following poem was written by Jacob L. Plett (1864-1931). It deals with the struggles of raising a family, seeing the time past and the prospect of heaven. It was read by his son, Jacob J.K. Plett, at the Plettentag celebrations in Blumenhof in 1945 and was translated by Saskatchewan poet, Margaret Penner Toews, in 1983.

When I Recall the Yesteryears

When I recall the yesteryears
When I was strong and young,
When mid its joy and pleasures

No care was found among,
O, how could life have been so good
When I could work as strong men should
And knew no weariness!

Yet as the years rolled onward
They brought with them their sorrow;
Life's troubles crowded on me
And had less joy to borrow.
With each increase in family
So, too, responsibility,
And cares began to weigh.

For when my children all were young
And innocence was theirs,
Life still went well; I did not see
Its pitfalls and its snares.
But as their childhood days took wing,
Their innocence a bygone thing,
As one needs must, I awakened.

A sinner, I, and sinner still,
E'en through my best endeavor;
O, could I be more as I ought,
And all sin's urges sever!
O, could I teach my children more
Through godly walk and wisdom's lore,
And set a good example.

O Lord, look down upon my pain
And help my load to bear;
Where I have sinned and gone astray,
Prevent me from complete despair.
Teach me, if error I should make,
That I might change the course I take
While life and breath is mine.

For swift and swifter fly the hours;
Each moment death is nearer.
So help while it yet is day
To see the way still clearer.
My children all, who follow me,
Grant each Thy heaven eternally!
O Lord, to us grant mercy!

There we will praise with grateful joy,
Our adoration bring,
With new tongues hallelujahs raise,
A new song we will sing.
There never will the foe molest,
And there at last for aye we'll rest
From weariness and sorrow.[2]

The poem below, while of a humorous nature, has in it a definite moral. It was often recited by John G. Barkman, who knew it from the time he was a little boy. He later taught it to his school

children in Kansas. The poem is written from the perspective of a grown man reminiscing about his childhood. It begins by describing a hard-working mother who works into the night mending clothes for her son. She also expends a lot of energy in preparing a variety of meals for him. It is her station as well to wash his ears and give him a Scherienje, a bowl-shpaed haircut. Finally, she also keeps him disciplined with the milk stick, a stick generally used to support milk vats but which also made a handy disciplinary rod. With such a mother, concludes the poet, a child will certainly succeed, and it is the world's undoing that it has lost the milk stick.

Dee Malkstock

Waut Mutta fe mie deed
Daut woa Eck nicht fejaete;

Woa See biem flekje niemals meed wort
But enne Nacht jesaete.

Miene Beckse wiere emma twae
En miene Stremp feraete;

Dann woll Eck bie mien allalae
Noch emma waut tom aete.

Dee Gjretje Malck, dee Plumme Moos,
Dee Schnetje, en de Kjielkje.

Wou kun dee Mutta daut doch bloss
Daut nemmt je doch en wielkje!

Seh woscht Dreijk von miene Ohre root
En schneet mie en Scherienje.

Haud dee Liehra Schlaejarie met mie
En See kreecht daut to hierre,

Dan musz een gouda Malk Stock
Mie dee Weedoag noch femierre.

Bie soune Mutta, ohne Froag,
Kaun jieda Kjint waut woare.

Dann fercht Eck, daut de Welt vondoag
Dee Malck Stock haft feloare.[3]

Peter A. Plett has become a well-known Low German poet.

He grew up in Blumenhof, married a Blumenort girl in 1925, and moved to Landmark. The following poem gives his perception of Blumenort in its early years. He describes the wildlife, vegetation and stream of the Blumenort area before the white man came. When the men from Russia came, they were struck by the beauty of the pland and, fully trusting God, they went about building a village. Houses were simply built and the barns attached to them. The clay loam was broken and seed sown after many days of back-breaking toil. A pasture was set aside where Old Cornelius, the herdsman, would take the cattle. A rough earthen road, which turned into a sea of mud when it rained, was built. The pioneers saw fit to give this place the beautiful name of Blumenort.

Daut Blomenoat

Doa wea mol ne Staed unjrem bleiwen Himmel
Mank Heischrakke, Mies en Hose;
Dei Stap dei wort mau blos jebrukt
Fe Hersche en Beffels toom grose.
  Dan kaume dee Manna von Russlaund aun,
  Dee haude daut Laund doa beseene;
  Doa wosse doch Paple en Wiedestruk,
  Doa sulle see foarmre kjenne.
Doa wea von Suedost ne lange Ritsch
Met kloaret Wota benne;
Daut wea doa sone feine Staed
Se brikte sik nich lang besenne.
  Doa siedelde dee Kleen Gemeende aun
  Em vollen Gottfetrue,
  Sei maute sik ihre Koagels ut
  En fonge aun Hiesa to buue.
Se moake ne Floa von gauns efacht Holt --
Doa wea keen Zeig nop geleigt;
Se straede doa Saund oda Soagespoon nop,
Daut sag je doch goanich so schleicht.
  Dem Staul en daut Wohnhus daut bude se toop,
  Daut kje wie uk goot vestone;
  Dan kunne see maklich ungjrem Dak
  Em Staul besorge gone.
Dag ut, en Dag en ha see doa jeschauft
En ha sik sea jemeagt;
Met Osse en Haundploag, so sacht aus daut jing,
Dem Lehmboddem rom gepleagt.

En aus dee Iad wea fien jeworde
Dan wort doa dee Soat jeseit;
Se prowde waut doa mau emma wul wause
Aus Joascht en Howa en Waet.
Dem Sack met Soat oppem linken Oarm,
So seide see ea Jetraejd;
Dan kleiwde se daut en beetke en
Met aeene Heltanne Eagd.
De Ole Knals de joag daut Fee
Em Noade nen nom Hock;
He bloosd sien Hoan, en piept en roopt
Dan jingt daut sea bolt drock;
Auf gida Koh gemolke wea
Doa wort nich no gefroagt;
Dan worde Kjiag en Kjalwa blos
Schwind oppe Gaus jejoagt.
Doa lengd de Gaus wea Leimje Grund,
Wan't raejend gauf daut nauts;
Dan wort waut aula derchgeklungt --
Dan wea daut doa ne Schmauts!
En faena Nome haude see
Von Russlaund aul jekannt;
So wort daut niee Darp hia dann
En Blomenoat jenannt.[4]

Spaziere (Visiting)

Spaziere in Low German meant visiting. Visiting at the house of a neighbor or a relative was by far the most important social activity practised by the Blumenort settlers. While attending a Schulzenbott meeting or a hog-slaughtering bee was an important social event, it was the visit of another's home that was most sought after.

Short visits were acceptable at any time or any day of the week. It was only an odd farmer that would not be glad to stop his work for a while when a guest appeared on the yard. Village culture encouraged visiting. This was true especially for women. They needed only to walk a short distance along the garden path and pass through the border-fence gates to reach their closest neighbor. Knitting and patchwork would invariably be brought along so no one could be accused of neglecting her work.

There were limits to the amount of visiting. Village women tended to frown on busybodies. It was generally thought that Mrs. Rodinzel did too much visiting. Not having a family, she apparently loved nothing more than taking her knitting and walking down the street looking for a place to visit. Even spring rains which made the street virtually impassable did not stop Mrs. Rodinzel.

The best time for visiting was Sunday afternoons. Many guests could be expected on Grout Sindach, when Blumenort hosted the worship service. Friends from Steinbach and Gruenfeld were always welcome. Not only was one fulfilling a scriptural injunction by having an open home; it was also a sign of prestige if one had many guests. On such Sundays the younger children usually stayed at home, although teenagers were expected to come with their parents. During these visits, discussion would centre around the sermon, farming, relatives and even world events someone might have read in the Mennonitische Rundshau or the Nordwesten. They would also often think back and talk von aune Eint, the first year of settlement. After a time of hearty eating and visiting, the head of the house would get the Groute Gesang Boak and lead the visitors in a time of singing. Singing tended to be a solemn time of worship and devotion. After singing, some of the guests might stay for Faspa, while others would go on to visit another village family. It was not uncommon for a visiting family to visit three different places in the village on that special Sunday.[5]

Diaries from these early times offer fine examples of the practice of Spazieren. Rev. C.L. Plett records that on January 6,

1895, in -15° weather, he went to church in Blumenort. In the afternoon he visited at Cornelius P. Friesens and dropped in at Henry E. Pletts, where he met Peter Ungers who were visiting there with their son, Johann, and his fiance, Maria Reimer. Gottlieb Jahnkes were visiting there as well. On Wednesday of that week the engaged couple, chaperoned by Henry E. Pletts, visited C.L. Pletts' home in Blumenhof. The next, on Thursday, C.L. Pletts went to visit Peter W. Loewens and the old Johann Koops in Neuanlage. On Saturday night of that week, C.L. Pletts visited the Abram L. Plett home. On Sunday, the day of Peter F. Unger and Maria Reimer's wedding, church was held in Steinbach and C.L. Plett spent the afternoon at the home of his brother-in-law, the Frank Kroekers.[6]

Spazieren was not limited to visiting one's fellow villagers. Existing diaries reveal that frequent visits were made, not only to friends and relatives in Steinbach and Gruenfeld, but also to fellow Kleine Gemeinders at Scratching River and Nebraska. It was always a special occasion when guests from Nebraska came and made their rounds, visiting as many relatives as possible. Occasionally relatives from Russia, who independently decided to move to North America, also dropped in at Blumenort.[7]

Folk stories told during these times of Spaziere were another important part of the village culture. These stories were orally passed on in Low German from one generation to the next. They told of times of hardships, tragedy, irony and heroism.

One such story about the Blumenort pioneer, Peter Penner, the forefather of all Kleine Gemeinde Penners in Manitoba, was

told by Margaret C. Penner of Belize.

> While still in the Molotschna Colony and when he was only 13, Peter Penner fell from a horse and twisted his neck. He lay so still that his family and the neighbors considered him dead. Funeral preparations were made, the body was washed and laid out on a table. Relatives gathered around the table to sing some hymns. When they left, one of the relatives noticed that young Peter's head wasn't facing straight up, so he returned to straighten it. As he did so, Peter opened his eyes and it was discovered that he was still alive. How surprised and joyous the relatives were one can only assume. Afterwards it was theorized that Peter's neck had twisted so that he was paralyzed.[8]

Later on, this Peter was to outlive four wives and be the father of 25 children. The story is told by John D. Penner, a great-grandson, that Peter Penner in his old age insisted that any problems he had with his fifth wife were surely not his fault because he had learned to live with four previous wives.

Another frequently-told story was about Johann Plett, the father to pioneer Cornelius S. Plett of Blumenhof. It was recorded in 1916 by Peter Isaac and appeared in his family book.[PI67]

> "A certain man in the neighborhood had advertised his house for sale. A few days before the sale, the owner was aware of ghost-like noises in this house. This worried him, because it diminished his chance of getting a good price for his property. He reasoned if it should become known in the community, he might not be able to sell the house at all. When he confided his dilemma to Johann Plett, with the remark that "the devil must be behind all this", Johann remarked, "There is no devil in your house, and I will rid your house of those noises, provided that you tell no one of our arrangement." The owner was skeptical but agreed. It was wintertime, so the next evening Johann Plett built a fire in the fireplace to keep warm and settled down in the darl room to await the "ghost". After a while the noise started in the second storey and Johann called, "Come down here", and on the stairs appeared a form so huge that Johann feared the steps would break. The figure had the head of a horse and feet like a camel. In its hand was a large pole or post. The "horrible form" had stood for a few minutes and nothing happened, Johann took the coal shuttle, stirred the fire and gathered up the shuttle full of hot embers and dumped them on the feet of the "ghost", who quickly shook them off. Then Johann Plett remarked, "If you are a ghost glowing coals can't burn you, so then you are not a genuine

> devil" and with that he grabbed the figure, threw it to the floor, tore off its mask, and jerked it back on its feet again and remarked, "Now you can go home; your role of ghost-acting is over." Johann recognized the man as one in the neighborhood who had hoped to buy the house cheaply, if his plan succeeded. He was however, not successful, since Johann Plett spread the news of this episode through the whole community."[9]

Another story is told by Abe P. Unger of his grandfather, Abram Reimer, who came to Blumenort in 1874 and set up a blacksmith shop:

> Not only was Grandfather a man of strong character and convictions, he was also a strong man physically. It is reported that he delivered a wagon to a customer living on the other end of the village, carrying the wagon on his back. The wagon weighed about 600 pounds. Another incident in his life reveals his sense of humor and wisdom. The hired man was a trustworthy and willing worker, till one day, in Grandfather's absence, he was placed at the head of the table for the noon meal. Occupying this place of honor affected the servant adversely, and Grandfather soon noticed that his loyalty and service were not as in former days. Having learned from Grandmother the probable reason for this change of attitude in the servant, Grandfather took it patiently for some time. Then, one day, both servant and master were working side by side in the blacksmith shop. Grandfather was busy and bade the hired man to set the anvil on the bench. The servant tried hard, but the anvil was too heavy and he was unable to lift it. Grandfather, then, with his one free arm simply lifted the anvil and set it on the bench himself. This put the hired man to such shame that respect and loyalty were once again restored in the servant towards his master.[10]

Sometimes the stories were tragic. Mrs. Peter B. Reimer (nee Margaretha Fast) relates the following story of her grandfather, Cornelius Fast. Fast was the father of Cornelius W. Fast who taught school in Neuanlage near Blumenort and the great-grandfather to Cornie J. Fast of Blumenort.

> Grandfather died in a terrible accident in Russia. He was a blacksmith and ran a blacksmith shop. One day a man by the name of Cornies brought a cannon shell to Grandfather and asked him to melt it down.
>
> Grandfather asked, "Is there any powder in the shell?" Cornies told him that he had removed it all. Grandfather, however, wanted to be certain, so he poured in some ashes. Then the

> shell exploded and ripped off one of his legs. When Grandmother heard the blast, she jumped up, forgetting that she had a child on her lap, and cried, "Now father and Cornelius are dead." Cornelius (Jr.) had run away before the explosion and nothing happened to him.
>
> Because Cornies did not want to get a Russian doctor, as this could result in complications, he went to fetch a German doctor. It took two days and one night to get there by horse. Throughout this time grandfather was in great pain. Then father, as a 16-year-old, went to get two of his sisters, but when they returned, Grandfather had died.[11]

The time of childhood was considered special. While Kleine Gemeinde values of simplicity and seriousness were taught to children, there seems to have been a time when they were not expected to conform entirely to Kleine Gemeinde ways. The pastime of the children, the mischievous pranks by the boys and even the time of courting and dating of the youth, although rooted in their Russian past, did not always reflect the traditions of the church.

Most children had many chores to do at home besides attending school. Parents were quite strict, and children usually needed permission to go into the yard of their friends. Often, however, neighbor children congregated at the fence on the border. Here they fashioned crude swings, using binder twine strung on horse tie rails. Sometimes children could be seen sitting on the milk table at the street, watching the wagons go past and chewing Kjeesjes or cheeses. Or they could be seen following the maid, watching her at work. John R. Reimer's daughter, Marie (Mrs. John C. Reimer), remembers how, as a very little girl, she followed her Tante Anna into the cow pen. Anna placed her on the large rock. From here Marie watched Anna milk the cows and listened to her sing the common folk song, Maria sasz auf einen Stein. On other occasions girls played with dolls made from rags and store-bought glass beads.

When several children got together, they played the games they remembered from Russia. They played Blinde Kou (Blind Man's Buff) or a similar game called Doa Set Dee Olle Babe (There Sits Old Babe). In the latter game girls would grab the outer skirt of a girl in the centre and walk around her chanting the chorus, then altogether they would lift the skirt above the head of the girl and run. The person tagged by the girl was the next Olla Babe.[12]

Zoakje (Piggie) was a more complex game played by the boys. Several boys stood in a circle, each holding a stick placed in a fair-sized hole. One boy had to stand in the middle and hit an object, a tin can or shoe, toward a boy in the circle. This boy would have to remove his stick and try to hit the object from his territory. If the object got into his hole, everyone had to change places. In the ensuing rush the middle boy would try to secure a hole for himself. The odd man out now became the Zoakje.[13]

Canadian sports were not introduced until many years after settlement. In fact, most Kleine Gemeinde members from the Blumenort area considered sports of games, for anyone besides children, wrong. Some of the more conservative, hard-working families insisted that there was no need for sports; for exercise, water and wood could always be hauled. John R. Penner remembered that he had to run to work as a youth and had even run to church in Steinbach, and subsequently he pressed on his children these values of hard work, John's uncle, Klaas F. Penner, had often quoted; "Six days shalt one labor" and hence discouraged his sons from participating in sports.

Other families, especially those from Blumenhof and Neuanlage, those with close relatives in Steinbach, were more open to

sports. Jacob W. Friesen remembers playing Baseball in a Neuanlage pasture.. It was something new, and Jacob found it difficult to get enough fellows to play, particularly as it was forbidden. Some Reimer boys from Blumenort did play, as did a couple of Hiebert boys from Bergthal.

Peter A. Plett recalls the Blumenhof boys playing the forbidden game of baseball against the Blumenort boys in the community pasture. He remembers Peter and Cornelius, sons of Klaas P. Reimer, and Abram and Henry, sons of Klaas F. Penner, playing for Blumenort. The equipment they used was primitive. A Binga-roll tapered at the end made a fine bat and a "league-ball" had been purchased with rabbit money for $1.25 in Winnipeg.

Perhaps the most popular sport was soccer which was played regularly at school and which, no doubt, had been played in Russia. The one sport that was never played, however, was hockey.

Most often, however, boys did not need sports to entertain themselves. Rautze (wrestling) was something that was done all the time. It was very important to find out who the strongest boys in the community were. Apparently the strongest around the turn of the century included Jacob W. Friesen, Cornelius R. Plett and Johann Koop, Jr. Once even Jacob thought he had gone too far when he had a bout with Isaac P. Loewen and in the course of the action lost Isaac's glasses. Jacob dreaded having to pay for new ones, and they spent a good while searching vigorously for them before they were found.

Boys did get into trouble and parents could get upset. All the watermelons in Peter R. Penners' garden were smashed once by a group of rowdy cousins trying to find out if they were ripe

enough to eat. A new maple floor at Klaas Penners was once hammered full of spikes by the children of Penners' visitors. Teacher George Giesbrecht's new bicycle was "borrowed" one day by some of his students, who "accidentally" rode it down the hill near Klaas P. Reimers, leaving it a mangled wreck. Klaas D. Reimer once had one of his friends dangerously lower hid down six feet into their well by a rope and bucket to rescue a bird nest that had been built there. When his parents returned home and heard of Klaas' dangerous act, they were not at all impressed. John L. Penner remembered that boys would sometimes ride oxen bare-back and quickly jump off if the ox headed into the narrow barn doors. He also remembered that boys would hang onto the wheel of a wagon or cart and see how far they could go along turning around and around. According to Abram F. Reimer's diary, his 12-year old grandson, Peter P. Reimer, was once kicked so hard in the stomach by their brown gelding that he lay in bed for three months.

Boys tended to gather at places that proved fascinating. Klaas D. Reimer remembered that his friends would often go to old Mrs. Cornelius Friesen at the east end of the village because Mrs. Friesen had a reputation for giving out sugar cubes and for teaching the boys about good-tasting "peppermint bushes" by the creek. Abe P. Unger remembered that he and his cousins would sometimes visit the widowed Mrs. Abram R. Reimer, who lived in the "summer kitchen" at Klaas P. Reimers. When these young boys, often unruly and loud, visited the elderly lady, she would quietly take out a large loaf of bread and kitchen knife and carefully cut a big slice of bread for each boy. She then insisted the

boys be quiet and sent them on their way. This had quite an effect on the boys when mothers were not so generous about feeding between meals. Boys even liked going to funerals, where they could always be assured of obtaining sugar cubes. Abe P. Unger remembered that the sugar cubes were so rare boys were restricted to one apiece. When one of the bigger boys slipped an additional sugar cube into his poxket young Abram was horrified, thinking that that was a very wicked thing to do.[14]

One thing which fascinated all boys was wildlife. At the turn of the century there was still much wildlife around Blumenort. Coyotes would be seen stealing chickens from a mother hen right on the yard. Wolves could be heard howling at night and even a bear once roamed into Jacob Wiebe's Fiastaed and apparently bit a calf. Deer were plentiful, and even a moose reportedly crossed Peter B. Friesen's yard in Blumenort. Garter snakes could be found in driveways and in wells. Skunks and jack rabbits were caught and their skins sold. Craefte, or crabs, were caught in the creek and their tasty meat cooked.

The most fascinating of these animals was the wolf. Wolves were remembered from Russia. Rev. Peter R. Reimer often told of the time he skated home from work along the river and was badly frightened by howling wolves in the night.[15] Wolves were plentiful around Blumenort as well, and in 1896, a $2.00 bounty was offered by the Municipal Office for each wolf shot in the East Reserve. In 1904 John Stone, an Indian, shot a record of 14 wolves in the East Reserve.[16] Even Blumenort boys set up traps for wolves. Klaas D. Reimer remembered that, as a boy, he set a trap in the poplar bush just to the north of the village. When he returned to

check it, he found that a wolf had been trapped but had ripped the chain and walked off with the trap. Six weeks later, when Klaas was sent north to cut wood in the community pasture, he discovered his trap, recently removed, lying in the snow. The wolf had actually walked around with the trap for those six weeks.

The biggest wolf story of this early came from an incident at Klaas R. Penners, where K.K. Penner and Sons are located today. A.K. Penner, then a 2-year-old boy, remembers that they had a horse which was lame, and one night it ditn't come back to the barn. In the morning they discovered it back on the other side of the low area, badly mangled by some animal. They suspected it could be a bear because they had seen bears around before. That day Abram was cultivating near the bush, always looking out for that bear, when suddenly he saw a timber wolf come out of the bush. His horses panicked and began to run. Abram, sitting low behind the cultivator, was terrified. He made plans to run onto the hitch between the horses, should the wolf come too close. In the midst of his escape he lost his Beese Hout (straw hat), which he found the next day ripped to pieces. When the horses finally stopped, the wolf wasn't in sight. People back at the yard were terrefied, and the heater-man from the threshing crew refused to go out and start the steamer in the back where they had been threshing.

Plans were made to catch the wolf. Poison was strewn over the dead horse still lying in the back. The next day, when Penners went out to check the results, they discovered the body of a huge timber wolf a mere 100 feet from the horse. The boys ran to get a team of horses, dragged the animal home and set it up

in the shed, much to Klaas Penner's chagrin. The word was soon out that Penners had gotten the beast, and people from miles around came to see the carcass, which some people later estimated to have weighed at least 100 pounds. The story even goes that a Winnipeg newspaper carried an article about the wolf that terrified the people of Blumenort.[17]

As the children grew into adoleschents and left school, new expectations were placed on them. They were now old enought to attend church, go visiting with their parents on Sundays and know better than to idle their time away playing games. Despite this, there seems to have been a reluctant acceptance by many parents that some deviance of the youth between 14 and 20 could be expected. Acommon saying of the time was, "The heart of man is wicked from the time of his youth."[18] Thus, there are stories of young men and women playing the phonograph in the shed or dressing up to have their photograph taken. Even musical instruments were sometimes purchased and played. Heinrich E. Plett is known to have owned a violin in his youth, and Peter A. Plett recalls how he enjoyed playing the harmonica and autoharp. He remembers, however, that when he bought a trumpet which had been owned by the Blumenort herdsman, Olla Kjnals, it was too much for his parents, and they forbade him playing it in the house.

The more deviant of the youths are said to have attended dances put on by their Bergthal neighbors a few miles to the west or skipped church Sunday mornings to smoke tobacco in the church barn. There are even stories of groups of young men roaming about at night steeling chickens and then cooking them in some empty building and having a chicken noodle soup party. Other stories

have been told about young men breaking up family gatherings following a wedding. On one such occasion in Blumenhof, young men demanded money from the groom and, when they were turned down, they forcefully entered the house where the gathering was underway and released a dozen geese and chickens.[19]

Another story has been told of how two Blumenort brothers went to visit their relatives in the States. One morning they passed a farmer's driveway where several milkcans filled with fresh milk were standing, waiting to be picked up by the local freight wagon. Being hungry, they took the pistol they carried, and shot holes through the cans. After drinking their fill, they went on their way, very pleased with their ingenuity.[20]

Dating between young men and women was not an acceptable form of social interaction. After school ended for children at age 14, boys and girls were not expected to interact until they were ready for marriage. There are several interesting stories of how young men and women did meet and eventually marry. One man followed his bride-to-be as she went blueberry-picking with a friend. Once they were safely in the bush, the young couple made the best of their time visiting together. Another young man noticed his future bride from the side benches in church. Once, while looking over the congregation, his eyes focused on a pair of bright blue eyes staring directly at him. He was so attracted to her he quickly became friends with her brothers and often went to visit them, hoping to meet her.

There are many stories about how boys would visit their male friends hoping to end up visiting with their sisters or even their sisters' friends. Boys would prepare themselves for

these visits by getting their hair cut short and their necks shaved. They put on woolen suits, steel-white plastic collars and bright ties. The girls they hoped to meet would likely be wearing their full-length black aprons and black kerchiefs with bright floral patterns. If they did chance to meet, they would spend the afternoon playing German equivalents of "Last Couple Out" or "Fruit Basket Upset". Later they might get together upstairs and sit around, visiting and playing crokinole.

As dating was unheard of, marriages were officially arranged through the parents. The boy who likely would have found some way to get to know the girl and receive some indication whether she liked him or not, would approach his father and relate his desire to marry her. The boy's father, in turn, paid a visit to the father of the girl, who then would break the news to his daughter. This meeting was sometimes referred to as Piat Kjeepe (horse buying) in order to keep the true nature of it secret. The daughter was given some time to pray and think about the preparation. If she accepted it, the boy paid her a visit. Shortly thereafter, perhaps at a brotherhood meeting, both fathers stood up and invited their relatives to the girl's parents for Velafniss. Velafniss was a more important meeting than the actual marriage ceremony. It is an engagement celebration in which relatives would quietly offer their support to this new union. Once all the guests had arrived at the house of the girl's parents and had been ushered into the Groate Stove, the engaged couple came from upstairs, making their way into the room which was packed full of people except for two chairs at the end of the room. This would be the couple's first public appearance together. The people then

took out their song books and much singing followed. Afterwards Faspa was served, and arrangements might be made for the couple to make the customery visits to the homes of their aunts and uncles. Such visits were, of course, always chaperoned. It was on these visits that gifts, if any, would be received.

On a Sunday, a week or two later, the couple travelled to the village in which the church service was held, and were married. At the church the couple entered the building together, through the ladies entrance, and sat down at the back. The women's dress was always a very dark nave, brown or even a black one. After the main service was over, the preacher, informed beforehand, would say: "Apparently there are two who would like to get married." The couple then walked down the aisle to the front to be married in a very short and simple ceremony.[21]

No reception party was allowed by the church. Later it became common to have visitors over in the afternoon and have Faspa together. But, even then, ministers were expected to be present to make sure that this meeting did not get too late. After the wedding, the couple moved into the Sommastove in their parents' house. Here they lived until they could build a small house on their parents' yard. After a year or so, they would purchase their own lot, where they started their family and milked the two cows and plowed the few acres their parents had given them as part of their inheritance.

Footnotes

1 Mrs. Isaac Penner, "In Memory of Heinrich Wiebe," translated by Betty Plett, original poem in the possession of George R. Wiebe, Greenland, Manitoba.

2 Jacob L. Plett, "Der Vorigen Tage," Plettentag ed. by G.
3 Thielmann, Steinbach Post, 1945, pp. 44-45.
John G. Barkman, "Dee Malkstock," tape-recording Bernard P.
4 Doerksen, Blumenort.
5 Peter A. Plett, "Daut Blumenort," 1980.
6 Interview with John C. Reimer, August, 1980.
7 Cornelius L. Plett, "Tagebuch," op. cit.
Abraham M. Friesen's diary has many recorded visits of guest
8 from Nebraska, Minnesota and Russia.
9 Interview with Margaret C. Penner, Belize, C.A., December, 1980.
Abram P. Friesen, et. al., The Von Riessen-Friesen Genealogy,
10 p. 165.
Abram Unger, "Biography of Abraham R. Reimer," Reimer Familien-
11 register, p. 115.
Margaret Fast Reimer, Familien Register von Witwe Peter R. Reimer,
12 (self-published, 1960), p. 26.
13 Mrs. John C. Reimer, op. cit.
14 Peter A. Plett, op. cit.
Abe P. Unger, story told at Blumenort Centennial Service, August,
15 1974.
16 Abram P. Reimer, op. cit. p. 217.
17 Hanover Municipality Council Minutes, op. cit.
19 Interview with A.K. Penner, Blumenort, Manitoba, August, 1980.
20 Interview with Dave P. Loewen, Blumenort, January, 1983.
21 Interview with Ben F. Reimer, Blumenort, August, 1980.
Peter A. Plett, op. cit.

Part II Chapter 9: Helping the Village Needy

The poor, the sick and elderly were well looked after. The church cared for the poor, self-made "doctors" healed the sick, midwives delivered babies and families housed the elderly.

The poor of the Kleine Gemeinde people had always been looked after by the church. In Russia the church had given goods to the very poor and underwritten the farms of the indebted. This tradition was brought to Canada. Deacons were elected by a general assembly of Kleine Gemeinde brethren and commissioned to make sure the poor of the whole church were not wanting.

The first Kleine Gemeinde deacons from Blumenort were Peter P. Wiebe and his half-brother, Heinrich F. Wiebe. Both men had been elected to their posts in the Blumenhof, Borosenko church. They were also the sons-in-law to Peter W. Toews, a prominent Blumenort farmer. Peter had been elected a deacon on November 21, 1864, in Markusland, Russia.[1] An existing letter shows him to have been a responsible and prudent leader. In March, 1882, he resigned his post after his wife joined the Holdeman Church. Peter Wiebe, however, continued as a member of the Kleine Gemeinde until 1902, when he was baptized on his deathbed by a Holdeman minister.

Heinrich F. Wiebe was elected a deacon at the age of 22 on January 20, 1873, in Blumenhof, Borosenko. Existing letters by him reveal that he was a man of great sincerity and commitment. He, however, served his post for less than three years. In December, 1876, he died in a snowstorm close to Blumenort.

Abraham R. Reimer, the Blumenort blacksmith, was elected a deacon on January 21, 1883, after Peter P. Wiebe resigned. He was the brother to Peter R. Reimer who had been elected a minister only the year before. While records show Deacon Reimer to have been quite a well-to-do man who lent substantial sums of money to his Kleine Gemeinde brethren, an existing letter written in 1891 to the church Elder shows him to have been a man of great humility. Reimer writes that, although "I feel God's grace, I still cannot rest as I remain spiritually inadequate....I am the most insignificant that has been called to help in the vineyard...yet, we are to remain faithful in little."[2] According to his children, Abraham Reimer accepted his call to the deaconry "as from the Lord and displayed...thoroughness and order in the discharge of his duties as deacon...James 1:27 was strictly observed in that the fatherless and widows were regularly visited...and their needs attended to."[3] Deacon Reimer died suddenly at age 49 in 1891.

Peter L. Plett, a Blumenhof farmer, was elected a deacon on December 15, 1891, to replace Abraham R. Reimer. He was a brother to Cornelius L. Plett, who was elected a minister at the same meeting. Deacon Plett is said to have "served this office faithfully all his life...[being] a very quiet man, dedicated to his duties."[4] Church records show Peter Plett to have been a particularly fastidious recorder of finances. In 1917 the Pletts moved to Kansas, where they lived till 1939, when they returned to Manitoba. Peter Plett died in 1944.

It was the duty of the deaconry to administer the church monies. Six hundred dollars, a substantial sum of money in 1874, had been brought to Manitoba by the Kleine Gemeinde leaders.[5] It was from

this money that deacons helped the poor. Additional charities came in every Dunday. Charitable funds came from several sources. The best-known and recorded charity source was the Kasse or the offering box at the back of the church building. Quite unobtrusively, small amounts of money were placed into the Kasse on Sundays just before the service. Kassengeld was not of much significance, though. Only $8.15 was collected in this way during the 17 worship services held in Blumenort in 1883. The whole Kleine Gemeinde of the East Reserve gave less than $30.00 Kassengeld in that year.[6]

Most of the contributions to the church seem to have been made privately by the more wealthy church members directly to the deacons. At first the church even borrowed money to give to its poor. Over $1,000.00 was borrowed from the Ontario Mennonites at a low interest rate. The Ontario Mennonites went a step further and dedicated a lot of apples totthe Kleine Gemeinde, which in turn sold them to its members for 10¢ a pound.

The poor were helped in two ways. The ill or widowed received outright donations of badly-needed goods and services. Church records show that these goods purchased by the deacons often included firewood, sugar, flour, wine, shoes, textiles, seed grain and kerosene. Deacons also paid for funeral expenses, doctor services, hospital care or a stay at the Brandon Insane Asylum. Expenses for individual recipients could be as high as $50.00 a year.

Another way the church helped the poor was through loans. Until 1908 the church borrowed and loaned money in the manner of a credit union. Early church records show that money was borrowed from Johann L. Warkentin, Johann Koop, Mrs. Isaac L. Plett and Peter Penner, Sr. This money was in turn loaned to the settlers

who had a difficult time starting off in the new land. At a ministerial meeting in 1908 the records of church loans were checked and because the church was financially strong, it waived all interest on loans and cancelled the debts of members who could not repay. Thus the debts of Peter B. Friesen, whose family had suffered a lot from illness, and Johann Broeski, who had moved to Alberta, were struck out. It appears that at this time the church stopped the practice of loaning money. Instead, greater amounts of money were now donated outrightly to the poor.

The Kleine Gemeinde deacons, however, were not concerned only with poverty in their own church. In 1876 the church loaned $600 to the Bergthal Church for the purchase of flour. Records also show that church people were quite aware of world suffering. In 1892 $10.00 was donated to needy people in Russia. This became an annual event until the 1920s when M.C.C. was formed to help Russian Mennonites. In 1917, the year of the Communist Revolution, over $200.00 was sent to those suffering in Russia. Other recipients aroung the turn of the century included Hutterites in Russia, a blind girl in North Dakota, starving children in India, victims of a hurrican in Texas and refugees of the South African Boer War.

The church was not the only helping hand in the community. Many stories have been told of individuals who helped the poor. One such man was Isaac J. Loewen. Just before his untimely death at age 48, he requested his daughter Elizabeth, to take him on a small child's wagon to his granary. When he saw how much grain had been harvested, he returned home to the house and asked his oldest son, Isaac, to strike out the debts he was holding against poor people.[7]

Another story is told of Mrs. Abraham Penner, who made a habit of secretly patching the coats of poor people who came to see her husband, the Kleine Gemeinde Waiseman. While her husband was in the Groati Stove, listening to the problems of his guests, Mrs. Penner would quietly take the coats from the hooks, patch them, and then return them to their places before the guests left.[8]

Mrs. Abraham F. Reimer is said to have had a strong will and soft heart. Once when her husbanc was away in the bush for several days, three poor, drunk men came to the Reimer home on a cold winter night, begging for shelter. Naturally Mrs. Reimer was scared, but when she thought of the possibilibty of these men freezing she allowed them in, gave them something to eat and some blankets. She then commanded them to lie down on the floor by the fire and not to get up for anything till morning. Too scared to go to sleep, Mrs. Reimer sat down on a rocker beside the sleeping men and watched them all night. When one of the men did sit up, she sternly warned him to lie down again, which he meekly did. In the morning the men left, well-rested and fed.[9]

Abram M. Friesen, although not a deacon, seems to have had a heart for the elderly widow, Mrs. Peter Penner. Friesen's diary shows that he frequently helped her with various things such as fixing her well, helping slaughter hogs, driving with her to Steinbach, and organizing her 1892 auction sale.

Other stories of neighborliness came from Blumenhof. In 1896, Cornelius L. Plett lent money to Gottlieb Jahnke who no longer belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde, and, around 1900, allowed the Herman Krebs family to move into a small house on their yard after his father, C.S. Plett, died. It is also said that Johann

L. Plett initiated a collection for a "Lily's Gemeinde" in Alberta in 1895.[10]

It was not only the poor whe were in need of help in the village. The first 35 years of Blumenort's history were marked by times of extreme sickness and deaths of many young and middle-aged people. Time and time again those seemingly uncontrollable epidemics struck. Not until the turn of the century was there a concerted effort to immunize children against infectious diseases. It was sadly said that the five most common diseases were children's diseased.

There are three distinct periods in which children died in the Blumenort area before 1910. Between 1886 and 1889, 10 children were buried in Blumenort. One pioneer voiced the despair many must have felt during this time in his diary. Abram R. Friesen's diary for April, 1888, states that "people are becoming sick and dying as never before here in Manitoba."[11]

Just a few years later, in 1893 and 1894, another epidemic struck Blumenort. More than 10 children under the age of three fell sick and died. In 1889 and 1900 typhus and diptheria swept Manitoba, and Blumenort lost 16 children. The Isaac J. Loewen family alone lost four children and both the Abraham R. Penner and the Abram L. Plett families lost two children during this trying time. These children were all under age five. In Blumenhof Cornelius S. Plett and his 45-year-old son, John L. Plett, died within two days of each other in November, 1900. No epidemic followed this one until the Spanish Influenza swept the world after World War I.

Another tragedy at this time was the death of young mothers.

With little medication and only midwife to assist, childbearing was always potentially fatal. At least 15 young women died in Blumenort during these years. Table #16 shows what has happened to the age of mortality in the Blumenort area between 1874 and 1980.

Although the Kleine Gemeinde had availed themselves of qualified medical help in Russia, such help was less accessible in the new land. In cases of grave illness, trips were sometimes made to Winnipeg or even further. In 1888, Peter B. Friesen took his daughter, Katherina, to Minnesota to a noted doctor who was to bring her back to health. Most often, however, medical services were supplied by individual members of the community.

The most important medical person in the community was the midwife, known at the Hebbamme. It was her job to supervise the birth of a child. She had to be ready to be picked up by the neighbors at any time and then to attend to the life-or-death matter of a mother bearing a child in primitive conditions. She had no formal training. Only experience, a reference book, and s sence that she had been called qualified her. Her job was difficult. Both the number of children born and the number of young mothers who died attest to this.

The midwife was also called upon to help when someone died. She was, in effect, the village undertaker, and was authorized to sign death certificates. Although the major part of the work of making the coffin and preparing the clothing was done by the family, the midwife would often help to wash the body, and cover it with a white, pleated cloth nailed to the sides of the coffin.

Over the years Blumenort was served by many midwives. The most famous was Mrs. Peter B. Toews (nee Anna Toews). For almost

40 years, from 1893-1932, Mrs. Toews worked diligently to bring most of the babies in the Blumenort and Ste. Anne areas into the world. Her personal record book reveals that over the years she delivered close to 1,000 children, 924 to be exact.[12] Often these children ranged over two generations. Her records show that is several cases she delivered both parent and child. Her services extended not only to Kleine Gemeinde and Holdeman people but to the Metis of Ste. Anne and Richer. Often these latter people were poor bush-dwellers without money. This did not deter her from helping them. She is remembered as a woman who felt strongly that she had a calling from God, and even though she had no formal education, it was her duty to help anyone in need. Her reputation as a person with medical knowledge was so widespread that she was often called officially to certify deaths of people.[13]

Other local women in this time who delivered babies included Mrs. Peter R. Reimer, Jr. (nee Suzanna Loewen); and Mrs. Johann R. Reimer (nee Agatha Barkman).

The most medically-reputed man in the area was Isaac L. Warkentin from Blumenhof. He was widely known among Mennonites and both French and English as Docta Warkentin. While he was a well-to-do farmer, he seems always to have had time for both people and animals who were sick. Many stories are still told about this quiet-spoken, bearded man who never turned down a request for help. One of these tales relates how, in 1893, he rushed to Steinbach to tend to Gerhard Giesbrecht's leg which had been badly cut in a sawmill mishap. Although Giesbrecht was permanently lamed, he regained his health and, by the next year, he was Blumenort's school teacher and cheesemaker.[14]

Another story is told of how Warkentin rushed to Greenland one night in 1903 to try to save the life of Jacob T. Wiebe's little boy, Isaac. The boy had accidently drunk boiling water from a kettle during the day and severly damaged his lungs. In this case the doctor could do nothing, and unfortunately, the boy died the next morning.[15]

On other occasions Warkentin's hand healed people instantly. He was once called to Ste. Anne to assist a young man who had been hiccoughing for almost a week. The doctor simply walked into the man's house, turned him on his stomach, gave him a powerful wallop over the back and returned home. The spastic diaphragm stopped with the whack and the young man although suffering a sore back, was the doctor's instant admirer.[16]

Even though Warkentin's remedies sometimes seemed a little unconventional, they were proven to work. His remedies are said to have included rhubarb root juice, Camalo-berry tea, Lepp Stock, and goose fat. For rheumatism he prescribed bear fat, and for a sore mouth or throat he would induce vomiting, which was to "open the boils".[17] Warkentin was sometimes hired to immunize the villagers against the possibility of epidemics.

Warkentin's services also included delivering babies. The following excerpt from Abram M. Friesen's personal diary for 1884 gives a glimpse of what this type entailed: "April 17: In the evening I fetched Isaac Warkentin for John I. Friesens. They had a daughter. April 18: At four a.m. I returned Isaac Warkentin to his home. The daughter was born at three a.m. There was a mist of air from the east."

Other men with some medical skills included Blumenort's

first school teacher, Cornelius P. Friesen. He is noted to have undertaken school vaccination programs and to have prepared herbal medicine which he sold. In 1895 he was even hired as the health officer and immunizer against epidemics for the Hanover Municipality. For these services he was paid $25.00.[18]

Abraham R. Friesen and Jacob L. Plett are two other men who seem to have had some medical knowledge. They both kept a record of half a dozen antidotes for the most common illnesses.[19]

The chiropractor Blumenorters went to was the famous, encentric "Doctor" John Peters of Grunthal. He was most reputed as a bone-setter and there are several accounts of Blumenort people being "rushed" to Grunthal in horse and buggy to obtain his services for 25¢. Blumenorters also remember his as a man of uncouth and coarse language. Apparently a Blumenorter once asked him why he spoke in such an ill-mannered way, and Doctor Peters replied, "Don't think I like to do that. If I don't talk this way, people faint in my room. I don't want people to die in my room." Not everyone in Blumenort trusted Doctor Peters. A humorous saying arose which claimed that, of all patients, 99 sind krepiert, der 100-dertste der ist kuriert. (Ninety-nine have died, and only the 100th is healed). In 1927 John Peters moved to Paraguay.

The elderly assumed a special place in the village. The respect that was their due is well revealed in a story by John G. Barkman about his elderly great-grandfather, Jacob Barkman. The elderly Barkman, who had come to Blumenort in 1874 at the age of 80, had difficulty seeing. Once when several small boys snickered as he blindly grasped for a door-latch, he turned to them

and gently admonished them, saying, "The owl is necessary, too." Not only were the elderly respected for their wisdom; they were also personally cared for by their children until death. By middle-age the parents relegated most of the work to their teenaged children and would often go visiting. They would have their boys harness the horses to the sleigh or wagon and expect them to be up at night when they returned to take the horses back to the barn.

Later, as the children married, the parents would help the children buy a farm or even the family farm. At this point the elderly parents would move out of the family house into a smaller retirement house on the same yard. Here they prepared their own meals, helped along on the farm occasionally, wrote their Familienbuecher and found peace. When one of the spouses would die, and it became increasingly difficult to manage their own house, the elderly moved from the house of one child to the next, eating and living in with the family. It was in this way that the needs of the elderly were sympathetically met.

The village needy also included the victims of fire. During the early years, several settlers suffered losses from fire. In each case the Mennonitischen Brandverordnung covered two-thirds of the lost property. The early Brandverordnung was an inter-Mennonite organization which had been transferred from Russia with very few changes. The known Brandaeltesters for the Blumenort area in this period were Johann Janzen and Abram M. Friesen, both of whom served in their positions during the 1880s.[20]

Footnotes

1 David L. Plett Papers, "Wahliste der Aeltesten, Lehrer, and Diakonen, 1818-1871," Transliterated by Isaac K. Plett, Landmark.

2 Abraham R. Reimer, letter to Elder Jacob Kroeker, 1891, EMC Archives, Steinbach.

3 Abe P. Unger, "Biography of Abraham R. Reimer," op. cit.

4 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, p. 89.

5 Kleine Gemeinde Rechnung; 1874, Prairie Rose E.M. Church, Landmark, Manitoba.

6 East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde Rechnung, 1883, Blumenort E.M. Church, Blumenort.

7 Interview with Mrs. Peter K. Plett, Blumenort, August, 1981.

8 Interview with John D. Penner, Winnipeg, Manitoba, September, 1981.

9 Mrs. Peter K. Plett, op. cit.

10 Delbert F. Plett, Plett Picture Book, p. 62.

11 Abram R. Friesen, op. cit.

12 Mrs. Peter B. Toews, birth register 1893-1932, Henry P. Giesbrecht, Ste. Anne.

13 Interview with Henry P. Giesbrecht, Ste. Anne, Manitoba, November, 1981.

14 William Giesbrecht ed., The Reunion and History of the G.K. Giesbrecht Family (Flagstaff, Arizona, 1961), n.p.

15 Jacob T. Wiebe, op. cit.

16 Abe Warkentin, op. cit., p. 222.

17 Peter A. Plett, op. cit.

18 Hanover Municipality Council Minutes, op. cit.

19 Abraham R. Friesen, op. cit.

20 Veraenderung und Ausbesserung der Feuerregeln der Gegenseitigen Mennonitischen Brandordnung (Altona, Manitoba, 1919), Jake K. Friesen Papers, EMC Archives, Steinbach, pp. 1-18.

Part II Chapter 10: Meeting Outsiders

One of the reasons why the Kleine Gemeinde chose to settle in southeastern Manitoba was because it allowed them to transfer an entire functioning society from Russia and to establish it here. Thus the Mennonites had their social and most of their physical needs met within their own group and very much tended to live apart from non-Mennonite Manitobans. While this separation allowed the Mennonites to maintain their sub-culture, it did not keep them from getting "along very well with their neighbors on the outskirts of the [East] Reserve."[1]

Indeed, the Mennonites were only one of several ethnic or religious groups to inhabit southeastern Manitoba. Census records for 1881 show that 50% of the inhabitants of Southeastern Manitoba were French and Metis people and that 30% were English settlers. Mennonites made up only 20% of the population.[2] Ten years later another major group of settlers, the German Lutherans, came to this area. Four major ethnic groups, then, could be found within 10 miles of Blumenort. The french and Metis of Ste. Anne, the English of Clearsprings, and the Lutherans of Friedensfeld became the neighbors and trading partners of Blumenorters. Trade was also carried on with the English and Jewish merchants of Winnipeg and with the Bergthal villages to the west of Blumenort.

In addition to encountering these different ethnic groups, the Kleine Gemeinde settlers also found themselves in close involvement with government officials and were quite aware of national

events.

From the very first years, Blumenort-area people frequently interacted with government officials. It was the officials at the Dominion Lands Office in Winnipeg whom the Blumenorters saw most frequently. At this office they registered their homestead claims in 1874, and later purchased their pre-emption quarters. And it was here that they made their patent applications for deeds to their land. This required that each farmer state just how he had improved his land and that a neighbor sign an affidavit declaring that these statements were true. This office was also the place where loans for seed grain could be made in the first years, a service of which some Blumenorters readily availed themselves.

Government officials also regularly visited the East Reserve. After 1878 a public schools inspector visited the village school twice a year. When he came, it was an event noted by the villagers. Abram M. Friesen's diary, for example, states that on December 4, 1884, and on February 19, 1885, "We had the school inspector from Winnipeg here."

Government officials who came inspected, but also encouraged. In 1877, John Lowe, the Dominion Minister of Agriculture, visited the East Reserve and praised the hard-working, frugal Mennonites. In the same year Canada's Governor General, the Earl of Dufferin, spent two days inspecting the East Reserve. A special ceremony was held on the prairie north of Gruenfeld. The Kleine Gemeinde Elder, Peter Toews, was present, as was Rev. Peter Baerg, who later moved to Blumenort. Baerg was so impressed by the occasion that he copied a full-length script of the Governor-General's speech and kept it among his writings. The speech gave a warm

welcome to the Mennonites in the name of the Queen. It promised them peace, freedom, equality and protection under the British flag. The only war that Mennonites would be asked to fight, declared the Governor General, was the "war of ambition...against the brute forces of nature." He then went on to praise the Mennonites for their achievements in establishing "comfortable homesteads which have arisen upon this fertile plain, for they prove indisputably that you are expert in agriculture."[3]

The Blumenort-area people were not aware only of the officials with whom they interacted. There seems to have been a strong awareness of the Dominion Government and a feeling of reverence for the British monarch. It was upon the good grace that the Mennonites continued to enjoy their Privilegium and live in peace. This privilege was never taken for granted. This was particularly true during times of unrest, when the pioneers were reminded that they could not remain unaffected by either national or international events. Looking back over this period some years later, Peter F. Unger of Blumenhof recalled two such occasions: they were the Riel Rebellion of 1885 and the Boer War in 1899. In the following writing Unger praises Queen Victoria for protecting the Mennonites from violence.

The Louis Riel Crisis

> On March 26, 1885, a rebellion broke out in Western Canada under the leadership of a half-breed Indian, named Riel. He was a very unruly man and had already set himself against the government in 1869, when he seized Fort Garry, today Winnipeg, for a short time. Then he started attacking and plundering the settlers again. Because the Indians gave him great support, he soon had a big rebellion going, and it seemed that, because the government had few soldiers in the West, the situation could become very serious. The soldiers that there were had to retreat in face of the rebellion.

> This caused great concern among the Mennonites, for the Indians were only 300 miles away. But soon the government in Ottawa sent out a full-fledged, well-armed military regiment. The rebellion was bloodily quelled and ended on May 16 with the capturing of leader Riel. During this unsettled time, the Mennonites were placed under no obligation by the government.
>
> In 1899, a war broke out between England and the Boer farmers in South Africa. The boers were defeated by England and made subject. Again, the Mennonites were put under no pressure by the government [to render military service.].
>
> This was the last war that Queen Victoria led. She died in 1901, and King Edward VII was crowned. Queen Victoria had, during her 64-year reign, led few wars, and all England made great strides under her rule. Also the Mennonites were able to practice their faith quietly and peacefully for 26 years under her reign. For this we owe the government and God much thanksgiving.[4]

The ethnic group which the Blumenort and Blumenhof villagers came to know the closest in the very first years were the English and Scottish farmers who had settled in Clearsprings between 1870 and 1873, and in the following years they proved to be very helpful and compassionate neighbors.

Trade was carried on with the English neighbors since the first years. Shingles were bought from Tom Rankin, and mail was picked up by the Blumenhof people from Alex McCaskill. John Carlton and J.J. Cohoe were hired to thresh; some borrowed money from James Steel and others bought grain from Tom Slater. Conversely, the Clearsprings settlers availed themselves of services rendered by their Mennonite neighbors. Both Abraham Reimer's blacksmith skills and Abram M. Friesen's watch repair expertise were often sought out by the English. Acts of neighborliness, such as the time that a Blumenort boy received a ride to Winnipeg from a Clearsprings neighbor and the time that a Clearsprings farmer was given permission to use the Blumenort well, reveal that a sense of trust and friendship existed between the two peoples.

Some Blumenort youths became closely acquainted with their English neighbors through road and bridge work. They found them to be a very nice and sincere people who willingly taught them to speak English. Some of the lads even secretly wondered if the English might be true Christians.[5] The Blumenorters who lived on the outside fringes of the district obviously had the most interaction with the English. Peter P.D. Reimer remembers playing baseball with the Peter Keatings boys and Peter J. Loewen remembers frequently being visited by his Giroux neighbors.

A town with which the early Blumenorters carried on a great deal of trade was Ste. Anne, more commonly known to them as Pointe de Chêne (point of oaks). Although the French language and Catholic religion obviously kept the Blumenort people from making close social contacts with the Ste. Anne people, they established a strong and continuing business contact with them.. As early as 1873, a French-speaking Metis from Ste. Anne had been hired to guide the Mennonite delegates into the East Reserve area. In the following decades, various business deals were made with the French.

One of the early business items between the Ste. Anne and Blumenort people concerned land. As part of the 1870 agreement between Louis Riel and the Dominion government, the land in the township just to the north of Blumenort was granted to the Metis. During the 1890s, this land was purchased by farmers from Blumenort, who established the Greenland community.

An even earlier land transaction between a Frenchman and a Mennonite farmer occurred in 1877. That was the year in which Johann Warkentin of Blumenhof decided to purchase the vacant quarter section, NW 23, lying just to the northwest of the village.

When he sought to purchase it, he was informed that is was already owned by a Mr. Lapointe, a man of whom Warkentin had never heard before. When Warkentin got in touch with Lapointe, he found out that the latter had purchased the land by mistake. Apparently in July, 1873, Jean Baptist Lapointe had been riding around what today is the Landmark area in search of a piece of land which he might buy. He even had a Mr. Nelson, a surveyor, with him at the time. When they saw a suitable piece of land, they stopped, took down the number on the survey post and went to Winnipeg to register it. However, the township numbers on the post had been wrong, reading 7-6E instead of 8-5E. Thus Lapointe had inadvertly purchased NW 23-7-6E instead of NW 23-8-6E. When he later discovered the mistake, he decided it was simpler to keep the land in 7-6E than to re-register. Upon Warkentin's request in 1877, Lapointe agreed to try to rectify the situation. The two men hired Royal and Prudhomace, Solicitors from Winnipeg, to work out the details which would see Lapointe owning the original quarter he had intended to purchase and Warkentin owning the Blumenhof quarter.[6]

Many other business contacts were established by Blumenorters with Ste. Anne before Steinbach grew into a commercial centre. There was a flour mill in Ste. Anne powered by water, a post office from which Greenlanders got their mail, and, of course, there was the Hudson's Bay Store. After the turn of century the Plett and Reimer threshing company custom-threshed for Ste. Anne farmers. Some of the Blumenort boys apparently even learned some French sland and reciprocated by teaching the Ste. Anne boys some German slang.[6]

An early story tells of the time when 15-year-old Johann, son of Abram M. Friesen, went to work for a Frenchman to earn money for his family.

> "When John Isaak Friesen saw that things were going poorly for his parents, he felt obligated to earn money to help support them. He packed his small bundle of clothes, put it on his back, and with warnings from his parents to guard himself against sin, he went on foot to look for work. He came to the Magers, where he got employment with Mr. Mager as a gardener. He had a good time here and also learned a great deal. The man was French and his wife was German. As his father's church was not in this area, and since he could not speak English, Johann spent his time on Sundays boating and sometimes took five-year-old Georgie with him on the boat. Ond day two nuns wanted to be taken to the St. Boniface Hospital and so Father had to take them along the river in the boat. The nuns had a very sick relative whom they wished to visit. The Hospital had been established by the Grey Nuns in the 1800's.[7]

The Lutheran people who settled in Friedensfeld aroung 1891 spoke German, enjoyed hard work and came from the Ukraine. Having so much in common with the Mennonites, it is not surprising that they were hired each fall by the Blumenorters as farm workers, threshing hands and bush clearers. Being very poor and living on marginal land, they readily accepted opportunity to work for the established farmers to the north. One of the first records of a Lutheran being employed in Blumenort comes from 1899, when John R. Reimer, who was quite ill, hired Klemens Richter and Nicholas Breitenbach to do his farm work and paid them each $20.00 a month.[8]

Despite the fact that Blumenort people did not often socially interact with the Lutherans, marriages between these two people did occur. Three of the first marriages between Lutherans and Blumenorters were the 1901 marriage of Isaac I. Friesen and Emilie Koenig, the 1905 union of Peter D. Koop and Auguste Hemiger, and the

1906 wedlock of John K. Friesen and Rosena Gerschefsky. All three couples left Blumenort several years later.

A limited amount of business was carried on between the two peoples. Jacob L. Plett threshed for Friedensfelders each fall. Others traded with them. A story is told of the time when Klaas Penner sold a very spirited horse to a Friedensfelder. He warned the buyer not to feed the horse any oats, for if he did so, the animal would begin stepping over the hitch of the wagon. The buyer apparently felt insulted that he should be told how to feed a horse, so he bought the horse, fed it oats, hitched it to the wagon and left. Later the buyer returned, demanding that Penner take back the horse because it always stepped over the hitch. When asked if the horse had been fed oats, the new owner acknowledged that it had. Klaas Penner simply stated, "Then I cannot take back the horse."[9]

Most of the Indian people were already living on reserves by the time the Mennonites came. The closest reserve was Rousseau River, 40 miles to the south, where the Chippewa had moved in 1871. The Chippewa, however, were allowed to hunt in bushland that had not been settled. This brought many native families closer to the Mennonites and some Indians even hunted right on the East Reserve.[13]

Blumenort people knew the Indians as very poor people who were hunters and came to the village to beg. Klaas D. Reimer remembers one incident which showed that, while the Indian was poor, he was also proud. Around 1890 an Indian came to old Abram Reimer's place, and one of Mr. Reimer's grandsons mimicked the poor man as he asked for a nickel. This angered the Indian

who pulled out a knife and warned the boy. The boy ran to the kitchen for a knife and returned with it, saying that he also had a knife. The Indian quietly left but returned a few days later with a group of his comrades. When the boy saw the Indians outside, he became very frightened. The Indians left after silently waiting outside in an apparent warning to the boy.[10] David P. Reimer once told the story of how during his childhood, he and his older brother, John, once had seen an Indian family entering their farmyard. Because their parents, the Peter R. Reimers, were not at home, the boys became frightened and ran to the hayloft where they hid until the natives left.

The Bergthalers were the main other Mennonite group in the East Reserve, and many lived just west of Blumenhof in Hochfeld, Blumengart, Bergthal and Chortitz. They often passed through Blumenort with their grain on the way to the railway centre at Giroux and Blumenorters passed through their villages on the way to Winnipeg. Frequent official contact with the Bergthalers was made as they shared with them a common Municipality and Brandverordnung. Similary, business deals were often made. Blumenort farmers brought their mares to Hochfeld to Mr. Krause's stallion, and Hochfelders with names like Gerbrandt, Hiebert and Falk often stopped at John R. Reimer's store in Blumenort to make purchases.

Despite their common language, few social contacts were made between the Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthal people. Blumenorters tended to hold suspect some of the Bergthal practices. These practices included participation in politics, smoking tobacco and, rumor even had it, carrying guns in their wagons and holding dances.

The first known marriage between a Blumenorter and a Berg-

thaler occured in July, 1887, when Abraham I. Friesen married Maria Wiebe. Another Blumenort man who had close ties to the Bergthalers was Gottlieb Jahnke. He is said to have begun attending Bergthal Church after he married his deceased wife's sister, a practice forbidden by the Kleine Gemeinde. Pioneers remembered how each Sunday morning Jahnke would pass through Blumenort with his new wife on their way to the Bergthal villages in the west.[11] Around 1904 Jahnke moved to Saskatchewan.

Blumenorters were often visited by transient peddlers originating in Winnipeg. They came by wagon or on foot, carrying goods they wished to sell or trade. They came so often that the East Reserve merchants petitioned the municipality time and time again for a by-law to restrict the trade of these merchants. They carried everything from cloth to trinkets to fruit, and took in return everything from money to worn-out rubber boots to dishes.[14] Occasionally they also sold books. Abram F. Reimer, who had a knack for detail, purchases a large science book from a German peddler in 1888 for three dollars, three days' wages.

Along with the peddlers came cattle dealers with names like Finkelstein and Schulz who enjoyed haggling and driving hard deals. It is remembered that a Mr. Cherry would sometimes visit Johann N. Koop in Neuanlage to buy cattle. When he was unwilling to meet Koop's price, he would cross his arms and intensely pace the veranda. Then he would climb on his wagon, travel down the road for half a mile, turn around and return to Koop's with yet another counter proposal.[12]

A similar story is told of Rev. Cornelius R. Penner who once had two fatted oxen for sale. A well-known Jewish cattle dealer

dropped in at the Penner farm in the afternoon, just at the time Penner was resting on the couch in the big room. When the cattle dealer was ushered into the room, Penner, without rising, quoted his selling price. The dealer, taken aback by this abruptness, asked to see the oxen. Penner answered that he himself had seen the oxen that morning and they were fine, but if the dealer wished he could please himself and see them. When the dealer returned, he found that Penner'selling price had not changed and that it was unlikely that it would change. Apparently the oxen were sold that day.[13]

In the first decades most Blumenort area farmers made monthly trips to Winnipeg, and in the process interacted with many English-speaking businessmen and professionals. A trip to Winnipeg was often a three day affair. Their first day took them to Oak Island, a settlement just east of Ile des Chenes, where they stayed at one of several boarding houses and livery stables. Names like Mager, Gilchrist, Rohns and Kreuse meant much to the Blumenort travellers.[14] These people supplied them with fried chicken and their horses with hay.[15] The next day they continued to Winnipeg to do their business and returne to Oak Island for night. The third day they arrived back in Blumenort. The people Blumenorters saw in Winnipeg included Jewish merchants, English wholesalers, St. Boniface doctors, Hudson's Bay land agents and, of course, the salepeople at Eaton's.

Eaton's became a Mennonite landmark shortly after it was built in 1908. While the church disallowed Eaton's catalogues, it became a tradition to shop at Eaton's whenever a trip was made to the city.

Blumenorters also patronized wholesalers. Store records show

that, in 1901, John R. Reimer had dealings with 18 different Winnipeg wholesalers. These included Thomas Ryan of Winnipeg, Campbell Brothers and Wilson, J.H. Ashdown Ltd., The Great West Saddlery Co., J. McLeod Holliday Co., Jobin Marrin Co., R.J. Whitka Co., The Consolidated Stationery Co. and the McCalrey Manufacturing Co.[19]

Jacob C. Penner from Belize tells the story of what his father, Klaas P. Penner, once experienced in Winnipeg. As a young man Klaas Penner sometimes went to Winnipeg with Peter Reimer where Reimer sold meat to Eaton's and other places. It was Klaas's job to watch the horses. One day a dark storm came up, the wind picked up and things began to be blown around. Something spooked the horses, and they took off down the street at a wild gallop with the wagon canvas madly flapping and Klaas Penner chasing after them, trying to catch the team. Down the street two cultured ladies, not noticing the team, started crossing the street. A policeman, watching the episode, saw the ensuing danger and rushed over to the two ladiès, grabbed one, pulling her back, and kicked the other one forward. When the horses were finally caught, no one apparently was badly hurt.

Records also exict which show that Blumenort-area farmers did much business with Winnipeg mortgage companies. These companies helped Blumenorters purchase Hudson's Bay and Manitoba Shool lands, Case and Watrous steamers, and make artesian wells. Some of these companies included the Manitoba Mortgage and Investment Co. Ltd., the Western Canadian Loan and Savings Co., the Dominion of Canada Mortgage Co. Ltd., the J.I. Case Co. and J.F. Dean Freeman, Ltd.[15]

Footnotes

1
2 Warkentin, op. cit., p. 92.
Marjorie Toews, "The Settlement Process in Provencher; 1881-1911,"
3 (a research paper, University of Manitoba, 1980), pp. 1-20.
4 Baerg, op. cit.
5 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
6 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
Johann Warkentin, letter, 1884, Crown Lands Office, Province of
7 Manitoba, Winnipeg.
8 Abram P. Friesen, et. al., op. cit., p. 136.
9 John C. Reimer, correspondence with author, August, 1981.
Interview between Betty Plett and Klaas C. Penner, Belize,
10 C.A., August, 1980.
11 Klaas D. Reimer, op. cit.
12 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
13 Interview with George S. Koop, Belize, C.A., December, 1980.
14 Interview with Abe P. Unger, Landmark, Manitoba, December, 1982.
15 Cornelius L. Plett, "Tagebuch, 1895," op. cit.
Land Transaction Abstracts for 7-6E. Land Titles Office, Province
of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

Part II Chapter 11: The Village System Ends

The Blumenort village broke up in 1910. For some years before that there were signs that the village system that had been brought over from Russia would not last long in Canada. As early as 1889 Blumenhof farmers left their village to settle on their own quarter sections. Shortly thereafter Neuanlage followed suit. Similar communities were started by Blumenort-area farmers in 1893 in Greenland, in 1894 in De Krim, in 1900 in Clearsprings and near Hochfeld, in 1904 in Ekron and in 1908 in Ridgewood.

In 1889 Blumenhof became the village in the East Reserve to dismantle and see its members move onto separately-owned quarters of land.[1] The reason for the unprecedented break-up of a Mennonite village seemed to hinge on certain unique features and problwms of the Blumenhof settlement.

The first problem may have arisen from the fact that Blumenhof was near Clearsprings, where the English settlers farmed separately-owned quarters. The idea of farming one's registered quarter independently appealed to Gottlieb Jahnke, the first Blumenhof settler. Jahnke, a Prussian who had joined the Kleine Gemeinde just before coming to Canada, had registered section S.W. 23 in 1874, and when the Blumenhof settlers came the next year, they settled just to the east of his land. When the Blumenhof villagers invited Jahnke to place his quarter into the Blumenhof Village District, he refused. Yet he decided to continue to live near the village and be a member of the Schulzenbott.

Jahnke's independence seems to have discouraged the smooth functioning of the village. In 1880 Johann Broeski, a brother-in-law to Jahnke, took the liberty of withdrawing his quarter section from the village district and selling to John Jamieson, a Clear-springs farmer. The idea of farming blocks of land independently seems to have appealed to Cornelius S. Plett and Johann Warkentin, the two brothers-in-law who founded Blumenhof and who had both farmed large acreage in Russia. Therefore, in the years between 1881 and 1884, when Plett purchased three quarters on section 26 from the Hudson's Bay Company and Warkentin acquired N.W. 23 from a French-man, they chose to keep these lands out of the village district. In 1884 another step in the dissolution of the Blumenhof village occured when Abram R. Friesen moved to Lichteau and sold his homestead quarter to Johann Janzen. Janzen then proceeded to withdraw both his new land and his homestead quarter from the village district and began to make plans to establish his own farm on this land.

By 1884, then, fully two sections of land in the Blumenhof area were being farmed independently. Because these land transactions created complexities and a spirit of disunity in the Blumenhof village system, it was suggested that is might be easiest if all the farmers moved onto their own quarters.[2]

Another problem which led to the end of the village was a lack of good drinking water. The wells that had been hand-dug in the first years began drying up in the early 1880s. In 1885 the problem was so severe that the Blumenhof herdsman, Isaac W. Reimer, brought the village cattle to Blumenort where there was better water. That same year Johann W. Reimer and Johann L. Plett were

each paid a dollar a day to explore the area in search of better water. Finally it was decided to sink an artesian well at the east end of the village. Hauling the water for a distance, however, proved inconvenient for most villagers.[3]

When Gottlieb Jahnke drilled his own artesian well and tapped a source of good water, other villagers considered doing the same. The cost involved, however, was so great that most farmers wished to make wells only on land for which they had legal title. By having legal title to their lands, farmers would be able to obtain mortgages to pay for the cost of drilling.[4]

The land and water problems finally culminated in 1887 when the following entry was put into the village minute book:

> "Today, on November 3, we were gathered here in the Schulzenbott and talked about the possibility of granting each the option of moving onto his own quarters and, through discussion, granted this freedom. Those who have to compensate others for land may pay it in three installments; the first term, 1889, the second, 1890, the third, 1891. The expenses of land transaction will be shared by all."[5]

By 1888 the necessary legal land transfers had been completed, and, on March 1 of the next year, the village had an auction sale where its wire, troughs, gates and fence posts were sold. Moving the buildings began in 1888 and was completed two years later with the moving of the school house a mile to the north.

The second dissolution of the village system occured in Neuanlage shortly after Blumenhof was dissolved. The process in which this occured is not clear. In April, 1889, Peter B. Friesens moved out of the Neuanlage village onto the south-west corner of their registered quarter section N.E. 15. This move came shortly after a disagreement between Friesen and his Neuanlage neighbors was discussed at a Brotherhood meeting. Whether the move took

place because of the disagreement or whether the planned move caused the disagreement is not known.

In that same year David L. Plett, a son-in-law to Johann Koop, Sr., purchased from the Hudson's Bay Company a quarter section of land lying just to the south of Neuanlage and moved there with his family from Blumenhof. Around this time as well, two other quarter sections were purchased from the HBC section by the Neuanlage farmers, who divided the land into strips resembling Koagels, but for which they each obtained legal title. The example set by the Blumenhof farmers and the purchase of the village of Neuanlage, which, it seems, occurred in 1890.

Only one detail of the dissolution is known. Apparently Peter B. Klassen, the village Schulz, had to make sure that the land distribution was fair and that everyone was happy. One of the Koops was quite unhappy with the settlement, and it was not until his neighbor gave him some additional land and Peter Klassen gave him a cow that he was satisfied. (The original document explaining this had recently been lost.)[7]

The Greenland settlement was begun around 1893 when Blumenorters belonging to the Holdeman Church moved onto separate farms in the north-western part of the Blumenort village district.and onto the Brittensteppe land just to the north of the village district. The Brittensteppe, meaning "land of the half breeds", was an area of land which had been granted in 240-acre parcels to the Metis of Ste. Anne as part of the settlement between Louis Riel and the Dominion Government in 1870. People with names like Flammand, Baptiste, Denign, Grouette, Perreault, Champagne, Payette, Lemire and Ducharme held titles to the uninhabitated, low-lying plain

which was to become Greenland.[8] There are reports from surveyors that, during the wet years of the early 1870s, this land was covered with vast sheets of water. During the next decade, this land turned into a lush green grassland. Hence it became known as Greenland. "Greenland" was the name given by John B. Toews, one of the first settlers in the area. He reasoned that Greenland was a good name because it could be used in either German or English.

In 1890 the John Toews family from Gruenfeld became the first settlers to move to Greenland. Two years later they were followed by the families of Peter H. Penner and Rev. Martin Penner. It was not till 1893, however, when the Blumenort Schulzenbott agreed to dissolve sections 32 and 33 and part of 35 in the northern part of the district and allow nine families to leave the village that Greenland grew into a full-scale community.[9] Six Blumenort families, including Peter W. Toews, John B. Toews, Peter T. Wiebe, Isaac De Veer, Heinrich Penner, Isaac Penner and the Blumenhof family Isaac W. Reimer moved to Greenland in that year. They were followed later by the Peter B. Toews family.[10] These families settled on their own quarters on the rich heavy soil found to the north of the creek. A road was built connecting the farmsteads, and leading to the southeast toward Blumenort and Steinbach. Church was held during the first years in the home of Peter H. Penners. The growth of the Greenland settlement is well described in the following accounts:

> "[In 1895] a small church was built of rough lumber; seating was arranged by putting planks on saw-horses (without backs, of course). This building was a mile south and a half mile west of the present church site, just east of the old cemetery [in the northern part of section 32.] In 1897 when Greenland was established as a school district, school was conducted in this building, with John B. Toews

> as teacher. In 1898 a school house was built across the road (east) of the present church. The late John L. Isaac, then of Gruenfeld, Manitoba, was the first teacher. In 1899 Elder John Holdeman visited the Manitoba congregations once more, and this for the last time. He died the following spring.[11]

The church building was enlarged in 1905; an excerpt from the Botschafter der Wahrheit, written by Elder Peter Toews, read as follows: "In Greenland the brethren have enlarged their meeting house lengthwise, and raised the ceiling. They have plenty of room now, and yet at the first meeting all the seats were filled.[12]" A cheese factory was also built during the first years. Peter H. Penner became the noted Greenland cheese seller in Winnipeg and Peter T. Toews was a cheesemaker there for a long time.

Only two non-Holdeman families, those of Abram M. Friesen and his son Klaas I. Friesen, took advantage of the 1893 Schulzenbott decision and settled on S.W. 35. The hard work involved in establishing a new farmyard were well revealed in Friesen's personal diary. On April 25 they decided to move out of the village. In June they hauled stones for the buildings which they would move to the new place. During that month, too, they dug their well. During the next months they moved and built buildings. A year after they made their decision to move, the farm was finally ready to be occupied.[13]

In 1892 Johann Janzen, the wealthy Blumenhof farmer, helped his children purchase the school section (29-7-7E), two miles east of the Blumenort school. Although Janzen never moved there, he helped four of his children establish a small farming community known as De Krim. Janzen's oldest son, Johann P. Janzen, and his son-in-law, Peter F. Thiessen, became the first settlers in the area when they moved here in 1892.[14] In the spring of 1893 Johann's

older brother Cornelius joined the settlement at De Krim after his marriage to Agatha Friesen. When Johann K. Loewen moved here in 1900 shortly after his marriage to Elizabeth Janzen, De Krim became a full-fledged Janzen settlement.

The Loewen quarter section had a unique feature. It was transversed by the CN rail line which had been built through the area from Winnipeg a few years before. Die Krim was to be one of the four Mennonite settlements in Southeastern Manitoba to be situated on a rail line and only one mile from a major train depot.

Around 1898 Johann P. Janzen moved to Rosenort, where his wife's family resided, and sold his quarter sections to Abram Penner, Sr., from Blumenort.[15] Penner extablished his married children, the Johann R. Penners and Johann K. Pletts, in this land. It was Johann R. Penner who, it is said, gave De Krim its name. Die Krim is German for the Crimea, a peninsula in Southern Russia, about 120 miles due south of Borosenko. Apparently the Mennonites from the Crimea were quite wel-to-do and the isolated Janzen settlement four miles to the east of Blumenort reminded Penner of what he had heard about the Russian Crimea.[16]

Sometime after 1905 Penner moved two miles south to become the first Kleine Gemeinde settler in the Ridgewood area. He was joined in the next year or so by Peter and Johann B. Thiessen, sons of Peter F. Thiessen. After the Blumenort village broke up, a fourth family, the Abram R.E. Reimers moved into the area.

No Kleine Gemeinde school was ever extablished in the area. The Ridgewooders and Cornelius P. Janzens sent their children to the English school nearby, commonly know as the Little Red School

House. The other settlers from De Krim, however, sent their children to school in Blumenort, where they boarded. When Blumenort broke up, the settlers took turns driving their children to the Blumenhof school.[17]

Around the turn of the century Blumenort began expanding southward onto expensive cultivated land in the Clearsprings district. In 1899 Heinrich R. Reimer, Peter P. Reimer and Peter B. Kroeker, each recently married to a Dueck girl, purchased two auarters (N.W. and N.E. 9) from John C. Winfield. That same fall the three families moved out of the village and settled two miles to the south across the road from an English family, the Peter Keatings. Here they established their own farms and their little settlement soon became known as Schwagershof (the yard of the brothers-in-law).[19] In 1908 Peter Reimer moved to Neuanlage and Peter Kroeker and Heinrich Reimer bought his 107 acres. Peter Reimer, meanwhile, purchased the farm of Peter Koops, who was moving to Saskatchewan. Ten years later Heinrich Reimer sold his farm to Kroeker when he joined the exodus to Prairie Rose. Schwagershof then became a Kroeker settlement where Peter B. Koreker and his sons continued to farm. The children of this settlement attended school in Blumenort until 1920 when they transferred to the Clearsprings school.

In 1902 Rev. Peter R. Reimer opened the way for another two of his sons to move our of the village onto their own farms when he purchased the west half of section 15 from Peter McIntyre. Shortly after this, Cornelius P. Reimer moved onto this land. In 1906 he was followed by his brother, Abram P. Reimer. In 1910 a former Blumenorter purchased S.E. 14 from Alex MacKaskil and sold it two

years later to Klaas P.L. Reimer, who moved there.[20]

Around 1900 two more Blumenort families left the village and moved out two miles west along the Winnipeg Road to settle near Hochfeld. Hochfeld was a Bergthal settlement begun in 1874. In 1900 the Manitoba Government put up its School Land Section (29) for sale to raise money for Manitoba schools. Peter I. Wiebe and Johann F. Reimer promptly bought three quarters of it. It seems that Wiebe, a young progressive farmer who bought the east hald of the section, began to build up his farm on quarter section S.E. 29 that very fall. Johann F. Reimer, who ran into some serious problems with his Hochfeld neighbors, waited till 1902 before he moved, to begin his farm half a mile west of Wiebes. It seems that the Bergthal settlers who were leasing parts of the school section for eight cents an acre objected that the land had been sold to a Kleine Gemeinder from Blumenort and that the N.W. quarter was now to be leased to Johann F. Reimer. In February, 1902, Martin Jerome, a government inspector, intervened in the dispute and recommended that the Hochfelders should have the preference for the lease. It was not till 1908 that Johann F. Reimer was able to negotiate the purchase of the disputed N.W. quarter.[18] The two Kleine Gemeinde Hochfeld families sent their children to Blumenort School.

The Ekron area, south of Steinbach, also attracted Blumenort area families during this time. Around 1904 Jacob L. Plett of Blumenhof purchased 240 acres there and helped establish his children, the Klaas K. Friesens, on it in 1905 and the David Siemens in 1908. In 1905 Klaas's brother, John K. Friesen, moved there as well. During this time, too, Cornelius L. Plett and his son-in-law, Bernard D. Doerksen left Blumenhof to establish farms just

south of Steinbach close to where Abram Braunte Reimer had settled earlier. In 1908 two more Blumenort families left the village when the Johann J. Loewens and the Klaas R. Penners moved to Ekron.

Herbert, Saskatchewan, was another area which attracted a number of Blumenort-area families during this time. Saskatchewan and Alberta were becoming attractive places for many Manitoba Mennonites seeking new economic opportunities. Local families who headed west around 1904 included Gottlieb Jahnke, Abram K. Plett, Peter B. Koop, Isaac I. Friesen, Cornelius R. Friesen and Cornelius K. Siemens.

In 1910 the Blumenort village came to an end. Like Blumenhof and Neuanlage before it, Blumenort disbanded its village and families moved onto their own quarter sections. This move ended a period of close interdependence and a special kind of community. With the end of the village came the end to the Schulzenbott, the herdsman, the Viedazeija, the Koagel, the garden paths and the village church. Everything the village stood for was eroded.

The question, of course, is: why did it happen? While there is no one answer, it is clear that the village system which had served so well in Russia and in the first era in Canada had become outmoded.

No doubt the most important reason Blumenort finally broke up in 1910 was because the Blumenhof, Greenland and Neuanlage people had made it possible for Blumenorters to accept the idea of "no village". With the example that Blumenhof and Greenland had set, the ideas of farming independently, living far from one's neighbors and selling and buying land as any other commodity had become acceptable.

Another reason was the growing disenchantment with farming Koagels, small strips of land spread over several miles. Abram R. Penner, a strong voice in favor of ending the village, argued that fully 1/3 of the farmer's time was spent moving the horses and equipment to the fields. "The farmer should be where the work is," said Penner.[21] Other farmers complained that themachinery could not withstand the wear and tear of being hauled long distances on dirt roads which, with cattle moving aout, were either dry and rutted or seas of mud.[22] Still other complained that is was impractical to buy large new steam engines for land on which one could hardly turn them around. Between 1900 and 1910 a few of the more progressive farmers like Klaas P. Reimer and Heinrich E. Plett began to trade Koagels in order to consolidate their land holdings in one particular area and thus make farming more profitable. Several Blumenort farmers owned land in Blumenhof, Ekron and Clear-springs and were fully aware of the advantages of farming larger blocks of land. These farmers felt most strongly that the village system, in which it was expected that one would share and keep things small, was too restrictive.[23]

A third reason for the end of the village system was the growing population on all sides of Blumenort. This made it necessary to exercise greater control over village land and made it difficult to maintain a large community pasture. After Greenland was settled, it attracted a steady increase in traffic from Giroux, Steinbach and Blumenort. This traffic had to pass right through Blumenort's pasture and this meant opening and closing these gates. Klaas D. Reimer remembers standing at the pasture well watching a vehicle pass through the west gate and noting hos the cows stopped

drinking to stare and see if the gate was left open. On at least one occasion this gate was smashed to pieces by vandals. By 1910 this problem came to a head when the Hanover Municipality announced that it was opening a road right through the middle of Blumenort's pasture. This meant the end to community and pasture and an end to herding cattle communally.[24]

A fourth factor in the dissolution of the village was simply that there was no major opposition to it. Church leaders in Blumenort who might have feared the effects of growing individualism were some of the first ones to leave. Unlike the church leaders in the West Reserve, who threatened members who left the village with excommunication, church leaders such as Cornelius L. Plett, Peter W. Loewen and Peter R. Reimer in the Blumenort area were proponents of farming separately. Opposition did come from sone of the more conservative members of the village, such as Isaac J. Loewen, who openly warned against large, worldly farms. Those who had grown to love the village way of life must also have hesitated when the movement to leave the village started. Many years later David P. Reimer nostalgically recalled the time when the East Reserve villages broke up:

> "Blumenhof allowed the same thing to happen to it and each farmer moved onto his own farm...With the disappearance of the village vanished the trumpet sound of the herdsman... Just as the herdsman's trumpet was silented, many other things that had been practised for hundreds of years in Prussia and in Blumenort for the first 36 years and had been considered traditional and economical, changed. The school children no longer had the school close by. They had to walk a long way or be driven to school. The neighbors were no longer easily reached. Previously, the women had been able to reach the neighbor's yard by walking along a peaceful pathway through beautiful gardens and wooden gateways. And yet these villages broke up, an action which was justified foe economic reasons."[25]

While there were nostalgic feelings towards the village, one

historian claims that the villages which retained until 1910 did so largely because "everyone dreaded the task of re-allocating the lands."[26] The task ofdividing up the land among farmers was indeed a long and difficult one for Blumenort. Before the move the Schulzenbott, chaired by Schulz Heinrich E. Plett, gathered several times to reach a consensus as to how the dismantling of the village could be done in a fair and smooth way. Consensus was all important, as the strip-farming had no legal basis, and thus the redistribution of the lands could only be achieved by mutual consent.

In 1909 Abraham R. Penner and Klaas F. Penner were chosen to head up the re-allocation committee. It was their job to take the 3,000 acres, or five sections, of Blumenort land and distribute it amont the 14 families who remained in the village. This was a difficult task because farmers had different numbers of Koagels and the five sections of land available were of varying quality. The land included bushland, shallow rocky land and deep clay loan areas. Thus different provisions were made for each farmer. Those who had many Koagels received more clay loam land. The elderly and the newly-married who had few Koagels, received land from the poorer areas. In addition, those farmers who received good land had to compensate those who received the poorer lands.[27]

Not all farmers were happy with the land which was allocated to them. It seems that some of the wealthier farmers felt shortchanged. One farmer who had already received three quarters was so unhappy with one of the pieces, which was very rocky, that he talked openly about giving it away to someone as a Christmas gift.

Most farmers were happy with the 1909 plan, and, in the summer of 1910, the moving started. Houses, barns, sheds and outhouses

were loaded onto wagons and hauled to the new farmsteads. The Plett and Reimer Company did most of the moving. They had previously ordered four special moving wagons with three-inch-wide steel rims. Two were packed in front of the building and two in the back. Once the building had been jacked up sufficiently, huge 8"x 8" beams about 36 feet in length were placed under the buildings and chained under the axles of the wagons. Plett and Reimer's Watrous steamer was hitched to the front wagons. In this way, building after building headed out of the village, along the crude dirt roads to separate farmyards.

Moving was not accomplished without difficulty. Henry E. Plett decided to move his hog barn with the pigs still in it. Using Plett and Reimer's Watrous as well as David L. Plett's Case, they got the barn up to a 1/4 mile from Plett's new place when the heavy load became bogged down in a low area. It was said that on this occasion such deep ruts were made that years of plowing did not erase them. Another trouble the movers had was getting Peter R. Penner's house up the hill in modern-day Blumenort. The steamers just did not have the power to pull the load, so a pulley was improvised and the house was winched up the hill. By the end of the summer the flurry of moving was over and the village of Blumenort was no longer in existence.[28]

Only three farmers who had been given land adjacent to the village kept their old farmyards at the village site. Klaas P. Reimer maintained his farm on the east end of the village and farmed there till his son Ben F. Reimer took over. Klaas F. Penner kept his farm on the west end, and many years later sold it to John L. Plett. Isaac J. Loewen, also having received land touching

the village, stayed where he had lived, right next to the school. His son, Isaac P. Loewen, stayed at that spot till 1937 when he moved onto the ridge, 1/4 mile north, to the present Dave P. Loewen farm. The church building also remained at the old village site fo for several years.

Thus the village era came to an end. Lying ahead of the Blumenort people was a new era in which they would face unforeseen challenges and changes. As the village ceased to exist, many of the customs and views which they had brought from Russia were lost, and new ways of doing things were becoming increasingly acceptable.

Footnotes

1 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
2 Ibid.
3 Blumenhof Protokoll and Rechnungsbuch.
4 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
5 Blumenhof Protokoll und Rechnungsbuch.
6 Abraham F. Reimer, diary, April, 1889.
7 Interview with Jac. U. Klassen, Steinbach, Manitoba, November, 1981.
8 Ste. Anne Municipality Tax Rolls, RM of Ste. Anne, Office, Ste. Anne, Manitoba.
9 Abram M. Friesen, op. cit., states that the Blumenort Dorfsgemeinde, in 1893, set aside some land in the northern part of the village district for anyone who wanted to move there. Friesen, however, was the only non-Holdeman to move out at the time.
10 Histories of the Congregations, (Church of God in Christ Mennonite Publication Board, Hesston, Kansas, 1963), p. 163.
11 Ibid.,p. 164.
12 Ibid.
13 Abraham M. Friesen, op. cit.
14 Abram P. Friesen, et. al., op. cit., p. 168.
15 Interview with John N. Janzen, Blumenort, November, 1981.
16 Interview with Peter J. Loewen, Blumenort, November, 1981.
17 Ibid.
18 Land Patent Application Records, Crown Lands Office, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
19 Interview with Mrs. Peter D. Kroeker, Steinbach, Manitoba, September, 1981.
20 Land Transaction Records, Land Titles Office, Province of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

21 John D. Penner, op. cit.
22 John Warkentin, op. cit.
23 Jacob W. Friesen, op. cit.
24 Klaas D. Reimer, op. cit.
25 David P. Reimer, op. cit.
26 John Warkentin, op. cit.
27 Blumenort Village Papers, Rechnung 1909, Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort.
28 Interview with Peter P.D. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba, July, 1980.

Part III: The Transition Era: 1910-1948

Introduction to Part III: The Transition Era

The period from 1910-1948 was a time of change for the Blumenort-area people. Slowly their customs and way of life began to resemble that of a typical North American prairie community. While many distinctive features of the Kleine Gemeinde culture were still intact by the end of World War II, many more were diminishing.

During Blumenort's "Transition Era", a countryside, complete with new scattered farmyards and section roads, was firmly established. Farms increased in size and business practices became more acceptable. Schools were forced to become public and English. The church had to contend with outside influences as never before. Lifestyle changed as the telephone and car became commonplace. While many community members adapted themselves to this change, others feared its consequences and sought a new home in Mexico.

Part III Chapter 1: Landscape in Transition

The new farmyards, the section roads, the telephone poles, the new houses and barns that were put up after 1910 radically changed the appearance of Blumenort's countryside. The settlement pattern in which each family live on their own quarter section had finally become fully accepted in 1910. Gone was the day when Blumenorters lived together in a village close to the school and church.

By 1914 many had already forgotten the life in the village. While the old village street remained and served as a driveway for Klaas P. Reimers and Isaac J. Loewens, most of the old buildings had been moved. On March 12, 1914, Jacob S. Friesen, the editor of the Giroux Volksbote, visited the former village site of Blumenort and wrote the following description.

> On March 12 we made a small excursion to Blumenort. (Our stepbrother, Klaas F. Penner, picked us up for a visit.) This is always an historic event for us...for this is where our mother [Mrs. Peter Penner, Sr.] has lived for a good part of her life. One can still see several of the old farmyards where the buildings used to stand. But most of these have totally disappeared.
>
> By the old Loewen place there are still the street trees and several fruit trees so that one can still orientate himself. The Old Cornelius Friesen house on the east end on the north side of the street still stands just as id did in 1889, when we left Blumenort to homestead in North Dakota. The Julius Radinzels still live in this house. The old street still runs as it originally was laid out.
>
> The complete building of old Peter [P.] Wiebe, which for a long time stood close to the street and is presently used by Klaas F. Penners for a barn, now stands behind our old place where the earth has since been levelled.
>
> Abraham [R.E.] Reimers still live at their old place, and

> across the street from where Jacob [P.] Wiebes once lived lives the old widow Abram R. Reimer. Klaas P. Reimer lives on the former Peter B. Toews place. The house which Toews built there, as well as the big barn which has been enlarged, still stands. Our firend Reimer has also moved the new house that his father-in-law Cornelius P. Friesen built just before his death, to the yard and attached it to the west end of the house so that the complex looks like one big house. The other people have all moved onto their own quarter sections and are in general all very well off.[1]

The most obvious change to Blumenort's countryside during this time was the changing shape and size of fields and the amount of bushland in the area. Under the village system, all fields had been long and narrow, usually no larger than several acres. After 1910, when farmers moved onto their own quarters, these field sizes increased to 40 and 80-acre pieces. The parts of the old pasture which could be used for farmland were broken and eventually the bushland on S.W. 27, S.W. 28, S.E. 29, N.W. 26, and N.E. 34, were broken and cultivated.

The number of acres each farmer put under cultivation rapidly increased between 1910 and 1920. This was because the wheat price rose and more land was put under cultivation in the Prairie Rose and Ridgewood areas. However, during the 30s, as the population around Blumenort increased and farmers became more dependent on mixed farming, the farm sizes dropped. Records show that in the Hanover Municipality the number of farms over 480 acres dropped from 53 in 1916 to only 18 in 1946.[2]

While many of the Blumenort farmers had moved their old buildings to their new farmyards, many others built spacious new buildings. The years after 1910 were prosperous ones, and the Plett brothers, who enjoyed carpentry, found themselves in great demand. Before a decade was up, a new church and a new school had

been built. Farmers such as Abram R. Penner, Abram R. Reimer, Cornelius P. Wohlgemuth, Klaas R. Penner, John K. Loewen, C.P. Reimer, Mrs. Heinrich Wohlgemuth and Jacob G. Barkman had new sturdy 2 1/2-storey cottage-roofed houses built for themselves. Others, such as the C.R. Pletts, Peter P. Reimers, Jacob L. Pletts, Abram L. Pletts and David L. Pletts had big L-shaped houses built. The great steep-roofed barns, with two-storey haylofts attached at a right angle to the barn, became common; and even some hip-roofed barns were built.

After 1921 building construction slowed considerably. There was activity at Heinrich E. Plett's farm, where Plettenville industrial complex was slowly being built up; across the road from Jacob G. Barkman's farm a large cheese factory was built by Blumenort-and-area farmers in 1932. The houses that were built during the 30s and 40s were smaller and cheaper, 1 1/2-storey structures. Such houses were built by the Plett Brothers who charged 25¢ an hour by 1937. It was this type of house that was built for C.W. Brandts in 1933, Peter K. Pletts in 1935, Isaac P. Loewens in 1937 and Jacob F. Wiebes in 1938.

Road building was a long, slow, tedious process. By the time Blumenort broke up in 1910, most roads already followed the road allowances along section lines. Some of these roads had even been built up by local farmers doing statutory labor for the Hanever Municipality. Most of the roads, however, were mere trails, rutty in summer, very muddy in spring and fall, and snowed over in winter.

When spring rains came, the trails were particularly bed. Community activities sometimes came to a virtual standstill. School

records show that in April, 1919, the school in Blumenort was closed for 10 days because of the poor road situation. School teacher G.G. Kornelson officially accounted for the days of school missed with two words, "Muddy Roads", neatly written across the empty space in the school register.

It is said that even the steam engines could not travel some of these roads. Plett and Reimer's huge Case steamer, pulling a thresher and caboose in 1920, once sank into the trail at a low spot near the school where John L. Pletts live today. Several hours of precious harvest time were lost as logs were gotten and a corduroy road built through the low spot.[3]

Even horses could not always make it. During the 30s C.R. Plett once became badly stuck on what was Blumenort's Main Street. He was on his way to the cheese factory on a wet morning. In preparation for bad roads he had hitched four horses to his wagon and put only six milk cans on the wagon. But this was not sufficient, and Plett and some of the neighbors spent a good part of the morning hitching and rehitching the team to the wagon to get it out.[4]

The few reads that were built up were the main roads connecting different communities. Such was the old Winnipeg Road which ran through Twin Creek, north-west through Hochfeld, Blumengart, Oak Island, to Point Douglas on the outskirts of Winnipeg. Jac. U. Klassen remembers a lot of Steinbach traffic passing their place in Twin Creek on its way to Winnipeg.

Another main road was the Steinbach Road, today the #12 highway. Before the 20s it was a mere trail that had been established by people travelling along the section line to Steinbach. It may have been built up slightly before this, but Peter K. Plett remem-

bers helping to rebuild it during the 20s. One summer, under local supervision and paid by the R.M. of Hanover, the farmers in the area began improving the Steinbach Road for at least one mile immediately south of Blumenort. Farmers could work as many days as they chose. Peter Plett recalls working three days during which time six or eight other farmers joined him. Each farmer owned a dirt bucket which was hitched to two horses, and dirt was brought from the sides of the allowances to form a crude dam. During different years different parts of the Steinbach road were built.

Parts of the Steinbach Road were gravelled as early as 1932-34. John R. Penner, working for the municipality, organized farmers with horses and sleighs to do the gravelling in winter time. The best road gravel was to be obtained from Isaac P. Loewen's farm, the very place from which the first Blumenort settlers obtained their gravel for building purposes. The farm was located on a hill of rough gravel mixed with clay. Because the top layer was frozen, the gravel was mined. Penner would tunnel up to 75 feet into the side of the hill by packing the floor of the tunnel with snow and backing the sleighs right into the tunnel. The gravel was then hauled to the Steinbach Road and spread by removing the 3" x 4" planks on the floor of the sleigh.[5]

The road leading from Blumenort to Ste. Anne was nothing more than a poor, earthen trail till after World War II. Most of the Steinbach traffic to Winnipeg followed the old cross-country trail through Twin Creek, Hochfeld, and northwest to the city until 1929. In that year the Dawson Trail, between Winnipeg and Ste. Anne, was gravelled. Steinbachers began heading straight

through Blumenort north to connect with the Dawson Trail on the west side of Ste. Anne. There was enough traffic to warrant the opening of a gas station, known as K.K. Penner Service, in Blumenort.

The road, however, was very crude, and in winter it was usually closed. Peter R. Penner was forced to keep his Model T. transfer truck in Ste. Anne and haul the dry goods for his store the rest of the way to Blumenort by sleigh.[6] This was a common practice for those who relied on their cars to get them to Winnipeg. During some years in the 30s, Jacob T. Loewen of Steinbach opened the road through Blumenort with a snowplow he had built. At one place Loewen led the winter road across a farmer's land and set up a toll station to pay for the plowing.

Another main road was the Giroux Road which ran straight west of Giroux to connect with the Steinbach-Blumenort Road. It was a very busy road, as it connected both Steinbach and Blumenort to the train depot. It, too, however, was a very low earthen road. In October, 1928, during a period of nice, dry weather, a major reconstruction of this road took place. For several weeks the two-mile stretch just east of the Steinbach Road was built up. Under the supervision of Klaas R. Toews and George Goosen, 30 farmers from miles around brought their horses, plows, and earth scoops. Peter P.D. Reimer remembers how he and Isaac F. Loewen manned the plows, each pulled by a three-horse team, and loosened the earth in the ditches. At different places along the stretch three earth-scooping teams worked together to pull the loosened dirt to form a dam. When the sun set, the farmers unhitched their teams and returned home. At eight the next morning the construction

resumed. Some time after this reconstruction the Giroux Road was also gravelled.

In 1932 when the Blumenort farmers decided to build their cheese factory on a ridge in the northern part of the district, they had no idea they were laying the foundation of a new village. Steinbach and Giroux were the service towns of the southeast, and more and more farmers were bringing their business to Winnipeg. Yet, partly because the Blumenort cheese factory was Hanover's busiest, and partly because the land around the factory was rocky bushland, useless for cultivation, a tiny village did arise.

Ironically, the poor bushland of northern Blumenort was to become the most densely populated after 1910. While the wealthier farmers were able to secure the more fertile land in large pieces in the south, the poorer land in the north was divided into smaller units for the younger farmers. Therefore in 1910 five young farmers established farms near or on the ridge which runs through modern-day Blumenort. They included 33-year-old C.W. Brandt, 28-year-old Peter R. Penner and 28-year-old Cornelius R. Penner. 32-year-old Klaas R. Penner purchased a farm nearby in 1911.

In 1932 the cheese factory was built in this area, in part because there were neighbors here who could keep an eye on the plant. The other site considered, near the present-day residence of Ben P. Doerksen, was rejected because there were few people in the vicint. The cheese factory brought further developments. Cornelius U. Kornelson, the Cheesemaker, settled nearby. By 1940 four small businesses had located near the factory to tap the business of the farmers from Ridgewood, Blumenhof, Blumenort, Twin Creek and Greenland who were bringing their milk to the factory.

Throughout the 1930s the population around the cheese factory grew as more and more people sought small pieces of inexpensive land to build their shelters and find work which would ensure them a small but steady income. In 1932 Jacob R. Unger moved onto a three-acre parcel of land made available to him by Rev. C.R. Penner. Unger built a log house on it and worked in the sawmill owned by Plett and Company. Penner also made a lot available to the elderly John J. Loewens, who built just to the west of Ungers.

In 1939 the Kleine Gemeinde church purchased 20 acres from the Klaas R. Reimer estate, a mile west of the present-day church site. This land was divided into 2 1/2-acre lots for relief to church members who did not farm.[7] These lots were sold at $30 an acre or, in at least one instance, given away. By 1940 John C. Reimer, Ed A. Toews, Abram U. Brandt and Peter K. Klassen had availed themselves of this land.

In 1937-1939 John G. Barkmans, Gerhard D. Doerksens and their families returned from Kansas and also settled in this area. John N. Koops of Twin Creek bought their lot in 1939 and sought employment in the area.

Thus by 1940 there were 16 families and six businesses located along or near the mile road which today is Blumenort's Centre Avenue. By 1948 the tiny centre was showing signs of becoming a full-fledged village.

Footnotes

1 Jacob S. Friesen, "Editoriales," Volksbote, March 1914.
2 Canada Farm Census, (figures for 1916, 1946), Provincial Archives of Manitoba, 1918.
3 Interview with Peter P.D. Reimer, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981.
4 Interview with Peter K. Plett, Blumenort, November, 1981.

5 Interview with Dave P. Loewen, R.R.1, Steinbach, December, 1981.
6 Interview with John L. Penner, Steinbach, August, 1980.
7 Francis, op. cit., p. 252.

Part III, Chapter 2: Changing Ways to Farming

Farming in the Blumenort area between 1910 and 1948 was a very up-and-down affair. The good times the Blumenort farmers had experienced since 1895 turned into a period of booming prosperity during World War I and continued until 1921. At that point prices declined and farmers stopped investing. When the depression came in the 30s, things reversed and Blumenort-area farms began depending exclusively on mixed farming to make ends meet. By 1937 the depression started lifting and Blumenorters began to realize a steady income from the cheese factory and reaped a bumper crop. Mixed farming continued to dominate the farm economy until some years after World War II.

Farmers entered the new decade in 1910 with optimism. The end of the village brought with it a building boom as new farmyards were established. These years also marked the height of steam engine activity in the community and an increase in farm efficiency. Farmers could look back over the past 12 years and see that, since 1898, high wheat prices and a good local market for milk had made farming profitable. Little did they realize that even more prosperity lay waiting for them in the next 12 years.

When Blumenort broke up in 1910, the cheese factory was a strong business and gave farmers a steady and reliable income. Four years later, as World War I began, the cheese

factory closed. Its closing, however, brought no bad news for the farmer. Winnipeg was suffering a milk shortage and creameries were outpricing the cheese factory.[1] By 1914 a Winnipeg creamery had put up a skimming station at the Giroux corner, only half a mile south of the cheese factory. Although some pioneers remember a big World War I sign reading, SAVE THE FOOD, nailed to the cheese factory, it seems that, shortly after the war broke out, the factory closed. John G. Barkman recalls riding his bicycle to the cheese factory in 1917 when it reopened on a trial basis and hired him as a cheesemaker. The trial, however, lasted only two weeks because no one was willing to sell his milk at prices lower than those obtainable at the skimming station.

The skimming station was conveniently located just a mile or so from most Blumenort-area farmers. From here the cream was transported by wagon five miles east to Giroux from where it was sent to Winnipeg by rail. After the cream had been removed, the farmer received the skim milk which he took home and fed to his hogs.

The station, however, had operated only for a short time when it was moved to Giroux. While the manager, John Esau, was an energetic and vibrant fellow, he claimed that, because he had been born on a ship, he had a hard time staying long at one place.[2] When the station moved, it meant that farmers had to group together to get their milk to market. It would be impossible for each farmer to make the seven or eight-mile trip each day. Mrs. Peter K. Plett remembers how they sometimes had to hurry to finish milking the cows

in time for them to send the milk along with the neighbor. Peter P. D. Reimer looks back upon the time when he was hired by the Neuanlage people to haul their milk to Giroux. At Giroux the milk was weighed, poured into a huge cooling tank, and readied for the 8:30 express to Winnipeg.

Both the prices for butter and milk remained high during these years. In 1916 butter was sold at 25¢ per pound, and the milk brought $6.75 a can.[3] Farmers began purchasing cows as never before. The Martin K. Friesens, although only a young couple in 1917, bought four cows in one day in the spring of that year.[4] The market for milk remained strong well into the 20s. The Winnipeg creameries sent out officials to organize public meetings to encourage greater milk production. One such meeting was held at the Blumenhof School in January, 1920. An advertisement in the Steinbach Post requested that many farmers come to the dairy meeting and promised that they would find it in their interest to come.

Another product which provided abundant income after 1910 was wheat. With the exception of 1912, which was a very wet year, and 1916, in which the wheat shrivelled from rust, good wheat crops were harvested year after year. The record crop for Manitoba as a whole came in 1915 when over 60 million bushels were harvested.[5] Isaac P. Loewen used to talk of the time when, returning from Giroux, he would meet up to 50 grain wagons. John C. Reimer remembers the sight of a line of 10 horse-drawn wagons full of wheat heading from Blumenort to Giroux in 1915. During this year, Gerhard

Doerksen of Blumenhof harvested a record 24 bushels of wheat per acre, 39 bushels of oats per acre and 25 bushels of barley per acre.[6] Some of the apparent reasons for these high yields were that fertile, virgin soil was still being broken almost each year and that the plump and quick-ripening Marquis wheat developed in Ontario was now available to the Blumenort farmers.

Although the price per bushel was relatively high at 82¢ in 1910, it sky-rocketed after World War I broke out in 1914. Canadian wheat was suddenly in great demand to feed a Europe at war. By June, 1915, Peter B. Friesen reported receiving $1.25 per bushel for wheat, and two years later Cornelius R. Plett wrote in his diary that the Giroux price for wheat was $3 a bushel. In 1919 Abraham R. Penner made an unprecedented $6,700 from 80 acres of wheat.[7] The bumper crop which had produced 30 bushels per acre was sold for $2.80 a bushel. In 1918 Peter F. Unger wrote that, although "this is the most difficult year for the church since our people came to Manitoba, we have it very good materially. The crop looks very good and prices are exceptionally high."[8]

The result was electrifying. A new demand for land arose as farmers were no longer content to farm just one quarter. In 1918 almost a dozen local farmers moved out of the area to Prairie Rose, where more land was available. Even those who stayed increased the size of their farms. By 1920 Klass P. Reimer, Henry E. Plett, Cornelius P. Reimer, Cornelius Wohlgemuth, Abram L. Plett, Cornelius P. Janzen, Peter I. Wiebe and Peter P. Reimer were farming around a

section of land each.[9] Land which had sold for $15 an acre in 1910 sold for three times that amount 10 years later. In 1915 C. P. Reimer paid William Mooney, Sr., $41 an acre for S.E. 14 which Mooney had purchased for $3 an acre 30 years before.[10] In 1917, when Peter L. Pletts moved to Kansas, their farm was purchased by Martin K. Friesens for $48 an acre, which included good buildings.[11]

This was also a time when more horse-power was needed. More money was invested in improving the breed of horses. But even more impressive was the spree of equipment purchasing which began in 1915. Since the half-dozen or so steam engines had come on the scene in Blumenort around the turn of the century, few new machines had been purchased. Now this changed. In 1915 Plett and Reimer Company purchased a big new 25/75 Case steamer with an eight-bottom plow.

Three years later the first gasoline-powered tractors appeared. Gasoline engines had been around before, but they had been used on well-drilling units and, in some cases, to crush grain and saw wood. Now they were mounted on tractors. Although these tractors had much less power than the large steamers, they required only one man to operate them and they were much cheaper and more versatile. Tractors bearing names such as Case, John Deere, Mogul, Titan, Reese, Twin Cities and Fordson were now becoming practical. On July 28, 1920, the Steinbach Post reported that the first barley in the area had already been cut at Peter F. Loewen's farm in Neuanlage and that the wheat harvest had begun. The Post went on to report that quite a few new binders and even a few new tractors could be seen working the Blumenort-area fields.

According to interviews with local people, the first tractor around was a 10/20 Titan owned by Abram L. Plett. In 1918 Henry E. Plett bought two gasoline tractors, a small Fordson and a three-wheeled Case. In 1919 Peter P. Reimer purchased a 10/18 Case with a two-bottom plow. Klaas P. Reimer made a big investment around this time, just before the bank in Steinbach went bankrupt, when he purchased a 9/18 Case tractor, a Minneapolis threshing machine and a new 490 Chevy car. Another big investor of this time was Peter I. Wiebe, who bought a three-wheeled, 12 horse-power Case tractor and, a year or so later, an additional four-wheeled, 27 horse-power Case and new 24-inch Case thresher. Even Abram R. Penner who had never enjoyed mechanics, preferring to farm his land with a three-horse team, purchased a Fordson tractor. By this time, too, C. P. Reimer owned a Fordson and only a few years later bought a 15/27 Massey-Wallace tractor. A. P. Reimer owned a Samson, and Cornelius R. Penner and John P. Reimer owned Titans. So great was the demand for tractors that, for a time, John K. Loewen even sold Twin City tractors from his farm in Ridgewood.

By 1922 the boom was over. World War I had ended four years before and the post-war demand for food stuffs had dropped considerably. Wheat prices fell from $3.19 a bushel in 1920 to $1.10 a bushel in 1922.[12] Equipment sales slowed down substantially. It would be almost 20 years before the machinery that had been purchased would be replaced. As the 1920 machinery wore out, some farmers reverted to horses.

The price of milk and hogs, however, remained relatively high through the 20s and Blumenorters were lucky that they had not turned to wheat production to the extent that their relatives around Rosenort had. In 1922 the folks from Jantzied had been considered much wealthier than their counterparts on the East Reserve.

Hogs, and even cattle, had remained important for the Blumenort farmer throughout the good wheat years. In 1910 men like John B. Koop, Jacob B. Koop, Klaas P. Reimer, Isaac Warkentin, Henry E. Plett and young John T. Reimer each ran an operation which included more than 30 hogs. Many of these men also kept a dozen heifers. Peter I. Wiebe kept up to 18 young cattle in those days.[13]

In the 20s, however, there seems to have been a new effort to sell livestock to Winnipeg. Peter I. Wiebe's son, Frank, still remembers how, around 1926, he and his brother Abram chased eight steers to Winnipeg. They had taken their bicycles along and took turns riding them. At night they had come to a farmer near Ile des Chenes who operated a corral. There they slept in the hayloft, and the next day they completed the cattle drive to the St. Boniface stockyards. Here they met their father, who took them home on the family democrat. Other farmers such as Abram D. Reimer and David L. Plett sought to tap the livestock market by raising sheep, a practice which had not been in vogue since the 1880s.

Most Blumenort farmers, however, placed more emphasis on hogs than on cattle. Thanks to the efforts of Peter R. Penner, local farmers found a ready market for pork. Sometime during

the war Penner had begun to act as a middleman for Blumenort's hog farmers and the Winnipeg meat packers. At first Penner made rounds picking up hogs from various farmers with his freight wagon. After the war Penner's business picked up, and, by the mid-20s, he was shipping a car-load of hogs a day to Winnipeg. In time more and more farmers began to raise hogs and haul them to Penner's car in Giroux themselves. Mrs. David L. Plett made the following entry in her diary on April 23, 1929: "Today we took six pigs to Giroux and put them into Peter Penner's box car." Prices continued rising from 12¢ a pound in 1926 to 28¢ a pound just before the depression.

Besides raising hogs, many local farmers also kept some chickens. As early as 1914 there was at least one local farmer for whom selling laying hens was serious business. John K. Plett of Ridgewood put the following advertisement, complete with a picture, in the Steinbach Post several times during 1914:

Gesprenkte Anconas

> He who wants good laying hens will check these out, for these are the very best winter and summer layers. They withstand very well the cold winters and are a little bigger than "Leghorns". They are black with white speckles: Hens, 15 for $1, 30 for $1.75 and 100 for $5. For sale at Johann K. Plett, Giroux.

Peter P. D. Reimer had been producing eggs since he married in 1918. He recalls that he had 200 laying hens in those early years, and later expanded his operation to 1000 hens. He discovered that chickens would lay eggs throughout the cold winter months if a lantern was hung up in the barn by six a.m. In those years his chickens were producing up to 15 dozen eggs a day. Reimer found a ready market for them at the Fort Garry

Hotel in Winnipeg, which paid him 50¢ a dozen. Later he set up four "Buck Eye" incubators and sold young chicks. People from miles around began to know Peter P. D. Reimer as Chickel Reimer.

Other more exotic types of farming were experimented with in those days. Around 1924 Jacob J. and Abram J. Thiessen began raising mink. This venture was begun at a time when there were only two other mink ranches in all of Manitoba, and neither Jacob or Abram had ever seen a mink before they bought their first breeding stock. In time the fur industry proved a successful venture. Abram, who lived west of Blumenort, fed his mink ripe tomatoes which his wife grew.[14] Jacob, who lived in Giroux, won many first prizes at the annual mink show in Winnipeg. By 1946 he was raising 650 mink a year.[15]

Times took a real turn for the worse in 1929, the year of the stock market crash. Blumenorters had begun to depend so much on the Winnipeg market that they could no longer escape the effects of an economic downturn. One Blumenort farmer, visiting Winnipeg in the fall of 1929, was warned that the Mennonites would soon feel the effect of the stock market crash. A gas station owner told him the following story:

> In October I had two men working for me, servicing and cleaning the cars of doctors and lawyers, bringing in eight dollars a piece. The doctor and lawyer had borrowed money invested in the stock market and now they stop and ask for $3 of gas at the most. I make 15¢ on that, and one week I let one attendant go and the other the next. Now I have a school boy working after four. If all the other businesses in town do what I do, there will soon be an army of men on the streets.[16]

In the spring of 1930 the Blumenort farmers began to feel the effects of the depression. The price of hogs drastically dropped from 28¢ a pound to 2½¢ a pound. One local farmer remembers how he decided to take his hogs to the St. Boniface stockyards himself and avoid paying a middleman. However, at the stockyards his pigs were graded as being too heavy, and he received only 2¢ a pound. Wheat dropped in price from $1.30 in 1929 to $1 the next spring. Although farmers didn't like the dropping prices, everyone thought a small dip now and then was normal and quietly waited for the price to rise again in fall. That fall, however, the prices dropped even further, and, by the summer of 1932, they had fallen to 32¢ per bushel.

The demand for farm power declined. A good team of horses which had cost $200 in 1930 went down to $90. Cream, on which Blumenorters had depended since World War I, dropped in value from $75 to $35 a hundred-weight.

Not only did the grain prices fall; the harvests began to fail. Drought and grasshoppers began to affect Manitoba adversely in 1929, when the total grain crop in the province was half of what it had been in 1911.[17] David L. Plett put the following entry into his diary on August 9, 1929: "It has been very dry this summer. Today it is also very hot (30°R). It is a miracle that the garden is green, because the pastures look very meager. The grain is already all ripe." Cornelius R. Plett wrote about a terrible grasshopper problem in 1933. His diary contains the following information: "May: we had a grasshopper meeting; June: there are incredibly many grasshoppers; July: it is very dry and the grasshoppers

are feasting heavily." While the Blumenort-area farmers suffered from drought and pests, they suffered much less from adverse weather than their West Reserve counterparts, whose land turned into a virtual dust bowl.

Many Blumenort farmers would have gone bankrupt or would have been forced into complete subsistence farming if it had not been for the cow. As always in the times of hardship, attention was turned away from wheat, livestock and milk to cheese, which could be stored and sold in small quantities. Farmers began recalling how Klaas W. Reimer's cheese factory had boosted the community in 1893. Now they asked: why could that not be done again?

In the spring of 1932 a meeting was called, and farmers from throughout the Blumenort area attended. The support given to the idea of a cooperative cheese factory was overwhelming. By July 15 the factory was operating, and by the end of the year local farmers had begun to earn dividends. (For a detailed account of the operation of the factory see Chapter 22.)

The effect of the cheese factory on the farming community was extraordinary. As in the 90s, the farmers in the 30s began seeing cash. John R. Penner had increased his herd to 12 cows. Each cow gave up to 25 pounds of milk per day, milk which could be sold for one cent a pound. Every farmer in the community began relying on his dairy herd, whether it contained three cows or 20 cows, for the bulk of his cash income.

With a couple of dairy cows, chickens and hogs and large potato plots, the Blumenort people managed to live through the

depression. There was a growing belief that a small, self-sufficient farm was the most secure way of life. Expansion and debt belonged to a past era. As a result, farms decreased in size throughout Hanover. The number of farms under 100 acres increased from 92 in 1916 to 422 in 1946. There is evidence that in this regard the Blumenort area was the same as other areas in Hanover. In Township 7-6E the number of people per square mile, which had remained very steady until 1921, began to rise steadily.

TABLE 4

Population in 7-6E

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Population	680	644	656	818	1071
Density/sq. mi.	18.8	17.8	18.0	22.6	29.6

By 1937 there were hints that prosperity could return. The country cheese factories had forced up the price of fluid milk, and some local farmers once again began shipping milk to the city. The newly-established Wheat Board had stabilized prices, and grain crops improved.

A third and perhaps most important factor was that farm diversification was beginning to pay off. For instance, farmers began to realize that a profit could be made by raising chickens and eggs. In 1936 two Blumenort-area farmers, Isaac F. Loewen and Peter P. D. Reimer, joined two Steinbach men to establish Steinbach Hatchery. It was hoped that this company would improve the breed of hens, increase egg production, and make the healthiest type of chick-starter feed around. Although

support for the company lagged, local farmers began shipping at least some eggs to Steinbach. Isaac F. Loewen kept a flock of 400 birds, while Peter P. D. Reimer's flock numbered 366.[19] Another local man involved in hatching eggs was Cornelius R. Plett. He had manufactured his own incubator, and by 1935 he was hatching almost 1000 eggs at a time.[20] In 1940 Jacob R. Unger established a federally-inspected Leghorn-breeder flock on his one-acre lot in Blumenort. He hatched purebred cockerels for local farmers who were scrambling to tap the egg market. The trend toward egg production was experienced throughout the R. M. of Hanover, where the number of hens and chickens rose from an average of 95 per farm in 1936 to 233 per farm 10 years later.

Another type of poultry to gain prominence during the latter 30s was the turkey. At that time many families had a few turkeys which disappeared into the bush in early spring to lay their eggs, and a month later the mother hen would proudly lead her little flock back to the farmyard. One day, a week or so before Christmas, the seven-months-old turkeys were caught, slaughtered, and driven to Winnipeg, where Eaton's or Winnipeg Meat and Sausage Company bought them at 25¢-30¢ a pound for the Christmas market.

In 1939 two local farmers, Jac. U. Klassen and John L. Penner, struck on the idea that it would be profitable to gather the eggs in spring, have them hatched at a Winnipeg hatchery, and then raise them in a more controlled way. Other farmers, seeing the success of Klassen and Penner, followed their example.

Soon a Turkey Club of 10 farmers was formed. Each of the 10 farmers had 10 breeders and one tom of higher quality bought from the Fraser Turkey Farm at Teulon, Manitoba. In this way the farmers assured a steady flow of eggs to the hatcheries in Blumenort and Steinbach. They were now also able to place an order for a sizeable turkey flock and knew in advance when to expect it. By 1942 the number of turkeys produced had increased to such an extent that Jac. U. Klassen sold his dairy herd and converted the barn into a small eviscerating plant.

In 1937 another boost to the local economy came when the first substantial grain crop in 10 years was harvested. Along with the increase in production came an increase in price. Wheat prices hit the 85¢-a-bushel mark and barley reached 74¢ a bushel. Although most farmers remained skeptical about grain growing, there were some Blumenorters who began to reap the benefits of the upturn in the market. Abram and John R. Plett's Twin Store Farm at Beausejour, for instance, became quite prosperous during this time. The 480-acre farm, which was purchased in 1938, became very productive after the peat moss was spread. Pletts reported harvesting 40 bushels of wheat per acre and 70 bushels of oats. Much of this crop was sold to Brett Young Seeds in Winnipeg, as it was almost free of weeds. Each spring and fall a crew headed out from Blumenort to work the Beausejour farm. In 1948 the farm was sold when the Pletts moved to Mexico.[21]

Even around Blumenort the 1937 crop gave a boost to grain farming. Many farmers could once again afford to buy new equipment. The most popular tractor in the Blumenort area

became the John Deere Model D. It was an inexpensive, all-purpose machine which could pull a three-bottom blow. The horse, which had been used for all field work on most farms during the depression, was now no longer used for plowing or cultivating. Spring seeding and harrowing and winter wood and hay hauling, however, still belonged to the horse.

Even some combines began appearing around this time. In 1938, C. P. Reimer, one of the most progressive farmers in the area, spent $1125 on the newfangled combine and swather. The combine was a Massey-Harris pull type with a 24-ince cylinder. The swather was an eight-foot Massey-Harris.[22]

Grain growing, however, never again became prominent in the area. Although the price of wheat rose steadily after World War II began in 1939, so did the price of meat, cheese, milk and eggs. Government officials even came around to offer farmers a 20¢ bonus for added milk production. Farmers who produced a certain quantity of meat were allowed to keep their sons on the farms instead of sending them to C. O. camps.[23]

Thus the continued demand for milk, eggs and meat during the war encouraged the continuation of small mixed farms. By 1941, 89 percent of farm income in the Hanover Municipality was generated from the sale of milk, eggs and meat.[24] The proven path of mixed farming still had a firm hold on Blumenort-area farmers in 1948. By that year, however farmers were making money by selling a variety of farm products to Winnipeg. The realization that farming could be profitable began ushering in a new type of farming after 1948.

Footnotes

1 John Warkentin, op.cit., p. 362.
2 Interview with John C. Reimer, Steinbach, July, 1980.
3 Peter B. Friesen, "Rechnungsbuch," Albert W. Friesen, Steinbach.
4 Mrs. Martin K. Friesen, "Familienbuch," Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.
5 W. L. Morton, op. cit., p. 356.
6 Gerhard D. Doerksen, "Tagebuch," Henry P. Doerksen, Blumenort.
7 John D. Penner, interview, September, 1981.
8 Peter F. Unger, "Denkschrift," Abe P. Unger, Landmark.
9 Hanover Tax Assessment Rolls, 1906.
10 Land Transaction Abstracts for 7-6E, op. cit.
11 Mrs. Martin K. Friesen, op. cit.
12 Morton, op. cit., p. 380.
13 Tax Rolls, 1906.
14 Rosabel Fast, op. cit., p. 9.
15 "Southeast Manitoba's Fur Industry," Carillon News, October 24, 1946.
16 Interview with Ben L. Reimer, Steinbach, August, 1980.
17 Morton, op. cit., p. 407.
18 Cornelius R. Plett, "Tagebuch, 1933," Mrs. Willie Dueck, Vidir, Manitoba.
19 Abe Warkentin, op. cit., p. 195.
20 Cornelius R. Plett, op. cit.
21 Fast, op. cit.
22 Interview with Dave P. Loewen, February, 1982.
23 Interview with Ben A. Reimer, Blumenort, December, 1981.
24 Francis, op. cit., p. 220.

Part III, Chapter 3: The Rise of Local Business

Business activity went through a real transition in Blumenort between the two world wars. Although Steinbach had clearly become the trade centre of southeastern Manitoba by 1910, and farming remained a priority for most Blumenort people, Blumenort was becoming more open to the business world. The two most notable commercial endeavors of this period were the Blumenort Co-op Cheese Factory and the Plettenville Industrial Complex. Both gained regional importance, competed with business from the outside, helped the community prosper, and opened the way for Blumenort to develop into a trade centre by 1940. In the meantime most other non-farming ventures were small services usually extended by farmers to their neighboring farmers.

The most noted veterinarian and horse-breeder in the area was Peter I. Wiebe. The Wiebes had long been noted horsemen (Peter's father, Peter P. Wiebe, had been a veterinarian himself). As farming became more prosperous, more and more money was invested in horses, and Wiebe actually began making horses his business.

In 1916 Peter I. Wiebe imported a Belgian stallion from Saskatchewan and paid for it the unheard-of sum of $1000. For many years farmers from miles around Blumenort relied on Wiebe's stallion to improve their stock. The stallion was hitched to a democrat, and the Wiebes travelled from farm to farm on service calls.

Peter Wiebe knew all about horses. He stocked medicine, filed horses' teeth and even turned colts inside mares when there was a birth complication. He also raised horses.

When the oil-driven tractors became popular around 1920, Wiebe's stallion business waned although his interest in horses continued till he died in 1933. During the 30s his son, Abram F. Wiebe, continued the stallion business, when horses once again became an important farm power source.[1]

Toward the end of World War I, John K. Loewen began selling Twin City farm machinary in partnership with Martin M. Penner from Steinbach. Peter J. Loewen still recalls the new, gray-colored 12-20 Twin City gas tractors standing on his father's farm in Ridgewood. They were advertised in the Steinbach Post as having a counter-balanced crankshaft, removable cylinder sleeves and direct transmission drives on both forward gears. It is also said that Loewen sold Cockshutt plows, drills and binders, as well as sleighs, cream separators and kerosene. Shortly after the wheat prices plummeted in 1922, farmers stopped purchasing machinery, and John K. Loewen's short stint with business was over.[2]

Threshing outfits did not change much during World War I. The outfits of Plett and Reimer, David L. Plett, Jacob L. Plett and Klaas P. Reimer dominated the threshing business until the advent of the gas tractor at the end of the war. In 1926 Plett and Reimer stopped custom threshing after Peter P. Reimer was elected the church Elder. Two years later the Case steamer's proud place as the power source came to an end after Heinrich E. Plett reluctantly allowed his sons to try their new

McCormick tractor on the threshing machine. During this time both David L. Plett and Jacob L. Plett retired their steamers and stopped the custom threshing business.

In the decades after the steamer, the farmers in position to buy the new Titan, Twin City and John Deere oil drive tractors, also purchased small separators and threshed for their neighbors. None of these farmers, however, ran outfits close to the size of their steam-powered predecessors. These farmers did not actively seek business but rather helped their poorer neighbors out. As gas tractors became more available, they outnumbered the threshing machines, and so threshing machines were sometimes simply rented out to the neighbor who would merely put the pulley onto his own tractor. After the depression even this practice became outmoded when the first pull-type Case and Massey combines began to appear.

The most widely-known auctioneer of Southeastern Manitoba in the 20s and 30s was Abram R. Penner, a well-to-do Blumenort farmer. He held auctions from Blumenort to Morris and Dufresne to Steinbach. His reputation really began in the 1920s when he helped auction the goods of the Hieberts, Falks and Klippensteins from Hochfeld who were moving to Mexico on account of the school question. He was auctioneer when John G. Barkmans moved to Kansas in 1925, when David L. Pletts retired in 1929, when Peter I. Wiebe's estate was settled in 1931 and when Henry E. Plett had a clearance sale in 1939.

Always Abram Penner sold in English. Buyers from Ste. Anne and Clearsprings could usually be expected at the sales, and inevitably, the sales were a great social event. Abram

Penner's son, John D. Penner, remembers that, although his father's English was not the best, he never lacked confidence. His favorite line was, "Have you all done with it?" which he repeated so fast it sometimes sounded like swearing. While auctioneering, Penner always stood on a platform erected in the middle of the yard. His commission was one percent of sales plus expenses.

Abram Penner continued conducting auction sales after he retired from farming and moved to Steinbach in 1937.[3]

By far the most successful local businessman during the 20s was Peter R. Penner. Having received some of the poorest farm land in the area when Blumenort dissolved in 1910, Penner looked elsewhere than to grain growing to make his livelihood. During World War I, he began to buy the hogs and cattle from Blumenort farmers and take them to Giroux. Here he loaded the livestock on a freight car and rode along to Winnipeg, where he sold the animals to Swifts and Canada Packers for a small profit. With the money he received he bought dry goods which he brought back for the farmers on the train the next day. As Penner purchased more and more dry goods, he found he could save money if he made his purchases straight from the wholesalers. But this got him into trouble with the Steinbach merchants, who protested to their retailers that Penner was not a merchant and should not be given special treatment. Peter Penner thus was forced to make a choice between buying expensive goods or starting his own store. Penner chose the latter, and around 1928 he renovated his summer kitchen and began selling products to Blumenort, Blumenhof and Greenland people.

Two other lines of services were started along with the above. Eggs were purchased, graded and resold. To grade eggs, a small hole on the west wall of the store was used. Eggs which could pass through the hole were graded small; those which did not were graded large.

The other service which Peter Penner rendered came as a result of his son's curiosity. One day during the 20s young John was exploring in the bush just to the north of the farmyard when he came across a badger hole. He noticed that the badger had dug out clean gravel. John ran home with the news and Peter Penner came out with a spade to verify John's find. Because there was a growing demand for good gravel by the Bergthalers to the West, Penner began selling gravel at once. In summer the Penner boys used horses and dirt buckets to dig out the gravel. In winter they mined the gravel. A cave was made on the side of the summer hole, and the unfrozen gravel was shovelled onto sleighs. As the tunnel deepened, green poplars were placed on the floor, and the sleighs were backed into the opening. Because the ground was frozen on top, cave-ins posed no problem, although when summer came the tunnel would inevitably collapse. Sixty years later this tunnel had developed into a 40-acre pit producing 100,000 yards of gravel annually.

Business was good during the 20s. In 1926 Penner purchased a new Model T truck, one of the first trucks in the district, to haul merchandise to Winnipeg. The road cross-country to Winnipeg was so rough it is said new tires for the truck had to be purchased after three trips to Winnipeg. In winter when

the roads to the city were impassable, Penner took the Dawson Road to Ste. Anne. At Ste. Anne he parked his truck and hauled the merchandise to Blumenort via horse and sleigh. In 1929 he bought a ton truck to improve his service.[4]

When the depression hit Blumenort in 1931, Peter Penner's hog market came to an end. Prices for livestock fell so drastically farmers made no money by selling their livestock to Winnipeg. Surprisingly, however, business at the store continued, and in 1933 the old summer kitchen was abandoned as a small new store was built. The reason for the continuation of the store was simple. In 1932 the cheese factory, a direct result of the depression, was built just across the creek a quarter mile west of the Penner store. The factory brought farmers from miles around and provided them with small amounts of cash. In 1939 Peter Penner retired and his store was sold to a former clerk in his store, Peter J. Loewen.

John R. Penner was another man to seek an income off the farm. When the depression struck the area, the R. M. of Hanover embarked on a road-building program to provide employment for hard-pressed people. The man they chose to organize the work in the Blumenort area was John R. Penner. Although Penner operated a large mixed farm in Blumenhof, he found time to be the road boss for the area. It was his job to inspect roads, drainages and bridges and report on their condition at monthly municipal meetings.

Some of his more noteworthy jobs included building the first stretch of the #52 highway and gravelling the #12 highway during the 30s. As foreman of these projects he received 20¢

an hour. Penner, however, spent most of his time on the roads as a bridge-builder. For years he built all the bridges in the area, using the municipal pile driver and hiring local men to help him. For three summers he even helped build large canal bridges in the Ste. Adolphe area.[5]

John Penner is best remembered as a hardy, boisterous man who loved telling colorful stories. He enjoyed telling people that he thought it was unnecessary to wear socks in his boots even while building bridges until sometime after the snow fell in November, Other people who worked for Penner recollected how he reacted to the cold when hauling wood from the bush. While the workers ran along behind the sleigh trying desperately to keep warm, Penner sat on the sleigh as if it were pleasant summer weather, and on one occasion he calmly took out his knife, pulled off his boot and began trimming his toenails.

Other stories are told about John Penner at bridge-building. One day, while building a bridge on the Steinbach Road near the old Blumenort Church, the pile driver broke down. As Penner climbed up on top of the high machine to try to fix it, he developed a terrible toothache. Not wasting any time he grabbed a chisel, turned it against the aching tooth, and, using his heavy hammer, he knocked the tooth away.

Few people are fond of government inspectors. John Penner was no exception. On one occasion an inspector visited the job site and Penner politely showed him around. At

one place a plank extended out over the ditch or creek, and one of Penner's workers happened to be standing at one end of it weighing it down when the inspector unwarily stepped on the extended end and took a look around. The young worker saw an opportunity for some fun and quickly stepped off the plank. As expected, the balance shifted and the inspector plummeted down into the wet hole. Penner, seeing this, did his duty and sternly admonished the worker. But he admitted later that it had been a hard struggle to keep his laughter until the inspector had left.[6]

John R. Penner continued in this line of work until the early 40s, by which time he was already over 60 years old. He remained active on his Blumenhof farm until 1951, when he was involved in a tragic car accident which took the life of his wife. Subsequent to the accident he retired.

Blumenort's first cheese factory closed down in 1917. Only 15 years later, in 1932, a new cheese factory was built in response to the depression which saw the price of fluid milk in Winnipeg plummet. The new factory turned out to be a big success, producing more cheese than any other factory in Hanover and boosting the local farm economy.

The impetus for the new venture came from local farmers who remembered what the old Klaas W. Reimer's operation had done for local farmers in the 1890s. In the spring of 1932 a general meeting was held for all local farmers at the Blumenort school. The meeting turned out to be a general success as farmers enthusiastically accepted the new plan to help them fight the depression. As other cheese factories

in Hanover and the West Reserve, this one would be organized as a co-op to keep the power in the hands of the local people and to make sure that all earnings went to the producer. That very evening, after the meeting, the farmers drove to the place in Blumenort where the old factory still stands (in the form of the F. F. F. Hatchery). Farmers agreed that the site, which Peter R. Penner was willing to give the new co-operative, was a good one. It was centrally located and lay right next to the creek.[7]

Some of the first board members in the co-op were: Cornelius P. Reimer, a progressive farmer from Clearsprings, Isaac P. Loewen from Blumenort, a talented accountant, Ben L. Reimer, an energetic and enthusiastic co-op man from Twin Creek, Jacob G. Barkman whose farm just across the road from the factory was often used for water and storage, and John R. Toews, the active community man from Blumenhof.

Work to start the factory began shortly after the spring meeting. Peter F. Unger, who had been the accountant at the old factory, was asked to help organize the financial operation of the new plant. C. R. Plett organized the droves of local farmers to help cement the floor and erect the building. Records show that 38 local men gave some of their time at 20¢ an hour for the project. Plett Brothers was hired to build the large cheese vats and Jacob G. Barkman was given the first contract to supply the factory with firewood, water, and gasoline, the latter at 20¢ a gallon. One of the most active men at this stage in the operation was C. P. Reimer. Many trips

had to be made to Steinbach and Winnipeg to find buyers for the product, to meet government regulations, and to seek an experienced cheesemaker. For this he was paid a small stipend and compensated 5¢ a mile for using his car. Meanwhile all of the board was actively selling shares at a cost of $10 each in order to establish a capital fund to operate the plant. Despite the fact that money was in severe shortage, many farmers bought two and three shares. Others, like the Steinbach lumber firm, M. M. Penner, and the elderly Blumenort farmer, C. W. Brandt purchased five shares.

By the middle of July the factory was completed and ready for operation. Eighty local farmers had contributed over $1,000 to help operations begin. Albert Carrier, an expert cheesemaker from Winnipeg, was hired to teach Cornelius U. Kornelson the art of cheesemaking. On July 16, the factory opened its doors for milk. During August, the first complete month of operation, 76 farmers shipped a total of 173,038 pounds of milk to the factory. At least a dozen farmers shipped more than 4,000 pounds during that month. The cheese, in turn, was sold to Winnipeg wholesalers, local stores and farmers for 10¢ a pound.

The factory was an immediate success. By the end of July, 25 percent of each farmer's original share was paid out, and on August 22 each farmer was paid for the milk he had shipped in July. The price he received for the milk in July was 65¢ a hundred-weight. Even though this was 20¢ a hundred more than the Winnipeg creameries were paying, the cheese factory price rose steadily throughout the fall to reach

$1.07½ a hundred-weight by November. In that month, as well, the value of each share was raised by $1 or 10 percent.[8]

While the board, no doubt, was happy at its apparent success, it continued to seek new ways to make the system more fair by using shareholder money to operate the plant. There were two apparent problems. Firstly, the existing system allowed wealthy non-farmers to invest money in the cheese factory and receive dividends and voting power without producing a drop of milk. Secondly, the system allowed large farmers to make a lot of money by selling milk to the factory without contributing a cent toward the factory's capital expenditure. In both cases the small farmer, who most needed the plant, was kept from receiving the fullest possible advantage from it.

The solution to this problem came from Isaac P. Loewen and Ben L. Reimer, who devised a plan which abolished the old system and introduced a unique revolving shareholding system. Instead of using shares to operate the co-op, five percent of each milk check was held back as the plant's operation fund. After five years the money was paid back with the percentage of the plant's increase in assets added to it. In this way the farmer who did the most business at the factory also paid the most to keep it operating. A few years later this plan was modified to make the money held back correspond to the number of cows kept instead of the amount of milk shipped. This was done to encourage farmers to produce the maximum amount of milk from each cow.

Through the years many local men were hired to assist

Cornelius U. Kornelsen in making cheese. Abe P. Unger, Frank Goertzen, P. R. Barkman and Jac P. Doerksen have been only a few to earn an income from cheesemaking. In 1946 when Kornelsen retired, Cornelius P. Unger, who was to become a prize-winning cheesemaker, was hired as the plant chief. He wrote the following account of the operation at Blumenort:

> Each month we produced 27,000 lbs. of cheese. About 35 pounds of whey butter was produced per day. At the most we received about 300,000 lbs. of milk per month. Most of the milk was received in May and June. During the winter months milk production dropped, and sometimes we received as little as 120,000 lbs. of milk a month.
>
> Milk was received in eight-gallon cans. The first years the cans were returned to the farmer unwashed so the farmer had to wash them himself. Later the cans were sent along a conveyer (upside down) and steam-washed, on a mechanism built by C. R. Plett. This was a great improvement for the farmer.
>
> The milk was taken to the cheese factory in horse-drawn trailers in summer and sleighs in winter. Often farmers would pick up milk for their neighbors and deliver it to the cheese factory.[9]

In order to market the cheese profitably, the cheese factory joined the Manitoba Cheese Co-operative Producers (MCCP) which was stationed in Winnipeg. From here the cheese was sold to Krafts, Canada Packers and Swifts, who paid a price the farmers suspected was set someplace in the east. One of the MCCP's chief salesmen was Cornelius M. Penner from Greenland, who worked for most of southeastern Manitoba's factories. Once, when one of the big companies flooded the market with cheese, the Blumenort directors suspected the worst and directed Mr. Penner to continue selling cheese, but to sell it to Vancouver and Toronto, even at a loss. They finally got the message across to the big Winnipeg firm that it could not

run the independent factories out of business, and eventually the cheese prices returned to normal.

At its height during the 40s the Blumenort factory was producing 269,000 pounds of cheese a year at a value of $36,304. The outbreak of a war in Europe opened up a vast market for cheese, as it was a nutritious and non-perishable food product. Government officials came around and offered farmers an additional 20¢ a hundred-weight if they sent their milk to the cheese factory instead of sending it to the Winnipeg Creameries which had raised their prices considerably.

After the war, however, the cheese factory began experiencing problems. The rising demand for fluid milk in the city had driven up the price of milk so much that more and more farmers began shipping their milk straight to Winnipeg. Arguing that the farmers who continued to support the local cheese factory were indirectly responsible for the high Winnipeg price, the co-op board was able to convince the local farmers who were shipping their milk to Winnipeg to donate money to the cheese factory to help keep it operational. The problem, however, grew, and by June, 1953, the volume of milk being received by the co-op had fallen to a level which forced it to close. Factory records show that the amount of milk received by the factory dropped from 2.3 million pounds in 1951 to just 383,000 pounds for the first six months in 1953. Just as had happened with the first cheese factory, this one closed when a strong economy opened a market for dairy products other than cheese.

Plettenville was a family-run industrial complex operated half a mile south of modern-day Blumenort on the farmyard of Henry E. Plett. Plettenville included two companies, Plett Brothers and Plett and Company, both operated by Henry E. Plett's sons. The companies were involved in a variety of enterprises including a box factory, metal products shop, a smithy, a feedmill, and a large lumber enterprise.[10] The complex, which eventually gave employment to almost 150 men, did business throughout Manitoba for 38 years, from 1918 to 1956. But it was most important because its services supported local agricultural developments, gave employment to many young Blumenorters and led the way for future local business developments.

Plettenville had its roots in the old Blumenort village. Here Henry E. Plett, a young progressive farmer, operated a wind-driven grain crusher and was part owner of the large Plett and Reimer threshing company. When he moved out of the village in 1910 and located in the middle of S.E. 27, he continued the farming sidelines.

As Plett's 10 sons began reaching manhood, these farming sidelines became more important. There were several reasons for this. On one hand, the Plett boys were very interested in mechanics, and it is said that nothing got the boys more excited than harvest time, when the steam engine was kept going steadily. On the other hand, there was a growing lack of available farm land in the immediate area, and despite the fact that almost a section of good agricultural land had been purchased in the Greenland area, the Plett family still did

not have enough work to keep themselves busy. Finally, the Pletts seem to have been a very cohesive family which chose not to see any of its members move to Kansas or Prairie Rose where more land was available.

The year of 1918 was significant for Plettenville. In this year Heinrich E. Plett dismantled the windmill and built a portable gasoline-powered feed crusher. Mounted on a wagon was a wood splitter and power saw. In the succeeding years Plett sent his sons from farm to farm, providing a valuable service to the community. This was also the year when Pletts' three oldest sons, Cornelius, Peter and Henry, formed a company known as Plett Brothers. In summer they constructed houses and barns which were in great demand in the rich post-war years. Plett Brothers also headed the construction of Blumenort's new church in 1918, and two years later they built the new school. In winter the small company built draft sleighs in the two-storey shed at Plettenville. On the ground floor they did the necessary metal work and upstairs they formed the oak runners and wooden tongues.[11]

While building construction decreased during the 20s, activity at Plett Brothers' small factory increased. Local people, seeing the opportunity to do business at home, readily bought up every sleigh Pletts could build. Over the years more than 200 sleighs of various models were designed and sold. These sleighs included heavy, open freight sleighs and covered caboose sleighs with two or four doors. The covered sleighs came with upholstered seats and charcoal

foot-warmers.[12] Although Pletts built few sleighs after 1930, when the car became fully acceptable by Blumenorters, these sleighs were popularly used until winter roads began improving after World War II.

Another product designed and patented by the owners of the small factory was the steel barn door latch which is still being sold. The following story, written in 1952, tells how the Plett latch came to be:

> In 1928 the two Plett brothers (Peter and Henry, Jr.) were rebuilding a barn for C. W. Brandt. He wanted a latch on his barn door that would not catch a harness of horses passing by and one that could be opened and closed with a mitted hand. The Pletts did some thinking and developed a latch that has been manufactured since with only minor changes. Over 150,000 of these have been sold. . .for use on barns and machine sheds.[13]

The early years of the depression was another significant time for Plettenville. In 1932 Plett Brothers built a large two-storey shop and began a three-pronged business. The most important aspect was the wood box factory which required the most room in the new shop. Wooden cheese boxes were in great demand in the early 30s when cheese factories began appearing throughout Manitoba. The Plett brothers figured out an economical way to mass-produce these boxes and even devised their own machinery to build the boxes. By 1942 the small factory was producing almost 60,000 boxes a year. Ben R. Plett, the youngest of the 10 sons, still recalls how the boxes were made:

> Poplar logs were bought in 100-cord units. Each of the logs had been pre-cut into 4-foot lengths. At the factory the logs were resawn into 16-inch lengths and sent, by conveyor, upstairs to be cut into boards. The boards were then piled up outside to dry out. After this they were brought in again and sent through planer after planer. Then several of the boards were taped together and sent to the circle saw. In this way round bottoms and tops for the cheese boxes were made.

> These box parts were then hauled to another, smaller, building to await the plywood sides. The plywood strips were cooked at a high temperature and then sent to a special machine which rolled the hot plywood around the bottoms and nailed it to them.
>
> The finished boxes were then stored and delivered to cheese factories throughout Manitoba.[14]

A second part of the new building was made into a commercial blacksmith and tinsmith shop. Here farmers could come to have their regular blacksmithing done. But more important, it was here that the door latches and other patented metal products were manufactured. Included in these products were wheelbarrows, wood-burning poultry brooders, weighing cans, cooling tanks and even special machine parts.

A third part of the shop contained the grain crusher which had previously been mounted on a wagon. Now the crusher was made stationary, and farmers came to Plettenville to have their grain crushed. This aspect of business was so good that in 1940 a separate diesel-powered feedmill was built. Even a specially-bagged feed, complete with concentrate named PEP FEED, was produced and sold as hog and chick starter.

Another important development in the early 30s was the start of Plett and Company, operated by Jacob and George, the younger Plett brothers. Plett and Company essentially was a lumbering enterprise. It began in 1933 when Pletts secured a timber lease near Vassar and labor was cheap and plentiful. Many local men spent a winter at Vassar to earn a tiny income which helped them squeeze through the depression. P. K. Reimer, who worked at the Vassar camp during this time, recalls how his pay was 2,000 board feet of lumber a winter which, when

he had sold it, provided an income of $24 a month.

The Vassar operation did three basic types of work. It cut four-foot green poplar logs and shipped firewood to Winnipeg. And it cut and sawed wood for C. T. Loewen of Steinbach. For a time the sawmill was even operated with the old Case steam engine that had so faithfully threshed Blumenort's grain for years. Later it was replaced with a diesel McCormick engine. All the wood destined for Plettenville was loaded on to flat rail cars and shipped to Giroux, from where it was picked up by Plett Brothers. During the summer months, the Pletts used their DW40 logging cat to clear bushland for farmers in the Vassar area.

In 1940 Plett and Company moved their operation to Roblin, located 40 miles northwest of Dauphin. Here their lumber enterprise reached its zenith. One of the foremen at Roblin, David Barkman, still remembers how the first camp was established in December. He and a crew of six men drove through the miles of wilderness by crawler tractor train. The last half mile to the camp had to be cut by hand through dense forest. Once they got to the site, they had to set up a sawmill in -30° weather before the camp could even be built. For three weeks the crew lived in a small unheated tent and for a while lived on snared jack rabbit which John P. Friesen faithfully cooked.

By Christmas the camp buildings had been started, and, at the camp's height around 1945, a dozen shacks lined the central street, making the camp resemble a small hamlet. Here many young Blumenort men worked through the war years.

Plett and Company had made a deal with the government to hire Conscientious Objectors, provided the C. O.'s would pay $25 a month to the Red Cross. Some of the C. O.'s who were unable to obtain farm leave stayed with the company for the duration of the war. The total payroll for a winter could include from 80-95 men.

David Barkman recalls many incidents from the Roblin years. He remembers how they once cut a 49-inch thick tree, how each Sunday Cornie Unger would go ice-fishing, how good the food cooked by Nettie Plett and Lena Penner tasted, how a Loewen and a Schellenberg once almost froze to death when their truck stalled 10 miles from camp, how some farm boys who saw bear tracks on their first day in the bush left for home the next day.

The war was good for the lumber industry. A huge American market opened up and a great deal of lumber was sold to cities as far away as Chicago. Even in Blumenort there was such a demand for lumber that old Henry Plett set up a small office at Plettenville and began retailing lumber for his sons. Another expansion saw a planer set up in the town of Roblin. Here the rough lumber which was hauled out on winter roads could be planed in spring. In 1943 the old two-man saw was replaced by the power chain saw, increasing production. At the height of the Roblin operation a million board feet a year, worth $40,000 were produced.

In 1945 the camp was moved across the border to Norquay, Saskatchewan. Here the camp with the sawmill in the bush and the planer in town operated very much as the Roblin Camp had.

By the end of the war the Plettenville-based companies were doing booming business. From the humble farm sideline beginning in 1918, the complex had grown into a large company of regional importance. From an attempt to keep the family together and make Blumenort more self-sufficient grew a large business which did almost $300,000 worth of business a year.[15] The men who had worn overalls during the 20s now wore business suits. In 1948 Plett and Company purchased the interests of Plett Brothers when Cornelius, Peter and Henry moved to Mexico.

It was not until the end of World War II that local service stations began to be viable enterprises. By the 1930s, however, Blumenort had two competing stations and one noted blacksmith.

Klaas P. Reimer never relied on his blacksmith and repair shop for a living. He carried on the sideline business because he enjoyed the art of blacksmithing he had learned from his father Abram R. Reimer and, no doubt, because the boys needed work during the winter.

Klaas Reimer was best noted for fixing engine blocks. It is said that he was of the opinion that anything could be fixed. The following advertisement appeared in the Steinbach Post on January 16, 1924:

> Grinding Cylinders?
> We grind cylinders in sizes from 3 3/8 to 5 inches. It costs only 12 to 15 dollars to fix a Ford block with pistons, rings and pins included. We also fix other blocks of similar make.
> Klaas P. Reimer, Blumenort

Klaas K. Penner began his service station in April, 1930, on the very farmyard where he had grown up. It was on this same location that K. K. Penner and Sons Ltd., later stood. When the depression sank farm prices, K. K. Penner sought to bolster his income by selling gas. The gas was pumped by hand from a tiny 250-gallon underground storage tank. In time Penner began to patch an occasional tire and even sell new ones when someone was in need. It was not until 1948, however, when the #12 highway was built and Steinbach traffic bound for Winnipeg began passing through Blumenort, that the service station was anything more than a supplement to the K. K. Penner's poultry farm.[16]

John F. Janzen began his service station in Ridgewood in 1936 after selling his farm in Prairie Rose. He located on a small five-acre lot on S.E. 20-7-E which he purchased from his father-in-law, John R. Penner. Here Janzen built a small blacksmith and repair shop. He also sold gasoline. However, the town of Giroux was declining by this time so, two years later, the Janzen's moved their building to Blumenort. They located at the very spot where the church now stands. After P. J. Loewen built a new store next to the cheese factory in 1940, John Janzen moved again. A lot was purchased from Jacob R. Unger and a new garage was built just to the west of P. J. Loewen's store.[17] Business during the war seems to have been good, as only four years after building the new garage an addition to it was made.

During the years of World War II, Rev. John G. Barkman operated a tiny leather repair shop and store across the road

from the cheese factory. The small business was started in a small building soon after the Barkmans returned from Kansas in 1937. Shoes and harnesses were repaired. Groceries and leather goods, as well as gasoline and kerosene were sold. To supplement the income from the store, Barkman served as janitor for the church. After both P. J. Loewen and J. F. Janzen located their business close by, the Barkmans gave up this store and moved to a small farm northwest of Blumenort.[18]

Peter J. Loewen began his general store in 1939 when he purchased the Blumenort store from his uncle, Peter R. Penner. Just nine years before, Penner had hired a young man named Peter Loewen to build egg crates for 10 cents an hour. When a new store opened in 1933, young Peter was invited to work in the store during the summer when business was brisk. Although he insisted that he was a carpenter and not a storekeeper, he accepted the job and boarded at the Penners. By the time winter came, Peter enjoyed the job and, having nowhere else to go, he asked Mr. Penner if he could stay and help for no pay, just room and board. Penner agreed and figured that if Peter was staying anyway, he might as well receive $10 a month for the work in addition to room and board.

After a few years Peter married and received an offer from a different uncle, Jacob F. Loewen, to manage the Hanover Co-op Store near Mitchell. In the meantime Peter R. Penner was considering selling his store. Since none of the Penner boys were interested in storekeeping, the store was offered to P. J. Loewen, who had been looking for his own store.

Thus in 1939, with $4,000 borrowed from C. T. Loewen without interest for 10 years, P. J. Loewen was in business.

That very fall Loewen purchased a lot just west of the cheese factory and on the day World War II began, construction on a new store was begun. The Loewens remember that "there were times of struggle to make all the payments, especially during the war years, but thanks to God, the business prospered."[19]

In 1940 Jacob R. Unger opened the first federally-inspected hatchery in the area. Operating on a one-acre lot just west of Janzen Garage, he kept 600 R.O.P. (Record of Performance) chickens. Each chicken's eggs were carefully recorded, and a weekly report was sent to Ottawa. Once a month a federal inspector visited the Unger farm. Although Unger could receive up to $4.80 a dozen for eggs laid by these chickens in the Winnipeg hatcheries, he chose to do his own hatching in his large 3000-egg incubator.

There was quite a demand for purebred R.O.P. Leghorn cockerels in the early 40s as farmers attempted to increase chicken and egg production. Only Unger, Jac U. Klassen and Frank K. Wiebe of Twin Creek had R.O.P. flocks, and farmers were willing to pay up to $5 for a cockerel of that type.

In 1946 Unger sold his place and bought a farm near Austin. A few years later he returned to the area and started an R.O.P. farm at Kleefeld.[20]

Footnotes

1 Interview with Frank K. Wiebe, July, 1980.
2 Interview with Peter J. Loewen, November, 1981.
3 John D. Penner, op. cit.
4 John L. Penner, op. cit.
5 Interview with Mrs. Margaret Penner Reimer, February, 1982.
6 Dave P. Loewen, op. cit.
7 Much of the information about the Cheese Factory came from Ben L. Reimer, who was an active member of the Co-op board for many years.
8 Blumenort Co-op cheese factory, Board Minutes: 1932-1952, H. F. Reimer, Steinbach.
9 Cornelius P. Unger, correspondence with Betty Plett, 1979.
10 Francis, op. cit.
11 Interview with Delbert F. Plett, January, 1981.
12 Abe Warkentin, op. cit., p. 258.
13 "Plettenville," Carillon News, October 24, 1952, pp. 4, 5.
14 Ben R. Plett, correspondence with Betty Plett, 1979.
15 Plett and Co., Financial Records; 1948, Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.
16 Interview with Elden Penner, January, 1982.
17 Interview with Mrs. Gertrude Janzen, December, 1981.
18 Interview with Ben P. Doerksen, January, 1982.
19 Peter J. Loewen, op. cit.
20 Jacob R. Unger, "Silberhochzeit," Steinbach, 1957, pp. 4-6.

Part III, Chapter 4: Education in Transition

The story of Blumenort education between the two World Wars is one of slow and painful change. This was the period which saw the end of the private church school and the firm establishment of the public English school. This period also saw a change from an emphasis on subjects such as German, Catechism and Schönschreiben, to subjects such as geography, English and arithmetic. It saw the change from teachers who had taught because they could not farm to teachers who taught because they had been able to secure a university education. Finally, this was also the period in which the Blumenort and Blumenhof schools were relocated and the Twin Creek School District was formed to meet the requirements of a changing population pattern.

Few things changed in the Blumenort School in the decade following the Flag Crisis in 1907. The school teachers, Heinrich R. Reimer and David P. Reimer, were both local men. School was in session from October to April. Children attended school for five years from ages seven to twelve. The curriculum was based on German and religion. School was held in the same building as the church. The preachers and the Elder acted as the school inspectors. The flag was not flown. There was no interference from the outside.

In 1916 this changed. Two years of fighting the Germans

in Europe had turned Manitobans' public opinion against the Mennonites, who not only refused to join the war but persistently held on to the German language. Disregarding the Letter of Privileges of 1873 "which had granted the Mennonites freedom to educate their children according to law", the T. C. Norris government in Manitoba passed the School Attendance Act in 1916. The Act stated that all children between the ages of 7 and 14 must attend public schools and receive their education in English.[1]

John C. Reimer, who was teaching in Blumenhof around this time, describes how the people reacted.

> There was great excitement among our people. This law would take their language out of the school and put them in danger of losing it. That would have deep consequences. With the loss of the language they would lose their religious writings and songs. A change of language would change their way of thinking and living.[2]

All Mennonite schools in Manitoba stalled for time. As the leaders of most communities, the Blumenort trustees petitioned the government, in an attempt to change its mind. The following petitionary letter, addressed to the Department of Education officials, was written by Blumenort School trustee, Klaas F. Penner, after the 1916 law was passed:

> Dear Sir:
>
> As a greeting we wish you much happiness and health, here in this world and also life everlasting. Amen!
>
> Very worthy sirs: We have been heavily pressured to accept public schools in the past and subsequently we did try them for a while (1883-1907). But we felt that by going along with the public schools we were losing our children with regard to religion. Because of this, we beseech you sincerely, please feel with us and leave our schools in our hands.

> It was the loving God who gave us our children that we should raise and train them in the Lord, make them familiar with the Holy Scriptures, and show them the right way from the time of their youth. If we want to do this--and we understand that God's law is the foundation of all laws--then we must certainly begin in the school. For that which a child is taught in school is not easily lost. For this reason we believe it is our duty to familiarize our children with the Holy Scriptures from their youth. This we cannot do if we completely administer our schools according to secular laws. We, however, want to teach English, so that our children can read and write.
>
> Thus, we beseech you again; Let us keep our schools! Certainly it is not right that other people shall have to help pay for our schools when we can do it ourselves. Also our Privilegium does give us full freedom in education and this was even given to us by Queen Victoria (1837-1901).
>
> Should there be someone in our community who wishes to have a public school (there are others than we Mennonites who live in our region) we would willingly help them pay for it while sending our children to our school.
>
> In closing, we once again greet you and wish you well. From your loving subjects,
>
> Klaas F. Penner
> Blumenort School trustee[3]

The chairman of the Blumenhof School board at this time was John R. Toews, who had recently moved into the area from Steinbach. Looking back to the year 1919, Toews wrote the following: "I had a hard time. Our school was run by the official trustee, Mr. Greenway and I was always dickering with the government that we wanted our school back."[4]

The attempt by the Blumenort-area people to keep their own schools, however, was doomed to fail. The government was determined to make Manitoba an English province with a public system of education. In 1919 the government began putting pressure on the Mennonites to comply with the 1916 Act. It obtained a ruling from the Manitoba Court of Queens Bench that the Act was constitutional. Then it passed legislation which

gave it complete power to set up a public school in any area which was not meeting government educational standards. Blumenort now had no choice but to comply or resist the government.

Unlike the Bergthal neighbours, Blumenort did comply. A major factor in this decision seems to have been the death of Elder Peter Dueck in January, 1919. According to Peter F. Unger, Elder Dueck had provided the Kleine Gemeinde with a strong voice, and his death meant that the man who could have led the church to resist the new law, and perhaps even lead people out of Canada, was no longer there.[5]

When the Blumenort people realized the inevitability of the public school, they changed course and attempted to keep as much control over the local school as they could. Because the government at first was quite flexible and because the local board was very hesitant about introducing new programs, the process of changing the local school to public standards was a long and slow one.

The one aspect of the School Act which the trustees openly accepted was its provision of government grants with which to build or improve school buildings. In Blumenhof the school building was remodelled and a teacher's quarters installed with government assistance in 1919. That very fall a Blumenort delegation, headed by Henry E. Plett, was sent to the Department of Education in Winnipeg to see the Official Trustee, Mr. Greenway about building a new school. The story goes that while Greenway was not in his office at the time, his deputy told the Blumenorters to go ahead and build their school.

Plett Brothers, headed by C. R. Plett, went to work the next spring, cutting, planing and stacking the wood on a new site across from Klaas F. Penner's farm. By May 1 construction of the new school was well underway. Somehow Greenway had never been made aware of this plan. When he visited Blumenort in spring, he discovered, to his dismay, that the independent Kleine Gemeinders were building a school without his official approval, and even without bothering to consult him about the plan. It is claimed by some that, when Greenway saw the new schoolhouse, he became so angry he threw his hat off and stamped around on it.

There were other provisions of the Public School Act which were more difficult for Blumenorters to accept. Klaas C. Penner recalls as a student how apprehensive everyone was on the day the first parcel of English textbooks arrived at school. Shortly after the books arrived, the Union Jack flag was brought to school with instructions that it must be flown. While the flag was tolerated at first, more and more people opposed it, and finally it proved to be such a controversial issue that the school inspector allowed it to be hung up on a wall inside the school, away from where the whole community could see it.

The new law also dictated that German should be taught only after 3:30 p.m. This was very difficult for the community to accept. Klaas C. Penner also recalls how one day in 1923 the inspector came to school before 3:30, and to his dismay found German words on the blackboard. When the inspector turned to the teacher, David P. Reimer, for an explanation, Mr.

Reimer quickly explained how German could help in understanding English. The inspector relented but insisted that while he was at school no German should be on the blackboard.[6] John C. Reimer, who taught in Blumenort from 1928 to 1939, indicates that in contravention to the 1916 Act he used both English and German for instruction. He recollects that when the inspector reacted to the use of German in school, he simply told the inspector that parents reacted when too much English was taught. Most inspectors, according to Reimer, tolerated the use of some German.

Another set of changes which were difficult for Blumenorters to accept were the new attendance regulations. All children between 7 and 14, instead of 7 and 12, now had to attend school. The school year was also lengthened to include the months of September, May and June; these were months in which children had traditionally been expected to help at home. School registers indicate that it was many years before Blumenorters fully accepted the new attendance laws. In 1920, for instance, only a third of the students attended school for more than 50 percent of the time in September, May and June. The others stayed home to help as they had been accustomed to do. In 1921 school was cancelled for the whole month of June. Even the average attendance for the month of November, which traditionally was the best-attended month, dropped after the new law, as parents hesitated sending their 7, 12, 13 and 14-year-old children to school.

TABLE 5

Blumenort School Attendance Record: 1915-1925

Year	Number of Students	% of Attendance for November
1915	49	96.2
1916	51	95.0
1917	60	95.1
1918	63	88.1
1919	67	83.2
1920	71	84.3
1921	60	80.1
1922	49	82.6
1923	48	83.2
1924	47	86.0
1925	42	91.5

The new law also dictated that a new curriculum was to be followed. This meant that students who previously had been taught according to a curriculum which emphasized German and religion now were taught a variety of subjects. In 1922 teacher Frank Wiebe introduced a course on health. In 1923 David P. Reimer began instructing secular history, teaching "World Relations" to grade four and the "History of England" to grade five. In 1924 Abram P. Toews introduced a geography course called "The Earth" and began teaching "Nature Studies". According to teacher William Kornelsen's records of 1927, all students between grades three and six spent the first three periods in the morning from 9:15 to 11:05 doing arithmetic.

Abram P. Toews taught school in Blumenort from 1924-1927. He was one of the first certified teachers to teach in Blumenort. Since then Toews has become a noted preacher, historian and poet. In 1981, from his home in Louisiana, he wrote the following recollections of his teaching years in Blumenort:

Recollections of Teacher Abram P. Toews

I taught school in Blumenort from September, 1924, to July, 1927. These were three meaningful years for me. School activities were very real for me.

Those Blumenort pupils were great! Never did I have any discipline problems. The older boys did not come until later in the season when the pertinent work on the farm was done. In the first year that I taught, they all started on the same Monday, during the first week in October. It was on this day that A. D. Penner (age 14) came to me and asked me to wrestle with six of them. The boys, as tall as I and robust farmers, at first had me a little perplexed. When I noticed how meaningful it was to them, I said, "Yes, but let's have one rule which we all will follow." They laughingly agreed. I said, "We'll all begin at the same time and wrestle until you or I will say, 'now that's enough'." They happily agreed. Then we all went outside, just east of the flagpole and I said, "Let's go!" When the six of them came at me I knew my problem. I reached out with my left foot and slipped a few of their feet and the same with the right foot and then pushed a few more with my hands on top of them. When they quickly got up to attack again, I said, "Now let's quit." And we did.

The boys were often a little assertive. Peter B. Reimer always asked with a smile, "Why?" John D. Penner and John D. Reimer always said, "I want to!" This I liked, for we all wanted to and did have fun. The girls also were active, obedient and cooperative. Klaas Reimers' Suzanna, (who died in 1944 from tuberculosis), was so understanding and concerned. Whenever I would come onto the schoolyard in the morning, I would call out, "Here I am!" and the students called back, "Here we are!"

I enjoyed teaching and my objective was to make the courses as practical as possible. We loved Canadian history. It made our religion meaningful. We loved arithmetic, figuring out how profitable the crops, cows, and gardens were. To make it more real, we resorted to eating sunflower seeds. When we sang, did we ever sing! I think I sang a little tenor at times and did that ever whip up interest! We all took catechism, but that suffered a little because there was too little doing; it seemed we were just memorizing. Teaching religious "doing" was very well accepted by the students though.

Community support for education was very good. I tried sincerely to tune into the church and play the same key. I felt close to all the Blumenort parents. They were honest, sincere, good conservative "Christ followers". There were many fine Blumenort fathers who influenced me.

> There was Isaac P. Loewen who was always interested and questioning. His heavy glasses were a fine screen from behind which he spoke, and so he was sometimes hard to figure out. Often he came to talk "with us", not "to us". Klaas F. Penner had a similar interest, but his approach was: "Here is the fence; do you see it?" We talked about the school fitting in with the church and the farm. I always found talking to him very rewarding.[8]

There was little change in Blumenort education during the depression years. Teacher's wages hovered between $500 and $800 a year, almost half the wages in 1920. School attendance was often below 90 percent. Local leaders remained suspicious of the public school and sought to control education by hiring teachers whom they could trust.

Blumenort's teacher during this time was John C. Reimer. He was quite familiar with the area, as he had previously taught school in Blumenhof for 6½ years. Because the 1916 Act had stipulated that only certified teachers should be hired, Reimer felt that the government would soon begin pressuring local school boards to dismiss local permit teachers. Thus he decided to attend Normal School in Winnipeg and certify.

Knowing that higher education was a controversial issue in the church, he approached the leaders with caution. He still remembers how he entered the minister's room in the Blumenort church where Peter P. Reimer and the ministerial were assembled just before the church service. He explained to them his plan, and, as he expected, the ministerial neither rejected nor approved it. As he recalls, the leaders said nothing. They faced a dilemma: by their approval of Normal School they might be seen to approve new ideas and the growth of pride; by their rejection of Normal School they were facing the possibility of having to hire outsiders to teach their children.

Reimer recalls that the ministerial's suspicions about Normal School were true. He had to receive special permission at the school to skip dance classes and saw, first-hand, how many young upstarts, having earned their certificates, arrogantly returned home to reform the school.

When Reimer returned from Normal School in 1927 the community leaders readily hired him. (After teaching in Blumenhof for a year, he taught for 11 years in Blumenort.) Although Reimer's choice to go to Normal School had not been sanctioned by local church leaders, he was seen as a man who could be trusted to be sensitive to local wishes. According to Reimer, Blumenorters sought to control the public school by hiring their own people. Thus, throughout the 30s few new ideas were allowed into the school. Prescribed courses such as history and nature studies were taught, but only to the extent prescribed by law. Students recall that exams or homework to encourage academic excellence were not introduced until some years later. Reimer's use of both German and English in school, as well as his emphasis on religion, seems to have been positively accepted by the community. His personal interest in Mennonite history also seems to have been appreciated. His students well remember the Semlin they built at the school in 1934 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the settlement.[9]

Someone has said that if Blumenort was the papa, Blumenhof was the restless son. Oftentimes Blumenhof seems to have been a little ahead of Blumenort when it came to introducing new ideas. According to the following writing, presumably penned

by teacher Herman Janzen, Blumenhof went through a dramatic change between 1935 and 1938. The writing also tells how Margaret Toews became one of the first students to return to school to obtain higher education. One thing the writing does not describe are the Junior Red Cross meetings organized by Janzen in 1938. Existing minutes of these meetings show that students raised about $2 a month for the Red Cross. They also reveal a strong patriotic spirit.

Recollections of Teacher Herman Janzen

> The Blumenhof School was without a teacher when the summer of 1935 began. After having asked a certain Mr. Giehlman from Saskatchewan to come and teach, they were told that the said teacher could not come. They then hired one Mr. Janzen, just out of Normal School. The school year began with an enrollment of 25. There was no grade VII or VIII. One pupil being past 14 left the school at the beginning of the year. Just before Christmas Margaret Toews, an ex-student, having spent two winters at home, returned to grade IX. In February another ex-student, aged 17, arrived to complete grade VII and VIII. Several older pupils had made it their practice to "wait" in school until they became 14, thus hampering progress. Although not much could be done about this, it was soon recognized that this could not last. Drastic measures were taken. Then followed the struggle against leave of absence and for punctual attendance. A system of examining pupils' progress was also started. The spirit of the school was changing so fast that some parents could not keep pace with it. A Christmas program was rendered in English and German. Trustees made a platform for the pupils to sit and stand on. New books and seat work were acquired by and by. Soon we also received a piece of new blackboard. A day was held over in which parents attended school for the sake of listening to the classes.
>
> The second year was begun with a much better understanding of desires and needs. Pupils and teacher had learned to trust one another better. The unprogressive element was also drawing closer to the age of 14. The work took its usual course with minor improvements being made by and by. The school could boast three grade VII students and one grade VIII student. Margaret Toews honored the school by returning to continue her higher education.[10]

The most important changes in education during the 30s were new school buildings built in an attempt to accommodate a growing number of students and changing settlement patterns. The roomy one-room school built in Blumenort in 1920 was quite sufficient until 1935. As a matter of fact, Blumenort's school population had dropped from 71 students in 1919 to 42 students 10 years later. The reason for the drop was that many families had moved to Prairie Rose in 1919. In November, 1920, another 12 students, children of A. P. Reimers, C. P. Reimers, John G. Barkmans and Peter B. Kroekers left Blumenort when they were transferred to Clearsprings to help bolster its tiny enrollment.[11]

By 1935, however, the student body at Blumenort had grown to 55, and most of these children did not live close to the school. The children of Klaas P. Reimers, Klaas F. Penners, Aaron R. Reimers and Abram R. Penners, who lived near the school, had reached 14. Most of the students came to school from the region around the cheese factory 1½ miles north, or from the Twin Creek (Neuanlage) area, a mile to the west. To solve this problem, it was decided to divide the Blumenort School district and build another school.

This plan, however, was not easily implemented. It became quite some problem to decide where to draw the boundary. When the line was finally drawn, some of the Kleine Gemeinde families who had been included in the Neuanlage area protested strongly about being put in a district with Bergthal and Russländer people. The church leaders finally had to intervene and the line remained. Another question which had to be answered was which district should get the old school building.

A meeting was called, and the fathers from each district wrote down on a piece of paper what they thought the building was worth. The average offers from the two districts were calculated, and the Twin Creek district, which had the highest average was awarded the building. (The one-room school had been valued by Mennonite Mutual Insurance at $1,000 in 1935.) The old building was moved a mile west to the Southwest corner of S.W. 21 and named Twin Creek School.[12]

The northern district, which kept the name Blumenort, hired Plett Brothers to build a new school a mile to the north of the old site. Teacher John C. Reimer recalls that the Blumenort builders in 1935 were as independent as they had been in 1920. Reimer tells the following story:

> Because government regulations were that all windows in a school should face the east, a lot on the west side of the road was sought. When the deal to buy a lot from Klaas P. Reimer fell through, a lot was purchased from Peter K. Plett across the road. The problem now was that no window faced the road. In that spirit of independence which never asks "do others have it this way" the Blumenorters decided to build a large window on the west side of the building, too. Even though this was contrary to government specifications the inspector approved the plan. It would have been inconceivable for Blumenorters to follow a government plan which was not practical.[13]

Five years later, when the student body increased to 74, a second room was added to the Blumenort school. Miss Margaret Toews was hired as the Room I teacher and became the first woman teacher in Blumenort.

Blumenhof faced a similar problem to Blumenort's; its population centre was shifting northward. During the 20s, many families began locating in the northern part of the Blumenhof district closer to the Ste. Anne river lots where

inexpensive land was still available. By 1932 these parents formed a majority and voted that the school should be relocated a mile north to where the Blumenhof Apartments stand today. Even though the building was 33 years old and contained two rooms, one classroom and a teacher's residence, it was decided that it should be moved and not rebuilt. In 1947, however, a separate teacherage was built and the old building once more was made into a two-room school.[14]

The beginning of World War II marked the end of government leniency toward Mennonite schools. New pressures were put on the Blumenort-area schools to comply with the 1916 School Act. German was to be restricted to the last half hour at school; only qualified teachers were to be hired and patriotic exercises were to be carried out. Seemingly the government was growing impatient with the communities which had still not assimilated and failed to become patriotic Canadian citizens.

Both John C. Reimer and George K. Reimer, who taught school in Blumenort during the years that Germany was threatening Europe, recall that the government put on pressures to limit German instruction in school. George K. Reimer specifically remembers that in 1944 the inspector asked him to delete German and religion from the school curriculum and teach more political studies. Reimer was forced to explain to the inspector how important German and religion were and promised to restrict this instruction to after 3:30.[15]

Another sign that times were changing came in 1940 when the Department of Education issued new guidelines for patriotic exercises. "O Canada" and "God Save the Queen" were

to be sung each day while all pupils stood at attention, and official holidays were to be commemorated "to impress upon the pupils love for the devotion to Canada." Four years later George K. Reimer complied after telling the students that the drills were a form of physical exercise and nothing more.

A third problem which arose was the government's refusal to allow school boards to hire local permit teachers. While teachers like John C. Reimer had had their teacher's certificate since 1928, the church had discouraged young people from attending Normal School. They had seen how tolerant the government was toward the old permit teachers and hoped that this policy could continue. Around 1939 this changed, and the inspectors began requiring local school boards to advertise for qualified teachers before granting them permission to hire permit teachers. This proved to be problematic for some of the schools in the Kleine Gemeinde areas. Ben L. Reimer, who was a trustee at Twin Creek, remembers that, when they advertised for a teacher, their only applicant was a woman who had specialized in folk dancing at the university. He was compelled to make a trip to Winnipeg and beg the head at the Department of Education for special permission to hire a Mr. Ginter, "a good Christian permit teacher." Even Rev. David P. Reimer is said to have publically admitted in a sermon preached in Steinbach during the 1940s that the church's policy toward higher education was partly to blame for the shortage of qualified Mennonite teachers.[16]

The result of the increased government pressures during the war was that in the Blumenort area, suspicion of the public

education system heightened. Special prayer for the "school situation" was requested by the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial in 1941.[17] George K. Reimer remembers that the trustees at Blumenort revealed a deep concern about the trends they saw in education. While they did not keep their children at home or refuse to participate in government vaccination programs, they were suspicious about new books and courses. They approached Reimer about the possibility of examining all new library books and textbooks and removing those which hailed military victories or taught evolution. Their concern also extended to the annual Christmas program, which had replaced Pruefung as the most important school activity of the year. The trustees made sure that Reimer knew that Blumenort would rather not have a Christmas tree at the program and asked whether they might see a rehearsal of the program. Later some of the elderly people asked Reimer to reintroduce the old Grosze Gesangbuch. Despite some negativism from the students, several of these German songs were memorized for the sake of the elderly.

By 1948 the schools in the area had changed to meet most of the requirements set down by the government in 1916. Yet the suspicion against the public system was so great that many families left Canada for Mexico. Those who were not prepared to leave remained committed to keeping the school a conservative institution which would reject all new ideas it was not explicitly required to introduce by law.

Footnotes

1 C. Henry Smith, op. cit., and Keith Wilson, "The Development of Education in Manitoba," Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1967.
2 John C. Reimer, "History of Our Schools Since 1874," The Sesquicentennial Jubilee, p. 166.
3 Klaas C. Penner, Ein Familienbuch, Belize, C.A.
4 Abram P. Toews, ed. The Chronology of the Toews Family (Toews-Fest Committee, Steinbach, 1961), p. 157.
5 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
6 Klaas C. Penner, op. cit.
7 Blumenort School Registers, 1907-1948, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg.
8 Abram P. Unger, Ferguson, Missouri, correspondence with author, July 9, 1981.
9 Interview with John C. Reimer, Steinbach, February, 1982.
10 Herman Janzen, Chronicle of Blumenhof School, 1935-1938, Melvin Penner, Blumenort.
11 Steinbach Post, November 1, 1920, p. 2.
12 Interview with Jac. U. Klassen, Steinbach, November, 1981.
13 Interview with John C. Reimer, op. cit.
14 Interview with Abram K. Penner, Blumenort, February, 1982.
15 George K. Reimer, Steinbach, November, 1981.
16 Ben L. Reimer, op. cit.
17 Kleine Gemeinde Bruderschaft Protokollbuch, 1941, Edwin Plett, Landmark, Manitoba.

Part III, Chapter 5: The Kleine Gemeinde Faces Change

While the most sweeping changes to church life in Blumenort came after World War II it was the period before the war which set the stage for these changes. When the Blumenort village broke up in 1910, local people still gathered in the schoolhouse for the services which were held in the community once a month. The Elder was Peter Dueck of Steinbach, and local representatives in the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial included Peter R. Reimer and Peter W. Loewen. The church still stressed a life of humility, simplicity and separation. No church programs for young people existed. During the 38 years from 1910-1948, these realities changed. A new church building, new local leaders, new church programs, a new openness to other church groups and the effects of two World Wars left the Blumenort Kleine Gemeinde much more open to change.

The first decade after 1910 was a difficult one for the church. This was the decade of World War I, and it was this war which ruthlessly reminded the Kleine Gemeinde that their dream of living separate lives from the world would be difficult. With the war came government I.D. cards and war bonds, the flag and public schools, unprecedented prosperity and a changing lifestyle.

When Britain declared war on Germany in 1914, the Mennonites were certain that, just as during the Riel Rebellion

and South African War, they would be left to themselves. The 1873 "Privilegium" clearly stated that the government would not interfere with the Mennonites' doctrine of non-resistance.

In 1916 three things happened which made the Kleine Gemeinde realize that this war would not leave them unaffected. First, the School Attendance Act was passed, bringing to an end the private church school. Then the government asked the church to provide money to help wounded soldiers, orphans and widows. Finally, in December, the government required all Mennonite males between 18 and 65 to fill out National Service Cards. The church felt under siege. Many were convinced that the government was moving to bring the Mennonites into the war.

The Kleine Gemeinde ministerial, led by Elder Peter Dueck, joined with other Mennonite groups to protest the government's intrusions. In 1917 the government met with the Mennonite leaders in Altona to discuss this fear. Peter F. Unger writes what happened:

> The government was very friendly, and gave our delegates the assurance that our privileges still held strong. Apparently we had no need to fear because these promises had been given in writing (Letter of Privilegium, 1873). The cards, however, must be completed. They should all have the name Mennonite written on them. . .After this a collection was held for orphans and widows and the money sent along with a thank-you letter to the government. The total contribution was $5,577; $210 came from the Kleine Gemeinde.[1]

That very year, as farm prices climbed, the government made another request for money. The Mennonite leaders met once again and decided to comply with the government's request if it promised us to use the money for orphans and widows. As

part of the Kleine Gemeinde, the Blumenort-area people now were expected to pay part of their earnings to the government. According to Peter F. Unger, the church asked each male member to pay 50¢ for each cow kept and one cent for each bushel of wheat sold. Laborers were asked to donate one cent of each dollar earned. By December 1917 a total of $1,558.65 had apparently been raised by the Kleine Gemeinde and given to the government.[2]

A year later the government approached the East Reserve churches for more money. This time it wanted the Mennonites to purchase $100,000 worth of war bonds. Unger writes that this request was "of great concern to the church." To raise the money was no problem. Farmers were selling grain at $3.00 a bushel and war bonds paid 5½% interest. The church leaders, however, were afraid that they were contributing to the cause of war. It was only after being assured that the war bonds would not be used for military purposes that it relented. In 1918 Abram R. Penner of Blumenort was asked to head a committee representing the Kleine Gemeinde, Holdeman, Bruderthaler and Bergthaler Mennonites of the East Reserve to sell war bonds.[3]

Another cause of concern among the Kleine Gemeinde was the passing in 1917 of the "Military Service Act" by the Dominion Government which introduced military conscription. Army officers were now reportedly comissioned to search for young men and enlist them. Once again Elder Dueck and members of the ministerial petitioned the government. At the War Department in Winnipeg they were assured that Mennonite youths

were exempt from the law. Each young man, however, was required to have an identification form filled out and signed for by the Elder. These forms were to be carried by the young men at all times and to be shown if they were stopped by the police or army.

Peter P. D. Reimer remembers how the Blumenort boys were called to come to the school where Deacon Henry R. Reimer helped them fill out the forms which had been signed by Elder Dueck. Peter also recalls how he and Cornelius R. Plett went by train to visit relatives in Rosenort at this time. Their parents warned them not to talk to any soldiers along the way, especially not in Winnipeg where they had to transfer from the CNR to the CPR. This transfer meant that they had to walk right past Portage and Main and they were sure to meet some recruiting officers. As Peter Reimer remembers it, the warning was unnecessary, as they did not even see a single soldier in that long walk through the heart of Winnipeg.[4]

While Blumenort youths were well protected from being drafted into the army, their relatives who had moved to the United States in 1915 were faced with the draft. The United States, which had joined the war in 1917, offered no recognition to the non-resistant Mennonites. Under this threat many Mennonite youths fled to Canada. Several Kleine Gemeinde youths sought refuge by coming to Blumenort and several Holdeman Americans came to Greenland.

Henry P. Doerksen who moved to Kansas with his parents, the Gerhard Doerksens, in 1915 and later, in 1940, settled in Blumenort, vividly remembers the troubled times of World War I.

When he was called up to register for the American army, he asked the local sheriff if he, as a Canadian citizen, would be allowed to return to Manitoba. The sharp reply was, "Sure, but first you will serve four years in the army." Shortly after this encounter Henry, with his brothers Gerhard and Cornelius and his cousin Ben, fled to Canada. When they reached the border Henry and Ben were barred from crossing.

That night, however, with the assistance of a stranger, they made plans to cross the border secretly. After putting on work clothing, they buried their suitcases in a nearby bush and made their way to the border bridge. Here, pretending they were railway workers, they walked across the bridge into Canada and made their way to their relatives in Blumenort. Within a few days Gerhard and Cornelius returned to the border town to retrieve Ben and Henry's suitcases.

Peter L. Plett's boys, Jacob and Abram, also fled to Canada. They came later and knew what they were facing at the border. In order to thwart the border officials, they hid in freight cars that were headed for Canada and crossed the border without incident.

When the war ended, the Plett and Doerksen boys returned to Kansas where their life returned to normal. Some time after their return, however, the local sheriff came to the Kleine Gemeinde settlement and arrested Henry Doerksen and Jacob Plett. The boys were sent to an army camp several hundred miles to the east, where they were given one-month sentences.[5]

Other things occurred during the war years which threatened the church. The government passed the Public School Act

in 1916 which declared English as the official school language, and, in 1918, it forced the Steinbach Post (to which many Blumenorters subscribed) to print in English. With the affluence of World War I came the car and telephone. Both caused a great stir in the church as its leaders struggled to maintain the ideals of separation and simplicity.[6]

Church membership grew rapidly during the war. By 1918 the school houses of Blumenort and Blumenhof could no longer contain all the worshippers on Sunday morning. Also by 1918 it was becoming clear that the end had come for the church-run schools and that it would no longer be possible for both church and school to meet in the same building. It was decided to build a large new church edifice which would bring together people of the Blumenort area under one roof.

Understandably, the biggest issue was the location of the new church. Peter F. Unger writes that there were many meetings held before it was decided to build the church a mile to the northeast of the old village site, midway between Blumenort and Blumenhof people. The Blumenort majority, however, was able to ensure that the new church would be located on the Blumenort side of the Steinbach road.

John F. Unger, Peter F. Unger and Abram L. Plett were appointed to be on the building committee. A total of $4,000 was pledged by individual members from all parts of the Kleine Gemeinde. Cornelius R. Plett was hired to be the head carpenter (Baumeister), and he in turn hired his brothers, Henry and Peter, to help him build the church. Other church members volunteered their help. Peter K. Plett remembers how he hauled

gravel for the church foundation from C. F. Unger's, a mile and half to the east. In the end the building cost $5,500. The balance was not paid until two years later when several offerings were taken for the church building.[7]

By the summer of 1918 the new building was completed. August 18 was scheduled as the dedication service, and the newly-elected preacher, Rev. Henry R. Reimer, delivered the first sermon. People from throughout the East Reserve came to attend the historical gathering. Estimates of people present run from 425 to 500. C. R. Plett, the Baumeister, reports that he counted 106 buggies and seven cars present at the opening.[8] For the first time the people had a building which would be used exclusively for church and a building which the church people of Blumenort, Blumenhof, Ridgewood and Neuanlage could consider their own.

Blumenort's reputation for having strong leaders continued during the inter-war years. By the 1920s the church leaders of the first era were no longer around. Peter R. Reimer had died in 1915 and Peter Loewen in 1919. Cornelius L. Plett and his deacon brother Peter had moved to Kansas. Now a new set of leaders was elected who would be called to deal with the increasing changes in the church community.

Henry Reimer, who had taught school in Blumenort and Neuanlage for almost 20 years, was elected a deacon in 1916. At the same election, Henry's brother, Aaron R. Reimer, who is remembered as a sincere and gentle man, was also elected a deacon.[9] Two years later, in 1918, World War I was putting such a great strain on the existing church leaders that a

ministerial election was called. At this election Henry Reimer was elected a preacher.[10]

Rev. Reimer is remembered as a strong and trusted church leader. It is said that he did not like to preach about the "assurance of salvation," but rather, of the "hope of God." He often admonished his people to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling."[11]

He is, however, also remembered as the man who was open to new ways of doing things. He was one of the first Kleine Gemeinde ministers who preached without reading his sermons, reportedly making his sermons more interesting and easier to follow. Although Henry Reimer moved to Prairie Rose the same year he was elected a minister, his influence on Blumenort, where he often preached, remained strong.

In 1919 Elder Peter Dueck died after almost 20 years as the Kleine Gemeinde leader. A year later a ministerial election was called and Peter P. Reimer, the Blumenort threshing company owner and farmer, was elected a preacher. In 1924 Jacob R. Dueck of Gruenfeld, who had been elected the East Reserve Elder in 1919, died. It was not until over a year later that an Elder election was called to fill the vacant position. Peter P. Reimer, 49, was chosen for this office.[12]

As a preacher he was well respected. It is said that Peter Reimer was one of those men to whom people started listening the moment he stood up and confidently strode to the pulpit. His sermons stressed unity of faith, togetherness and consensus, and the need to live simply, following a Christ-like lifestyle and turning one's back on evil pleasures

and hedonistic pursuits.[13] He is also remembered as a man who knew the Scriptures very well. While the church of his time did not have a vision for missions, he spoke openly of his salvation experience and allowed missionaries to speak in church.[14]

It is said that Elder Reimer keenly felt the responsibility of his new office. This responsibility entailed leading a church which was becoming increasingly diverse. The effect of the more liberal Russian and American Mennonites on the Kleine Gemeinde in the East Reserve was strong during the 20s. In Steinbach the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite Brethren churches practiced oral prayer, held Sunday School, used musical instruments and stressed pietistic themes such as the assurance of salvation. Some of the Kleine Gemeinde members were attracted to this approach to church life. Others began to be open to government pensions, sports and photography. These changes were of concern to Elder Reimer, who saw them as contrary to Christian humility and separation from the world. To deal with some of these issues, he wrote at least two pamphlets: "Christianity and the Vote: The Reasons I Do Not Vote in Worldly Election" and "A Booklet Concerning the Practice of Praying Aloud." Elder Reimer also took an active part in the Kansas Ministerial Conference of 1937 which dealt with some of the tensions the Kleine Gemeinde were experiencing.

Perhaps Peter Reimer's greatest achievement was the reorganization of the Kleine Gemeinde into a conference of autonomous churches. It is said that Elder Reimer realized

that each of the districts should have its own church organization, but he found it difficult to lead them decisively to that point. On one hand he seemed to feel the burden of being the sole leader of the church, and, on the other hand, he felt a responsibility to keep the liberals of the church in check.[15]

The talk of forming separate church districts began in earnest during the years of World War II. By the fall of 1938 district brotherhood meetings were being held, and by next spring the practice of organizing worship services at a local level had also begun. In February, 1941, Prairie Rose needed another minister to assist Rev. Henry R. Reimer. It was decided by Elder Reimer and the ministerial that, because Prairie Rose was such a distance from other districts, it should elect its own minister and deacon. Ben D. Reimer and Peter A. Plett were the first minister and deacon to be thus elected.[16]

By 1945 full autonomy had been granted to each of the four East Reserve churches. In a special letter sent to each church, Peter P. Reimer placed the leadership of each church in the hands of the oldest minister.[17] Elder Reimer now became the lead solely of the Blumenort church. Three years later he resigned and joined the exodus to Mexico, where he died on April 18, 1949.

In 1925 Cornelius R. Penner, a 43-year old farmer, became the third minister from Blumenort to be elected during this era. On June 1 of that year he was ordained by Jacob B. Kroeker from Rosenort. During the Elder election in 1926

C. R. Penner was the runner-up to Peter P. Reimer. Rev. Penner is remembered as a very sincere and emotional speaker. People appreciated him for the concern and love he showed to his brethren. Others recall how he would usually close his sermon with the words: "The High Priest has empathy with our weaknesses."[18]

Penner was known to be a conservative who felt uncomfortable with new ideas in the church, and supported local businesses as a way in which young people could be kept in the community. He was a faithful member of the ministerial, sometimes even making the long trip to the C. O. Camp at Roblin, Manitoba, to minister to the young men there.[19]

David P. Reimer was elected a preacher in 1929 at the age of 35. In 1948, when his brother Elder Peter P. Reimer resigned as leader of the Blumenort Church, he was elected to that post. He is remembered by many as a gifted leader who served not only his people in Blumenort but had a positive influence throughout the Mennonite community.[20]

Before he was elected to the ministerial, David Reimer taught school in Blumenort, served as school trustee and farmed. After he was elected to the ministerial, he was to lead the way for beginning Sunday School, "Singstund" and "Jugendverein" in Blumenort. In 1935 he was appointed the editor of the first Kleine Gemeinde church paper, Christlicher Familienfreund.

His most notable service, however, came during World War II when he represented the Kleine Gemeinde on the four-man Mennonite Committee of Elders and served for months at a

time as C. O. Camp chaplain. In the years after the war David Reimer served as Elder of the Blumenort Church, Moderator of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and as the editor of several books.

While some of the church institutions began changing during this period the theological tenets did not. A sermon preached in Blumenort on October 31, 1926 by Peter P. Reimer shortly after he was elected the Elder of the East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde typifies the theology prevalent among community people.[21] It was a theology which stressed a humble and ascetic life of discipleship and devotion. This type of thinking was under particular attack during these years, and the sermon was obviously given in response to this fact.

Elder Reimer's concern about peoples' lifestyle, which had just seen the full acceptance of the car and seemed to become increasingly materialistic is revealed in one of the first points in his sermon.

> O Beloved listeners! What could really be better for us in life than to reject all the foolish, worldly things and leave them with courage as the Spirit directs. . .We read about our dear Lord and Savior as He walked on this earth. He did not even have a pillow. Yes, he walked before us as one having nothing but really having all. . .This does not mean that we should not own possessions or make use of them. But it means that we should not misuse them.
>
> The Word says "Love your neighbour as yourself." I must consider this. If, for example, I want to trade in my car to have one more to my taste and I know that there are some of my neighbours who do not have sufficient food for their needs, should not I ask myself if I am using what the Lord has given me, rightly? It would be good if we would remind ourselves of what we read in Acts 2:44-45. Especially a person who has debts. . . has reason to be careful not to purchase things which he does not really need. . .

Another problem which Elder Reimer confronts is a theological one stemming from the growing movement of evangelicalism, with its doctrine of assurance of salvation and its innovative church services. Elder Reimer reminds his congregation that his text is based on Matthew 5:1-19 and proceeds to offer the following exposition of it.

> Our text is Matthew 5:1-19. Here Jesus says that those people who are blessed are poor and weak. It is only a person who feels his weakness and sickness that needs a doctor. Does this not imply that a person who claims to be healed will forget that God's strength can be real only in the weak, according to II Cor. 12. Oh how great will be the disappointment on the day for those whom we read about in Matthew...
>
> Oh let us be united in mind as we have been taught. Even if we do not receive much recognition from people for the (simple) way in which we conduct our church services, we can receive an eternal blessing if we worship God with a quiet, faithful heart. We do not prove that we have come to a real faith by making our services very fancy and beautiful...Saul was told that God was much more pleased with obedience than with many nice, fat sacrifices...of what good is it if we know how to sing beautiful praises to God after much practise but do not have the true humility needed for obedience to God's Word?

Elder Reimer concludes the sermon with the following appeal to faithfulness, unity and discipleship.

> Pray that true love will increase and that the love for the world will become cold. Yes, if we could really strengthen each other in the faith with good works and an honest walk before God what better could we wish for.
>
> Therefore, because we have been granted life even this day let us move forward and not stop...We must even now be patient, if we have done the best we know then we want to put our trust in the Lord that He might continue to give us strength and assistance. Let us faithfully follow the good and rightly walk the road that is dear to us that we, together with our children, might attain eternal life through His boundless grace for Christ's sake. Amen.[22]

It was in the 30s that many changes came to the Blumenort

church. The man behind many of these changes was David P. Reimer, who had been elected a minister in 1929. Although he was not a radical who pushed changes onto the church, he is remembered as being close to the younger people, sensing their thinking and quietly and diplomatically seeing to it that the church could accommodate them.[23]

By 1930 the influences of both the Holdeman and the Bruderthaler, who in turn had been influenced ty the German Pietists and American evangelicals, began having a strong effect on the Kleine Gemeinde Church. While Blumenort is said to have had an authority image, being a community which would have to be contended with when other Kleine Gemeinde churches wanted to introduce "progressive ideas," it, too, began to change.[24] The community's spirit of independence and conservatism continued, nevertheless. In many cases the new ideas or programs gained widespread acceptance first by Blumenort's more liberal wing, the Blumenhofers, before they were officially sanctioned by the church at Blumenort.

The first new church program was Sunday School. The EMB church in Steinbach and the Kansas Kleine Gemeinde had had Sunday School for years. At a Brotherhood meeting in Blumenort in 1926 it was decided that the Steinbach church would be allowed to hold Sunday School. Bible classes were also held in Blumenhof on Saturday afternoons at this time.[25]

Many people remained hesitant about this idea. It was argued by some that the instruction of religion should be done in school. Others feared that Sunday School would be an avenue for new and foreign ideas to enter the church.

The main proponents for Sunday School were men such as John E. Friesen, Rev. David P. Reimer, Abram P. Reimer and Abram R.Penner. Two things finally convinced Blumenort to accept Sunday School. First, there was a feeling that with the Public School Act of 1916 not enough religious and German instruction was legally permitted in the schools.[26] The other feeling was that religious life needed to become more open and spontaneous.[27] After several meetings and much prayer, the brotherhood finally decided to introduce Sunday School into Blumenort in the spring of 1932.

Peter K. Plett and Peter F. Wiebe were chosen to be the first teachers.[28] In the first years Sunday School was held only every third week on Sunday afternoon. The Sunday School material was limited to the German Bible Story Book, also used in school. For each story there was a Scripture verse the students had to memorize and recite.

A few years later women were also assigned to be Sunday School teachers. The first women to hold this position included Anna K. Plett (Mrs. Isaac C. Penner), Sara Unger (Mrs. Peter J. Loewen) and Elizabeth Loewen (Mrs. Abram T. Loewen). Mrs. P.J. Loewen still remembers how she taught the older girls, ages 10-14, while Elizabeth taught the younger class, ages 6-10. As there were no classrooms, each of the four classes gathered in a corner of the church. In the middle of the building the parents who had brought their children to church gathered for a Bible study led by the Sunday School superintendent.[29] These first leaders include John C. Reimer, Abram P. Reimer and Abram J. Thiessen.

In 1933 the next new program, Singstund (Singing Hour), was introduced. It was a program for the young people between 14 and 21. Unlike today's choir practice, it was meant only to be a time of singing and fellowship. The decision to introduce a "Singing Hour" came after an ad hoc group of young people in Blumenhof began gathering in homes for times of singing. Leading this group were men like Abe P. Unger. From the Steinbach EMB church George and Abram Barkman came out to help organize the Blumenhof group. The song book used was the unsanctioned, evangelically oriented, Kleine Palme #1.

When the church leaders saw this movement, they realized something had to be done for the young people. In 1933 Rev. David P. Reimer invited the local young people to gather at the school on a Sunday afternoon for a time of singing. Over 100 young people showed up. After John C. Reimer, who had been asked to lead the singing, had given a lengthy talk about singing, Singstund began. The song book was the Sole Buch, which used the lyrics of the Grosse Gesang Buch but had a melody represented by numbers. According to one of the young people present, there was a sense of anticipation in the air as young people now had an opportunity to do something they enjoyed.[30]

In time the Sole Buch was replaced by the green Evangeliums Lieder Buch. Singing Hour was held every other Wednesday night. At times the young people got onto sleighs and headed to the homes of the aged or sick and sang for them. Young people from the 40s remember singing for both John U. Klassen and Abe F. Plett who were on their death beds.[31]

A third new church program was Jugendverein (Youth Meeting), which began in 1942. It was introduced so that young people and lay members could participate in a church service by singing songs, reading poetry and answering Bible questions. This was a program meant for the whole church. The Jugendverein was carefully organized by a three-man committee. David P. Reimer, Henry R. Plett, and Cornelius U. Klassen were the first members of this committee.[32]

A fourth idea which was beginning to gain acceptance in the church was the idea of evangelizing the world through foreign missions. As early as 1936 it had been decided by the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial to send $10.00 three times a year to mission fields. The next year the ministerial decided to support Gerhard Thiessen, an EMB missionary to China, by giving him $6.00 per month.[33] Blumenorters still remember how Missionary Thiessen came to church to report and how he taught them a Chinese song.

Yet it remained unthinkable for a Blumenorter to go out as a missionary. Men like John L. Penner considered the possibility, but education of any type was frowned upon and a deep-seated suspicion of churches who had mission programs still lingered.[34] While Susan Plett of Prairie Rose, a cousin to many local people, went to Brazil as a missionary in 1942, it was not until the 50s that Blumenort officially accepted the idea of missions. Extension services were organized by the local church as early as 1936 when services were held at the Plett logging camp at Vassar and in the Ridgewood school house.

Women were affected directly by yet another new idea entering the church at this time. In April, 1934, the question arose whether it might be appropriate for women to attend brotherhood meetings when preparations were made for communion. On June 8 the ministerial, led by Peter P. Reimer, decided that women should attend and be encouraged to give their testimonies to prepare for communion. Some concern was raised whether women should be allowed to speak, but it was generally agreed that I Timothy 2:12, which forbade women to preach, implied that they could, indeed, speak.[35] In the following years women became more and more involved in the church. Sunday school and sewing circles offered women a chance to serve the community in an organized way.

A growing openness to other Mennonite churches was another development of this time. Since John Holdeman had visited Blumenort in 1881, church leaders had been generally closed to other Mennonites. World War I had begun to change this as the Kleine Gemeinde worked closely with other nonresistant churches. In 1918, the Old Colonist Bishop, Johann Friesen, was even invited to speak about the war in the Steinbach church.[36]

During the 30s the Kleine Gemeinde opened up a little more when Gerhard Thiessen was asked to bring mission reports. In May, 1939, three ministers of the Rudnerweide Church (EMMC), named Falk, Froese and Baerg, visited an afternoon communion service at Blumenort. That night a special service was held where Peter P. Reimer asked the visitors to preach. World War II brought the Kleine Gemeinde even closer to other denominations.

The church, however, did not accept all the ideas circulating during the 30s. Both the official 1937 Kansas Ministerial Conference Communique and a record of brotherhood meetings show that the church was bombarded by a host of issues that could not fit into their theology of a simple, separate life.[37]

Among these issues was the problem of the increasing role of government in the lives of the church members. The brethren were reminded that it was inconsistent for them to accept government positions such as municipal councillors, jurymen, justices of peace, or to participate in government elections. They were also advised against buying life insurance or accepting widows' pension and admonished to seek to guarantee the physical wellbeing of members through church programs. Another matter of concern was the increasing ownership of radios and musical instruments, which was also seen as a practise which violated Christian humility. Another change which was officially discouraged was the increasing elaboration of church services exemplified by gift-giving at weddings, flowers at funerals and verbal prayer at Sunday morning services. Members were also urged to live a separate and simple life by refraining from seeking work in the city or participating in Mennonite festivities.

In September, 1939, Canada declared war on Germany. Once again the Blumenort people braced themselves, wondering whether they would be exempted from military involvement as they had been during World War I. Even though the church took the issue into its hands, local people soon found out

that, during this war, their young men would have to render at least some form of service.

Already in May of 1939, as tensions were growing in Europe, leaders of the Mennonite and Hutterite churches gathered in Winkler to discuss what stance to take in case of war. Elder Peter P. Reimer, who represented the Kleine Gemeinde, was one who strongly felt that the church should be prepared to suffer rather than to serve in any military-related service. Shortly after the war broke out in September Elder Reimer asked David Toews, the chairman of the Winkler meeting, to give a report in Blumenort. Toews outlined the threat which the war was posing to the non-resistant Mennonites. He opposed the position taken by the more liberal Russlaender Mennonites that conscientious objectors should be willing to render non-combatant military service.

A year later, when it became apparent that Canada was sending more and more soldiers to fight in Europe, the conservative Manitoba Mennonite churches organized an Altestenkomitee to ensure military exemption.[38] Rev. David P. Reimer, who had a command of the English language and was a natural diplomat, was chosen to represent the Kleine Gemeinde on this four-man committee. The committee travelled to Ottawa to seek a guarantee for total exemption for its young men, just as it received during World War I. Times, however, had changed over 25 years, and the government now insisted that the Mennonite boys stand as conscientious objectors and render alternative civilian service.[39]

In November, 1940, the Kleine Gemeinde summoned together all young men between 21 and 25. They were told that they would have to appear in court and be prepared to give a scriptural basis for refusing to join the army. At this meeting the boys were told to be able to answer the following questions;

1. Are you a descendant of the 1874 Mennonite immigrants?
2. Are you a member of a church, and do you attend?
3. Do you believe the teaching of that church?
4. Confirm this belief according to your conscience.[40]

The first court session came on December 4. Both Peter P. Reimer and David P. Reimer attended as witnesses, and the first group of Blumenort boys were interrogated.

In June, 1941, the first of these C. O.'s were called up for a four-month term of alternative service at Clear Lake. The Blumenort boys included Ben P. Loewen, Corny A. Reimer (who later enlisted in the army) and Willy P. Reimer.[41] Before they left, a farewell service was held at the church. For many Blumenorters this was an emotional affair, for they were sending their boys 200 miles from home and placing them in the hands of the government.

Rev. David P. Reimer accompanied the Kleine Gemeinde boys to Clear Lake, where he later served as chaplain. Because his eldest son, Henry J. Reimer, had been given a medical exemption freeing him to manage the farm, Rev. Reimer was able to spend much of the war years as chaplain in various C. O. camps.[42]

By the end of 1941 Klaas P. Friesen, John J. B. Reimer, Irwin P. Reimer and Jacob C. Penner had also been called up

for service. In January, 1942, the single men over the age of 25 were called up. It was this group which served the longest terms and furthest away from home. They include: John J. R. Barkman, Henry B. Reimer, Ben A. Reimer, Henry P. Unger and Cornelius P. D. Reimer. They were sent all the way to Seebe, Alberta, where they cut firewood and mine props in a forestry camp. John Barkman remembers that conditions at the camp were good; the food was plentiful, clothes came from home, and the government and the church each paid them 50¢ a day. Henry B. Reimer recalls that he had time to work on his grade 10 by correspondence. Rev. David P. Reimer visited them. Yet the boys were counting their days to return home.

One day, near the end of their stay, a sign went up at the kitchen announcing that all C. O.'s would stay at the camp for the duration of the war. This came as a shock to the boys, and when they enquired how long this would be, one man told them not to worry, it would not be more than 10 years. After this notification many of the men were transferred to Vancouver Island, where they once again worked in a forestry camp. By the spring of 1943 many of the boys had received farm leave, allowing them to go home early. Henry B. Reimer, however, served till the spring of 1944.[43]

Beginning in 1942, the government arranged for most of the C. O.'s from Blumenort to work in civilian-owned sawmills. Thus most of the C. O.'s from Blumenort spent their terms at Roblin at the Plett and Company sawmill. These C. O.'s received full wages ($3.00 a day), although they had to pay from $15.00 to $25.00 a month to the Red Cross. Most of these

men were also readily granted farm leaves each spring on the condition that they continue paying their Red Cross money.

Having to serve as C. O.'s was not the only way in which World War II affected Blumenort people. As in World War I, farm prices went up, and once again the government asked for money. In April, 1941, the church decided to allow the sale of non-interest-bearing "Victory Bonds" to the people upon a promise by the government that the money would be used only for relief. Isaac P. Loewen was appointed salesman for the bonds in Blumenort.

In February, 1942, the Blumenort people faced a dilemma when Prime Minister Mackenzie King's government held a referendum on the issue of conscription for overseas service. Some Mennonite ministers encouraged their people to vote against conscription. However, the Blumenort leaders advised against voting, explaining how Mennonites could lose their C. O. status if they participated in the referendum.[44] In the final end, Blumenorters ignored the referendum as they did all government elections.

After six years of fierce fighting, Germany was defeated, and in May, 1945, the war was over. The last C. O.'s came home. Rev. David P. Reimer and Rev. Cornelius R. Penner had a short talk of thanksgiving for the students at the school.

The war, however, had changed the community. Throughout the war Blumenort leaders had worked closely with leaders of other churches, and many of its young men had spent months away from home. One of the effects was that many members of the Blumenort Church became more open to outside ideas such

as foreign missions, the use of English, and a freer, more spontaneous religious life. Other members, however, saw the war and the changes in the church as a sufficient threat for them to leave Canada and move to Mexico. The stage had been set for a new era in which the church moved from a conservative, German-speaking Mennonite congregation to a more open, English evangelical body.

Footnotes

1 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
2 Kleine Gemeinde Rechnungsbuch, 1917, Blumenort E. M. Church.
3 Unger, op. cit.
4 Peter P. D. Reimer, op. cit.
5 Interview with Henry P. Doerksen, Blumenort, November 1981.
6 See Part III, Chapter 4.
7 Kleine Gemeinde, Rechnungsbuch, 1920.
8 Cornelius R. Plett, op. cit.
9 Interview with Abe P. Unger, Landmark, August, 1980.
10 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
11 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
12 Margaretha Fast Reimer, op. cit.
13 John C. Reimer, op. cit.
14 Interview with Rev. John P. Loewen, Blumenort, January, 1982.
15 Interview with Peter J. B. Reimer, Rosenort, January, 1979.
16 Kleine Gemeinde, Protokollbuch, 1938.
17 Peter J. B. Reimer, "Origin and Development of the Steinbach Church," Sesquicentennial Jubilee, p. 35.
18 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
19 Kleine Gemeinde, Protokollbuch, 1942.
20 Interview with Peter J. B. Reimer, op. cit.
21 Peter P. Reimer, sermon, 1926, Peter P. D. Reimer, Steinbach.
22 Ibid.
23 Unger, op. cit.
24 John C. Reimer, op. cit.
25 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
26 Peter K. Plett, op. cit.
27 Loewen, op. cit.
28 "E.M.C. Year Book," 1957, EMC Archives, Steinbach.
29 Mrs. Sara Loewen, interview, December, 1981.
30 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
31 Interview with Gertrude Klassen Loewen, R.R. #1, Steinbach, January, 1982.
32 Interview with John P. Loewen, Blumenort, December, 1981.
33 Kleine Gemeinde, Protokollbuch, 1936.
34 John L. Penner, op. cit.
35 Protokollbuch; 1934, op. cit.

36 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
37 Protokollbuch, 1930-1940.
38 Ibid., 1939. This committee included the Kleine Gemeinde, Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, Bruderthaler and Holdeman Churches.
39 Laurence Klippenstein, That There Be Peace: Mennonites in Canada and World War II, (The Manitoba C. O. Reunion Committee, Winnipeg, 1979), pp. 16 and 17.
40 Protokollbuch, 1940.
41 Loewen, op. cit.
42 Interview with Dave J. Reimer, Ste. Anne, December, 1981.
43 Interview with John J. R. Barkman, Henry B. Reimer and Ben A. Reimer, all of Blumenort, December, 1981.
44 Protokollbuch, 1942.

Part III, Chapter 6: The Helping Hand in Transition

During the period from 1910-1948, the sick, poor, and unfortunate still looked to the church for help. By the end of this period, however, public institutions had begun to take over the responsibilities for the community's welfare. Previously the church deacons assisted the poor, the midwife delivered the babies, the Brandschulz helped fire victims, and the Hilfsverein helped the young farmers. By the end of World War II the Canadian Pension Fund, the Bethesda Hospital Society, the Red River Mutual Insurance Company and the Steinbach Credit Union brought an end to the time when the church was the only hand its members relied on for help. The lifting of this burden from the church was, no doubt, one of the factors which allowed the church to begin focusing on evangelical missions.

It was not until 1937, when the first publicly-owned hospital in Steinbach was completed, that Blumenort people began to rely on professional services for their health. For the most part, however, local people still relied on each other; the local midwife, chiropractor or tooth-puller to help fight disease, relieve pain or deliver babies.

There is no better example of a time that people of the community unselfishly served each other than the time of the Spanish Influenza in 1918 and 1919. The epidemic, which struck

throughout North America and Europe, ravaged on in the Blumenort area for all of November and December. "The Flu" became the most severe epidemic Blumenort had known. Whole families became bedridden, hampered by a high fever. On November 6 it was reported that Mrs. John K. Plett of Ridgewood and two of her children were critically ill.[1] Two days later school teacher Gerhard Kornelson and three students fell ill.[2] The Blumenort School was closed the next day, and, shortly thereafter, Peter P. Wohlgemuth closed the doors on his school in Blumenhof.[3] On November 17 church services were called off until Christmas.[4] The practice of having funerals stopped, and even the graveside services were attended by very few because most people were sick at home. At one funeral only a couple of menfolk showed up; they sang a few songs and buried their friend.[5]

While many were gracious during this time, most were afraid to help the sick in case they, too, contacted the dreaded disease. There were no doctors or hospitals in the area. In December the energetic nurse from Steinbach, Mrs. Agnes Fast (later Mrs. Anderson), tended to the sick in the Blumenort area for a while.[6]

In Blumenhof Abram L. Plett is remembered as a man who helped the sick. In Blumenort Klaas F. Penner was the most energetic local worker. Somehow spared from the influenze, he worked each day and many nights, looking after the sick. He tried to make them feel more comfortable and did their farm chores for them. He noticed how peaceful the sick often were; usually asking for no more than a glass of water. The only

prevention against the flu that Penner knew of was sugar cubes with "cold drops". Because his own family was ill, the neighbour, Isaac P. Loewen, helped do the chores when Penner was away.[7]

"The Flu" finally began to subside in the East Reserve at Christmastime. In Blumenort and Blumenhof six people had died. They included the following: Abram Penner, Sr., aged 70, on October 17; Mrs. Klaas K. Friesen, aged 32, on November 24; Gerhard, 1½ year-old son of C. P. Reimer, on November 25; Miss Maria P. Unger, aged 19, on December 10; Mrs. Jacob L. Plett, aged 50, on December 13; and Klaas R. Penner, aged 40, on December 19.

The sorrow that family members felt during these times was very deep. Klaas K. Friesen's grandson, Patrick Friesen, has written the following poem, which Friesen says portrays "what I imagine my grandfather to have felt when his wife, Maria, died." The poem is reproduced here with the permission of Turnstone Press, 1980.

klaas friesen's dream

to wake finding november at the window
my wrist shrunk to bone
but to wake again

earth still fat with october
shivers beneath white wind

here on this farm
between la broquerie and blumenort
now in this hardening month 1918
they say she has gone
and though I hear myself say it isn't true
I know it is because the house is cold

I dream a blizzard
barney and prince flounder

snow whirling from treetops
spinning where wind twists one way then another
snow drifting to their chests
melting on muscle forelegs driving
and wallow and barney strikes the rise where snow is thin
leans against a poplar deadstill

I turn my eyes back to the hollow
snow rising like pillars as wind swoops
but there is no prince
and when I look to the trees there is no barney

snow fluttering against glass
and I'm wondering how hard the earth
shovels flashing at noon iron strike iron
how they lowered her then
snow and dead leaves wheeling across her casket

I lie facedown on her side of the bed
the warmth the musk of her
this I cannot bear[8]

The Blumenort-area families were also painfully aware of the deaths of relatives in Steinbach, Kleefeld and Rosenort. Jacob L. Plett suffered deep sorrow when he attended a burial in the Rosenort area where three persons had died and were buried together.[9] Peter F. Unger recorded that 12 Kleine Gemeinde church members and many children had died. C. R. Plett recorded 20 deaths in the East Reserve from November the twelfth to February the first.

Until 1937, when the Steinbach hospital opened, it was rare for a baby to be born anywhere else than in the home. The vivacious Mrs. Peter B. Toews, who began working as a mid-wife in 1893, continued serving in that capacity until 1932. However, by 1910 Mrs. John F. Unger from Blumenhof began helping with the births in the area. With her reputation as a caring person and some training from Mrs. Toews, Maria Unger became a person on whom community mothers depended. Her daughter, Mrs. P. J. Loewen, remembers how people would drive

up to the yard at night and call her mother away. When complications with the birth developed, Mrs. Unger would call Dr. Shilstra from Steinbach, who was the first resident doctor in the area. For 30 years Mrs. Unger served the community by delivering hundreds of babies. Her wages usually came in the form of gifts of clothing or food.[10]

Blumenort was served by two chiropractors during the time from 1910 to 1945. Both Miss Gertrude Klassen and Mrs. Peter K. Dueck aided the community in a humble, yet skillful way.

Miss Klassen, affectionately known by all as "Tante Trutje", had an interest in medicine from the time she was a little girl. By the time she was 19, she was a full-fledged chiropractor. As time went on, her reputation as a bone-setter spread from Blumenort to Kleefeld.

It is said that "Taunte Trutje's" first love was children. People remember her saying, "I have always had a great burden in my heart for poor helpless children."[11] Thus she turned to fostering children and in her life-time she looked after a total of 53 children, three of whom she adopted. When she was only 22, she took in Annie and John, the children of the Peter K. Klassen family. The Klassens were poor and John was a paraplegic. A few years later she adopted Betty, a baby girl from the Children's Home, something that was unheard of in those days.[12]

A few years after her father, Peter B. Klassen, died in 1930, Miss Klassen took her small family and her mother and moved to Kleefeld. Blumenort-area people did not forget this remarkable woman and often made the long trip to Kleefeld to get their aching muscles and twisted joints back into shape.

After Gertrude Klassen moved to Kleefeld, the Blumenort area was without a chiropractor until 1937, when the Peter K. Duecks moved back from Vassar where they had lived for two years and settled 1½ miles west of Twin Creek. Mrs. Justina Dueck, a daughter to the midwife Mrs. John F. Unger, had followed in her mother's interest in helping people in need.

After returning from Vassar, she subscribed to a correspondence course on muscle massaging. But she also became adept at bone-setting. A small room was set aside, and Mrs. Dueck began a notable chiropractic practice. It is a practice she carries on to a certain degree even today.[13]

Although tooth care was left very much to the individual, there was no local toothpuller to match Abram R. Penner's skill and reputation. It was he who had a set of professional dentist pliers; one each for the right, left and middle mouth. Very professionally, before each pulling, Penner would fire up the stove, boil water and sterilize his equipment. Over the years hundreds of people came to Penner and willingly paid the 50¢ fee to get rid of their aching teeth.[14]

In 1937 a church-run hospital was built in Steinbach. It was the result of six hard years of work by the Mennonite Society For Aid of the Sick, founded by East Reserve churches in 1931. The society had been started to seek to provide all-around medical and hospital care for sick people who were cared for only at home or at expensive Winnipeg hospitals. Two of the society's seven members were Abram R. Penner and C. P. Reimer, both from the Blumenort area. In the 1940s the Blumenort area was actively represented on the Bethesda

Hospital Society by Isaac F. Loewen. He served in that capacity until 1957 when the hospital became a municipal organization. Jacob F. Loewen represented the Blumenort area on the new administration.[15]

The church remained the basic welfare agency in the community until sometime after World War II. It helped the poor through its Deaconry, Waisenamt, Hilfsverein and through the M.C.C. No doubt even greater help came from selfless individuals who assisted their neighbours in need. There are stories of how those with money gave interest-free loans to the young farmers; how those with strength fostered the children of the sick; how those with land offered shelter to the landless.

Blumenort and area was served by three deacons during these years. They included Aaron R. Reimer (1918-1953), Peter K. Dueck (1929-1964), Cornelius L. Plett (1933-1950), and Jacob U. Kornelsen (1948-1950). The office of deacon did not change during these years. Elected for life, the deacons were called to help the poor in the church community. As in days of old, the needy were provided for with clothing, food, and in some cases, even shelter.

One of the new programs introduced during this time was the church foodbank. In September, 1937, during the first substantial harvest in years, the brotherhood decided to increase and streamline local welfare by establishing a church granary.[16] It was decided to build the granary as large as voluntary contributions allowed. The small 12' x 14' structure (painted red) was erected on the yard of Deacon C. R. Plett.

Farmers who wished to help could now deposit their grain here, and the church deacons would distribute it to the poor. The granary was operated until January, 1950, when the last of its grain was given to an elderly couple and several young Ridgewood area farmers.

The deaconry also helped poor people by providing land for them on which to settle. During the 1930's, 20 acres on S.E. 28 was purchased by the church from Klaas P. Reimer and registered under Deacon Aaron R. Reimer's name. This land was divided into two-and-a-half acre lots and sold at low prices to the poor. By 1940 half a dozen families had settled on this land.

For many years Abram R. Penner from Blumenort was the Waisenvorsteher for the Molotschna Mennonites (i.e. Kleine Gemeinde, Holdeman and Bruderthaler Churches) of the East Reserve. As the Vorsteher, it was his job to visit the families where the father or mother had died and ensure that estates would be properly administered. He had to make certain that orphans received their fair inheritance after their parent remarried.

While the Waisenamt had been a very dominant institution in Russia, serving as both an estate's administration and a trust company, it took on a much lesser role in Canada. Despite the fact that the Waisenamt was revised in 1890, it is reported to have almost broken up by 1910. It was in this year, according to Peter F. Unger, that a concern was raised about the financial plight of orphans. Thus, a new Waisenamt was formed which was to include the Kleine Gemeinde, Holdeman and

Bruderthaler churches. A Waisenvorsteher was to be elected for a four-year term and assisted by Waisenmänner in each community.

It was after this reorganization that Abram Penner was chosen as the Waisenvorsteher. John D. Penner remembers how busy his father was in this position. When a man died, Penner would go to his family and take stock of what the family owned. One third of this was designated as belonging "in trust" to the Waisenkasse. Thus, when the mother remarried, as was almost always the case, the children would be assured of an inheritance. While no money was paid out to them, their new father would have to assure that one third of the farm belonged to his step-children. Even this did not solve all the problems. Sometimes Abram Penner had to deal with deep bitterness that developed when a step-father, assuming control of the farm, ran it down, leaving nothing for the children.[17]

Abram Penner kept this office until 1927, when Peter H. Wiebe from Greenland took over. Klaas F. Penner served the community as Waisenman for many years. It was his job to work with the Waisenvorsteher and administer the estates in the Blumenort area.

The Hilfsverein was a financial assistance committee. It was begun in 1929 by the Kleine Gemeinde in response to the growing number of brethren who were deeply in debt or had no money with which to begin. The first men to serve on this committee were Abram R. Penner and Klaas F. Penner from Blumenort, and John Schellenberg from Kleefeld. Other local men to serve on this committee in later years included Isaac P. Loewen, Peter K. Plett, Klaas R. Plett and Abram K. Penner.

In order to begin the Hilfsverein, it was suggested that each brother should deposit .5 percent of his assets. This earned two percent interest per year. Poorer farmers who wanted to buy seed grain, livestock, or pay off small debts could borrow this money at three percent interest.[18]

Blumenorters availed themselves fully of the services of the Hilfsverein. In later years as money became more available, local farmers began looking upon the Hilfsverein as a Credit Union. Wealthier farmers who had traditionally lent money to their neighbors privately now deposited big sums of money into the Hilfsverein and directed their neighbours to borrow money from it. A. K. Penner recalls that, while most loans amounted to no more than $100, some were as big as $5,000. Farmers began to borrow money for land and houses which they mortgaged to the Hilfsverein. Penner remembers that he enjoyed working on the committee, especially when farmers punctually and happily brought in their payments.

Sometime after World War II a decision had to be made whether the Hilfsverein should grow into a full-fledged financial organization or join the Steinbach Credit Union. When the latter offered to take on all the mortgages and to provide a good alternative service, the Hilfsverein dissolved.

Another organized way of helping the poor came through a woman's organization called the Naehverein, or sewing circle. While women had often gathered to help a poor neighbour or relative, no official organization existed until 1944. In that year several local women responded to a call by Rev. Henry R. Reimer for more people to become directly involved

in relief work. One woman described this beginning in the following way:

> As we turn the hands of time back to 1944, we see two ladies possessing initiative and courage: Mrs. John U. Brandt and Mrs. Peter J. Loewen stalking from house to house in the village of Blumenort, canvassing for the first Naehverein. At every house they present a written statement made by the late Henry R. Reimer, granting them liberty to assist officially in supporting the Mennonite Central Committee.[18]

The idea of ladies' sewing circles caught on. Twenty-five years later, ladies' sewing circles still flourish. However, instead of one group of women, there are eight, and, instead of supporting only the M.C.C., they support other missions as well. The basic work of sewing, knitting and mending, however, continues.

Not only did the community and church reach out its hand to the poor and sick; it also helped the displaced.

On August 20, 1923, a train pulled up to the Giroux depot. On board were 80 Russländer Mennonites. These Mennonites had fled the ravages of the Communist Revolution and the ensuing famine in Russia. Blumenort was one among hundreds of other Mennonite communities in Canada who put out their hand to help the Mennonites who had chosen to stay in Russia after 1874.

Peter P. D. Reimer still recalls how David P. Reimer once stopped him and other by-passers at David Reimer's corner. Reimer asked the neighbors to sign a petition which would allow the Russländer to come to Canada. Mennonite leaders in Canada had to assure the Dominion government that the Russländer would be supplied with work and shelter. During the next year every available house and hut in the district was opened to these

strangers and they were given whatever work could be scrounged up. It was a time, writes Peter F. Unger, which "presented many opportunities to do good."

It was quite an event for the Kleine Gemeinde people to open their homes to the "high-brow" Russländer. Isaac P. Loewen, who picked up the Herman Peters family from Giroux, often spoke of how ironic it was that the humble Kleine Gemeinde should share their possessions with a people who considered themselves more highly cultured and were more educated than their sponsors. Krank K. Wiebe remembers that most of the Russländer who came to Blumenort were members of the pietistic Mennonite Brethren Church who held prayer meetings and sang in harmony. Jacob W. Friesen claims to have been intimidated by the Russländer, who would flaunt their "perfect High German" as they addressed their fellows. Others apparently greeted the immigrants with excitement; one Russländer claimed that all the bachelors and widowers in the area seemed to have "waded up to their knees to get a Russian spouse."

While some of the Russländer settled in Blumenort, most stayed only for a year or so. Old-timers remember men like Herman Peters, Frank Reinke, Jasch Wiebe and Peter Vogt as being part of Blumenort only for a year or so before they purchased farms from the Bergthal people who had just moved to South America.

Others came and stayed. Henry T. Braun arrived at Giroux as a 15-year-old orphan without a relative in Canada. His parents had died in 1919 from typhoid fever, and in 1923 he left his younger brother and sister when it became apparent

that he would be drafted into the Red Army when he turned 16. His prayers for a way out of the draft came when a Peter Kehler family took him along on a spare immigration pass. The journey from Berhatova Colony to Manitoba was a long and gruelling one. But once he arrived at Giroux, he was met by his sponsor, Klaas P. Reimer, who gave young Henry a ride home to Blumenort on a new 490 Chevy Sedan and offered him a new home. Although Mrs. Reimer apparently had wanted a girl, Henry was accepted as one of the Reimers' sons. Henry also stayed with the John B. Reimers, Peter F. Reimers and Tom Mooneys before he married Margaret, the eldest daughter of C. W. Brandts, in 1930, and established a farm three miles west of present-day Blumenort.[20]

Alexandra Novikova was another Russländer to marry a Blumenorter. As the orphaned servant girl of Dr. John G. Kroeker, she had been allowed to come along to Canada. She arrived here in 1926 at the age of 14 and in 1933 she married Jac U. Klassen of Twin Creek.[21]

Fire insurance was another area in which the church, through the inter-Mennonite Brandverordnung, continued its traditional role. The following story reveals how the Brandverordnung worked. Toward the evening on September 9, 1931, a huge blaze went up at C. W. Brandt's farm. The clover that had been stacked in the hay-loft had become hot, igniting the barn. A strong northeasterly wind spread the fire to the chicken barn, the summer kitchen and finally to the house. Neighbors who left their milking and rushed to the Brandts could do nothing but pull the furniture out of the house. A quarter of a mile west at Peter K. Pletts someone stood on the barn

roof with buckets of water to extinguish threatening sparks coming from the Brandts. That night the Brandts moved in with their in-laws, the C. R. Penners, and lived there until new buildings could be erected. The next day the Brandaeltester, John F. Unger, assessed the damage and began collecting premiums from the neighbouring farms to pay for the damage suffered by the Brandts.

The fire insurance organization for which Unger worked was called the Brandverordnung. While there were several such organizations, the Kleine Gemeinde people belonged to one with the Bergthalers of the East and West Reserves. The fire organization appointed an agent for each community to sell fire insurance, make sure that each farm had a fire hook and ladder, and see to it that every able-bodied man in the district showed up to help fight fires. This agent was the Brandschulz. For many years Klaas F. Penner was the Brandschulz in Blumenort, David L. Plett in Blumenhof and John K. Klassen in Neuanlage.

These men were responsible to the Brandaeltester, the fire insurance chief, who was a director on the Brandverordnung board. It was his job to assess damages, determine the cause of the fire and pay out insurance. One of the persons to hold this position for a long time was Abram Penner, Sr. When he died in 1916, John F. Unger, who had previously been a Brandschulz, became the Brandaeltester. He served the community in this capacity until he died 22 years later. He is remembered as a meticulous man who could sense the value of buildings as well as the cause of the fire. On one occasion he suspected quite strongly that the cause of the fire was arson by the owner

who needed cash. Unger also sensed that the right thing to do would be to pay out the insurance and wait for the power of conscience to take its course. As he expected, the owner of the buildings was on the Unger yard within a week to confess and return the money.[22]

In 1941 the old Brandverordnung was reorganized and named the Red River Mutual Insurance Company. The new company replaced the church-appointed Brandschulz with the insurance agent, the Brandaeltester with the company director, and the German language with the English. One of the engineers behind this change and one of the first directors of Red River Insurance was John U. Brandt. He often told of the many trips to Altona he made with C. T. Loewen, where they met with the West Reserve representatives and ironed out the problems in forming the new company. Not only was John U. Brandt a director; he, along with Isaac F. Loewen, served as agents in the Blumenort area. (In 1959 the agency for the area was assumed by P. K. Reimer from Blumenhof. He is still the agent for the area, selling insurance to 900 different landowners. In 1964 John U. Brandt resigned as director and Henry F. Reimer served in that position for a number of years. At the present there is no director from the area.[23]

For centuries tradition had dictated that children would care for their elderly parents at home. Most of the community's elderly spent their last years moving within their family, from one home to the other or living peacefully in a small house on their children's farmyard. In 1946 this tradition began to change when the Kleine Gemeinde purchased a Senior

Citizen's Home in Steinbach for $10,000. In the years since then, Blumenort men like A. K. Penner and Peter K. Plett have given active leadership to the board which administers the Home. Through the years many elderly Blumenort people have chosen to live at the Steinbach Rest Haven and the adjoining apartments.

Footnotes

1 Steinbach Post, November 6, 1918.
2 Klaas C. Penner, op. cit.
3 School Register; 1918, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg.
4 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
5 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
6 Steinbach Post, December, 1918
7 Margaret C. Penner, op. cit.
8 Patrick Friesen, The Shunning, Turnstone Press, 1980.
9 "Jacob L. Plett Familie," Bericht von dem Pletten-Tag, op. cit.
10 Interview with Mrs. Sara Unger Loewen, Blumenort, December, 1981.
11 Abe Warkentin, op. cit., p. 216.
12 Interview with Gertrude Klassen Loewen, January, 1982.
13 Interview with John R. Dueck, January, 1982.
14 John D. Penner, op. cit.
15 Abe Warkentin, op. cit., pp. 228-231.
16 Kleine Gemeinde, Protokollbuch, 1937.
17 John D. Penner, op. cit.
18 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
19 "Report on Sewing Circle," Sesquicentennial Jubilee, p. 144.
20 Interview with Henry T. Braun, Steinbach, January, 1982.
21 Jac. U. Klassen, op. cit.
22 Abe P. Unger, op. cit.
23 Interview with Peter K. Reimer, Steinbach, January, 1982.

Part III, Chapter 7: A Changing Lifestyle

The car and the telephone were symbols of a changing lifestyle in Blumenort. The simple, isolated farming way of life just could not remain the same with the coming of these new inventions. Community elders in Blumenort knew this and strenuously opposed the telephone until 1915 and the car until 1920. Special brotherhood meetings were called to discuss these vices, and members who used them were excommunicated. As the prosperous time of World War I came, first the telephone and then the car were accepted. Nowhere is the saying, "Today's luxury is tomorrow's necessity" more true than in regard to these two inventions. Even the radio made its debut during this time.

In 1906 the people of Blumenort were invited to vote in a referendum to approve a plan in which the Manitoba Government would set up a publically-owned telephone system. One of the main reasons for this plan was that the Bell Telephone System had been too slow in connecting Winnipeg with rural areas. Although few people in Hanover voted, those who did opposed the government's plan 100 percent. There was no way that the people of the East Reserve wanted a direct link-up with Winnipeg.[1]

In 1906 as well, the issue of telephones came up at the Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood meetings. Peter F. Unger, a chronicler

of these meetings, reports that there was strong opposition to the telephone. It was seen as another symbol of pride.

By 1910, however, the strong opposition to the telephone had calmed. In 1908 Manitoba Government Telephones connected Steinbach to Winnipeg, and, during the next decade, Neuanlage, Blumenort, Blumenhof and Ridgewood sent lines to Steinbach switchboard.

Some of the first telephone lines in the Blumenort area were put up around 1912 between relatives in the southern part of the district. One of the first privately-owned lines of this nature was one constructed by John B. Koop, Sr., from his farm in Neuanlage to his son John's place, 10 miles away at Heuboden.[2] Around this time as well, a telephone line was strung up between the farms of Peter P. Reimer, Henry R. Reimer and Cornelius P. Reimer.[3] Peter I. Wiebe also constructed a line, connecting his place to the home of his father-in-law, Peter B. Klassen, in Neuanlage, and all the way to the place of his brother-in-law, Cornelius F. Unger, in Blumenhof.[4]

By 1917 the Wiebe and Reimer lines had joined and connected to the Steinbach switchboard. This line, called Line Number 10, was to become the main Blumenort line. Although some of the more conservative farmers strenuously opposed the telephone at brotherhood meetings at this time, by 1920 Line Number 10 had 21 subscribers.

One of the later subscribers to Line Number 10 was Klaas F. Penner. There is a story about how a neighbour once came to visit at Penners. Knowing that Mr. Penner was home alone, the neighbour found it rather disconcerting to hear Penner

loudly talking inside the house. The dismayed visitor apparently was very relieved to find out that the Penners had just been connected by telephone.[5]

A second line in the area was built by John A. K. Plett from Ridgewood. Around 1916 he connected the four farms at De Krim, and two years later he extended the line to Giroux from where a link could be made to Steinbach.[6] This was Line Number 13. In 1917 Plett headed the construction of Line Number 9 through the Blumenhof area and led it to Steinbach along the Steinbach Road. Peter K. Plett still remembers working for his cousin, digging the holes for the poles with a spade and climbing the poles to attach the wire. Around 1920 Line Number 13 and Number 9 are said to have joined to form Line Number 18. A third line, Line Number 12, connected many of the local farmers who lived within a mile of the Steinbach Road.

The Greenland people appear to have had telephone service some time before Blumenort had it. By 1915 three farmers, Aaron T. Penner, Isaac T. Penner and Peter R. Toews had numbers listed in the provincial telephone directory. Henry P. Giesbrecht recalls that this line had its beginnings before 1912 when Peter B. Toews led a wire along the pasture fence to Greenland Cheese factory where his son Peter worked. For a time it was the practice to hang a blanket over the telephone when the elders of the community came to visit.[7]

As more and more people subscribed to the existing lines, telephone service deteriorated. Most lines were single-stranded and tended to be very noisy. It was of some benefit to have

many householders on one line as they enabled anyone with community news to ring the Alle Manns Ring, 10 long rings. When all the receivers had been lifted the birth announcement, news of tragedy, the sale of livestock or the date of a church meeting was given. The obvious difficulty of early party lines, which had 20-30 subscribers, was that telephone service could be tied up for long periods of time. It was not until 1948, when the Blumenort Co-op Telephone Exchange was started, that these problems were rectified.

Although the telephone was totally accepted by 1920, the car was just beginning to be accepted. For centuries man had used the horse and a simple wagon to get around. Anything more was considered a symbol of worldly pride. Isaac J. Loewen, who, around the turn of the century had purchased a new buggy with a roof on it, was asked by the church to remove the roof, as it was not in keeping with a simple lifestyle. Loewen, having become accustomed to the roof which protected the riders from rain, hesitated, but finally removed the roof and strung it high up in the hayloft.

Now, in 1920, the car, which had been invented a generation earlier, was beginning to be purchased by the more wealthy and liberal members of the community.

As early as 1905 C. F. Broeski from Heuboden, who had been born in Blumenort, had built a car. In 1912 J. R. Friesen became the first man in the area to buy a factory-made car, a Model N Ford. The Kleine Gemeinde church strongly opposed these new gadgets. Special brotherhood meetings were called and both Broeski and Friesen were excommunicated. After a

while other folks from the progressive town of Steinbach purchased cars. Blumenort-area people, however, continued to oppose them.[9]

Several stories exist about the first cars that visited Blumenort. Peter A. Plett remembers how around 1915 he was given a ride on a Model T, owned by a former Blumenhof school teacher, Frank Goossen. Plett had been walking to fetch the mail from McKaskill's in Clearsprings when he suddenly heard a terrible racket and roar behind him. As he turned, he saw a car with brass trimmings bouncing along the rutty road toward him. When the car came up to Peter, it stopped, and the driver was none other than the school teacher. After this, Peter ran home to tell everyone about his wonder ride and, needless to say, they were all very envious.

Abe P. Unger saw the first car in Blumenort in August, 1916, at the funeral of his grandmother, Mrs. Abram R. Reimer. He related the following story at the Blumenort Centennial Service in 1974:

> We boys were allowed to come along to the funeral, (although) usually this was not the case. We had to stay outside during the service, though, as the church was overflowing. But what was especially exciting for us boys was that there we saw our first car from close-up. I had once seen a car driving at a distance, but here I saw one right from close-up, as this one had come to the funeral.
>
> As the service concluded and the procession made its way to the graveyard, 200 paces to the (north of the church building) through the trees, this car went to the graveyard as well, and we, about 35 boys, were greatly interested in this car we followed. As many as possible climbed onto the car, hanging on it from all sides. Because I was one of the younger boys, I was on the outside layer. The car drove very slowly. But I did not mind, as I could hang on that much better.

> On that ride to the graveyard no fewer than two tires blew out. It was very loud for a while. A spare tire they did not have. The tires had to be patched. If I remember correctly, the car never quite got to the graveyard.
>
> My parents were not too happy about that car at the funeral. The car had been of such great importance to some of us that the solemnity of the funeral had been forgotten.[10]

Not all the boys of the community were as bold as Unger. Mrs. C. K. Plett remembers that when a car pulled past her parents' (Henry R. Reimers) place, the small boys came running in and declared a wagon without horses was passing outside. Jac U. Klassen remembers that, around 1916, he and a group of his friends were walking along the road when a Mr. Schellenberg from Steinbach came along in his car on a return trip from Winnipeg. The boys madly ran onto the field, pretending to be afraid. Apparently this was enough for Schellenberg to stop and offer the boys a ride. It was an offer the boys readily accepted.

By 1918 there were several cars in the area. At the opening of the new Blumenort church in August, there were seven cars and 106 buggies. However, in most cases the first cars in Blumenort area were owned by young single men who were not members of the church. Cornelius and Peter, sons of Klaas P. Reimer, and Peter, son of John R. Penner, each had a Model T. Ford Coupe by 1917.

Blumenort's first collision involving a car occurred at dusk one evening in March of 1919, half a mile east of present-day Blumenort.[11] Peter J. Penner was driving his Ford Coupe west toward the Steinbach Road when he collided with a horse

and buggy driven by Peter F. Unger. Just who was at fault here is a matter of some controversy. While Penner, who rammed the buggy from behind was obviously at some fault, he claimed that Unger, who is said to have been opposed to cars at this time, had not let him pass. Although the collision occurred at low speed, it was enough to ruin the buggy and send Unger to the hospital in Winnipeg.

One of the last families in the district to approve of cars was the Penner family. Peter L. Penner remembered that his grandmother, Mrs. Abram Penner, Sr., had requested that her grandchildren not buy cars as long as she lived. It is said that her second-oldest grandson, Abram P. Loewen, lived without a car for most of his life while another of her grandsons, Abram D. Penner, became Steinbach's most reputed car salesman. When Blumenort merchant Peter R. Penner bought a car in the 1920s he said apologetically, "It's good to have a car. . .at home in the garage."[12] When Klaas F. Penner finally bought a car, he made a rule that that car should never exceed 10 miles per hour. When Isaac P. Loewen purchased his first car in 1929, his conscience bothered him so much that he sold it and contemplated the issue for another six months before he finally bought a car which he kept.

Local people remember that by 1921 the car was no longer a total taboo. In that year, after a good crop, Klaas P. Reimer purchased a brand new 490 Chevy, fully equiped with a canvas roof. About this time John K. Loewen from Ridgewood bought a second-hand 1919 four-door Gray Dort. By far the most popular car was the Model T Ford. The Blumenhof Holdeman

people, such as John Wohlgemuth and Heinrich Ens, being more progressive than their Kleine Gemeinde neighbours, had brand new Model T's. Even Peter F. Unger who had been injured just two years previously, was one of the first to buy a Model T.

There is a story that by 1928 even Elder Peter P. Reimer had bought a new car, likely a Model A, with which to take a trip to Kansas. To make sure that the people would not conclude that he was proud, he had the bumpers and all chrome painted black.

Even Blumenort could not completely escape radios, gramophones and movies, inventions that were not even fully accepted by city folk.

Old-timers remember, as teenage boys, standing around the community's first gramophone in Klaas P. Reimer's barn, listening to the music of the day. The first radio in the area was probably owned by Frank K. Wiebe who, in the early 1920's purchased a radio for five dollars from the Eaton's catalogue. He had earned the money by collecting horse hair from the neighbours and selling it to the Winnipeg textile firms. The radio was a primitive crystal set which required a set of headphones and a high aerial mounted outside. Wiebe recalls how he and his father would spend long winter evenings picking up the signal from Winnipeg and listening to Western music. The high aerial did cause some problems for the Wiebes, as every neighbour passing by could spot the farm that had the radio.

In Neuanlage the John K. Klassen boys, who had also purchased a crystal set radio, were more secretive and tried

to pick up their signal by hooking a wire up to the community telephone line. Although they apparently picked up a signal, they also unknowingly were piping music into each home on their telephone line. Jacob B. Koop, a good conservative Kleine Gemeinder, figured he knew where the music that he heard on his telephone was coming from, but he was not sure how he should solve the problem. One evening a plan occurred to him. He went to John K. Klassen's place and headed for the barn and, as he expected, he came across the Klassen boys huddled around the radio. He stepped inside, told the boys he wished to thank them for the wonderful music they were providing for the whole community, and then returned home. When he got home the music service had been discontinued. It had not taken the startled Klassen boys long to dismantle their telephone-line antenna.[13]

Other local boys who had radios during this time included Jacob R. and George R. Plett. Apparently they were always careful to use the radio's headphones when the parents were at home.

There is even a story about the Blumenorters attending a movie in the 1920s. Once on a trip to Morris by train via Winnipeg, David P. Reimer and three other fellows stopped in the city for business. One of the fellows told his three friends that he would like them to see something interesting and took them into a building with seats. When the three suddenly realized that they had been induced to enter a theatre, they immediately stood up and filed out. Outside on the street, not letting any time escape, they had a little Bruderschaft

and severely admonished their "brother". And forthwith they hurried to the railway station to continue their trip to Rosenort.[14]

Social life was one of the aspects of community which changed very little during this time. Social participation with non-relatives outside the community was almost unheard of. Thus when the teacher, David P. Reimer, was invited to speak at the 50th anniversary of the Mennonite settlement held in Mitchell in 1924 he did not appear.[13] When the Blumenort children attended the Boys and Girls' Fair in Steinbach in 1923, the community leaders seem to have advised against future attendance.

While school picnics were introduced during the 1930s, sports activities for children over 14 were severely frowned upon. Although Singstunde and Jugendverein provided a controlled social outlet for youth, dating before Velafniss and gatherings like barn dances were done without the consent of parents or community leaders. During leisure times the boys would take their bicycles to the local swimming hole and the girls would walk to meet their friends for an afternoon visit.

Spazieren and family gatherings continued to be in vogue. The extended family, and not the community, remained the realm within which visiting took place. As times became more affluent, lengthy visits to relatives at Jantzied--Rosenort and Rosenhof--continued without change. Mrs. David L. Plett writes about a visit they made to Rosenort in 1926. Their stay lasted a whole week, during which time they visited no less than 22 places.[15]

Other trips to places outside the province increased as close relatives moved to places in Kansas, Saskatchewan, Alberta and as far away as Texas and Oregon. Already during the years of World War I, Blumenorters availed themselves regularly of the train service at Giroux. Often departures and arrivals at the train depot were reported by the Giroux Volksbote.

Footnotes

1 Winnipeg Telegram, December 15, 1906, p. 1.
2 Jac U. Klassen, op. cit.
3 Peter P. D. Reimer, op. cit.
4 Frank K. Wiebe, op. cit.
5 Interview with Abe P. Unger, Landmark, November, 1981.
6 Peter J. Loewen, op. cit.
7 Henry P. Giesbrecht, op. cit.
8 "Manitoba Provincial Telephone Directories," 1910-1930, MTS Archives, Winnipeg.
9 Abe Warkentin, op. cit., p. 106.
10 Abe P. Unger, story told at the Blumenort Centennial Service, August, 1974.
11 Steinbach Post, March, 1919.
12 John L. Penner, op. cit.
13 Klassen, op. cit.
14 Interview with Menno D. Loewen, Belize, C.A., December, 1980.
15 Mrs. David L. Plett, diary, 1926, Betty Plett, Blumenort.

Part III, Chapter 8: Exodus: The End of an Era

The people of Blumenort used to consider themselves a transient people, a people without a homeland. Through the years they often moved and established new settlements, sometimes in search for more farmland and sometimes for greater religious security. During the first era notable migrations from Blumenort occurred in 1879, when Neuanlage was established and in the early 1890s, when Greenland was settled.

The practice of groups of local people pulling up their stakes and moving continued throughout Blumenort's second era (1910-1948). Two notable migrations included one (around 1916) to Kansas and another (around 1920) to Prairie Rose. Both were made primarily for economic reasons at a time when new farmland in the Blumenort area was becoming scarce.

The Public School question precipitated plans for another migration. The loss of private schools in 1919 was a major threat to the Mennonites. Thus, during the 1920s, several delegations went to Quebec where farmland was available and school laws more favorable. When the plans to move to Quebec fell through in 1930, so did the spirit of migration. A new settlement was started in Vassar in 1937 but was soon aborted. It was not until World War II that talk of moving away was revived. The war which forced local boys to serve in C. O. camps convinced many that a major move was necessary to preserve the faith. In 1948 about 40 families began their move to Mexico.

There were several reasons for the move to Kansas. Ever since 1881 when Elder Abram Friesen from Nebraska came to help reorganize the church in Manitoba, close church ties had existed between the American and Canadian Kleine Gemeinde. For instance, in 1912, Rev. C. L. Plett travelled to Nebraska to help mend a church split. On one of these trips widower Plett met the widow Katherina Heidebrecht and they decided to get married and live in the United States. Rev. Plett's children the Gerhard and Bernard Doerksens, were to follow their father to the United States.[1] Similarly the Reimers, mentioned above, moved to Meade after their widowed father, Abram P. Reimer, found a bride there in 1912. His children joined him four years later. The next year the three Reimer families moved west to homestead at the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren settlement at Garden City.[2]

The other reasons for moving were economic and climatic. The prosperous times of World War I gave these people the opportunity to look for new places of settlement which had pleasant climates. Satanta and Garden City also offered the people the opportunity to purchase huge tracts of previously homesteaded land at reasonable prices.

The first years in Kansas were rough. A new settlement had to be started. In 1918 many of the young Mennonite men in Kansas were drafted into the American Army, forcing them to flee to Canada. In time, however, Rev. C. L. Plett's spiritual leadership and the fertile land and moderate climate made for a healthy and happy community.

The good times came to an end with the coming of the "Dirty 30s". The drought in Kansas was so severe that much of the land was turned into a dust bowl. For seven straight years the wheat crops, which had been the settlement's staple, were total failures and for two years there was a severe feed shortage. Families began packing up and drifting back to Manitoba where, despite the depression, times were better.

Ben P. Doerksen remembers how they finally left Satanta in December, 1939. They packed seven people into their 1929 Plymouth, hitched to it a loaded four-wheeled trailer weighing 5,000 pounds and headed back to Manitoba. Although the trip was long and the Plymouth's rear axle broke enroute, the Doerksens finally made it back. In Blumenort they purchased 126 acres of stony land from Klaas P. Reimer for $17 an acre and prepared to make a living here. Several of the boys, including Ben and Jacob, found employment at the local cheese factory. Klaas P. L. Reimers, another family which returned, purchased 80 acres on S.W. 2-6-8E in Blumenhof. Some of the families, however, fared better in Kansas. The Bernard D. Doerksen family, for instance, managed to make it through the depression. In later years, with the discovery of natural gas on their land, it is said that they even became quite wealthy. Most of the families who stayed in Kansas later joined the KMB and MB churches.

Prairie Rose was another settlement begun by Blumenort people during the prosperous years of World War I. Although Rev. Martin Penner, Sr. had already established four of his sons in this area in 1907, much of the land in township 8-5E

was barren until 1920. The prosperous years after World War I brought new settlers, optimistic that there was a bright future in grain farming and determined to bring more land under cultivation.

The Prairie Rose settlement began after the Kleine Gemeinde leaders are said to have become aware of the need for more farmland for their young people and after becoming interested in developing the vast plain in township 8-5, known as the Eakbusch Heistap. Apparently, in 1917, Elder Peter Dueck asked Rev. Heinrich Reimer of Blumenort to examine the area and, if possible, organize a new settlement.[3] Abram L. Plett of Blumenhof was one of the leading men who examined this area and made a purchase in it. His son Peter A. Plett has written the following description of the land:

> At that time a huge, open prairie lay northwest of Blumenort. It was called the Brittensteppe. This plain, however, was too low-lying for grain growing and was utilized as hay land. At many places there were swamps, and often after a heavy rain or in spring this land was flooded. Huge canals were dug through the swamps and the land drained. Trees began to grow and the land began to have the appearance of farmland. Soon one piece of land after the other was purchased; people moved in, houses were built, fences erected, meadows broken.[4]

John B. Koop from Neuanlage was one of the first Blumenort-area settlers to come to Prairie Rose after he purchased section 13.[5] According to his daughter, Mrs. Abram C. Penner, Koop wanted to live in an area where his children could be his neighbors. Thus, in the fall of 1918, his son Peter Koop moved and the next spring John B. Koop moved as well. By 1920 a dozen Kleine Gemeinde families from Blumenort, Blumenhof, and Steinbach had purchased land in the area and had begun establishing their new farms.

Life was not easy for the first Prairie Rose farmers. Much of township 8-5E lay in the low-lying flood plain of the Seine River, and for the first years the local farmers were hampered again and again by floods. Peter F. Loewens had just finished moving their buildings from Blumenort to a farm site in Prairie Rose when the spring floods came and forced them to relocate. During this period, it is said that John B. Koop, Sr. carefully mapped out the low-lying areas of the township and drew plans for a drainage system. Although the government is said to have scoffed at his plans initially, they were the model used by government engineers when the government finally authorized work on a drainage system.

In May, 1919, a meeting was called for all farmers living on sections 20-29 of Township 8-5. At this meeting the name Prairie Rose, selected by Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer, was chosen. At this meeting as well, plans were made to establish a post office.[7]

Next year the old Blumenort School was purchased and moved to Prairie Rose and by 1925 a public school district had been organized. The foremost community, school and church leader during these early years was Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer. In time this community grew into a thriving farming settlement which kept its close ties to Blumenort alive.

The move of 6,000 Mennonites to Paraguay and Mexico in the years from 1921 to 1930 did not leave Blumenort unaffected. Included in the move to the south were Blumenort's Bergthaler neighbors from Hochfeld, Chortitz, and Blumenfeld. But more important for Blumenort was the fact that the government's

actions during the war, which were so threatening to the Bergthalers, were also threatening to the Kleine Gemeinders. In fact, the Kleine Gemeinde was also seriously considering leaving Manitoba.

During the 1920s, their leaders considered starting new settlements in Alaska, Colorado, Peace River, Mexico and Quebec. At each place they sought greater school freedom and suitable agricultural land. In September, 1922, Henry R. Reimer and Henry R. Dueck, joined by Kleine Gemeinde leaders from Kansas, visited Mexico but disapproved of the land they saw.[8]

The most seriously-considered place for a new settlement was Quebec. Unlike other provinces, Quebec's educational system was church-run. Moreover, the government there was opening up a large tract of inexpensive farm land near Amos in northeastern Quebec. Finally, the Kleine Gemeinde people had a growing attachment to Canada. According to Peter F. Unger: "Many did not want to leave this government which had been so good to them."

Thus, during the 1920s, four local delegations visited "La Belle Province," and each time they returned, a special brotherhood meeting was called to consider their report. On June 6, 1922, the first delegation, consisting of Henry E. Plett, C. P. Reimer and John R. Penner, left for Amos.

The next year in June another delegation consisting of Heinrich E. Plett, David P. Reimer, Heinrich R. Reimer, Isaac P. Loewen, John J. Barkman and Klaas D. Reimer, went to Quebec. Klaas D. Reimer writes of some of the difficulties

facing them there:

> At Amos we camped close to the prospective land. Next day we went to check out the land. Trees had to be cut to cross streams and hordes of mosquitoes had to be fought off. We met a Quebec farmer, but he could not tell us anything about the land because he spoke no English. The land was very wet with many swamps. It was so marshy our boots almost filled with water.[9]

In 1925 a third trip to Quebec was organized. Henry E. Plett, who had been a delegate on the former two trips was presumably the leader. This trip seems to have been the longest and most complex. According to a letter written by Plett to his parents in Kansas, the delegation travelled almost 3500 miles and spent three weeks examining land in both Ontario and Quebec.[10] The letter clearly reveals that the delegates had two primary concerns: the first was educational freedom and the second available farmland. Plett writes that the Quebec government was anxious to meet both concerns:

> In Quebec City we went to the Parliament Buildings to ask about our school freedom in Quebec, and also to see if our military exemption was as good there as in Manitoba. We found out that it was. They knew very well about the freedom we had been granted (in 1873) and they wanted very much to have us settle their land.

The available land, however, proved a disappointment to the Kleine Gemeinde farmers. Plett was clearly unimpressed with the agricultural potential of the St. Lawrence valley.

After visting Quebec the delegates went on to Toronto where they asked the Ontario government about land which they had seen in northern Ontario on their way to Quebec. More important than the question of land, writes Plett, was the question of "the school laws in Ontario. They said that we could have private schools but they required that an inspector

see that our children learn enough. Here, too, we were offered land, but I think the school freedom in Quebec is better." What convinced Plett of this latter point seems to have been their visit to a Mennonite congregation in Kitchener. After spending a night with a very hospitable Mennonite family the delegates attended their hosts' church:

> From here we went to Kitchener where the Mennonites are. We stayed there at Lanmans for night. In the morning was church. First was Sunday School which was in German. The church service was in English. The preacher mentioned that it was too bad that it was not possible to learn German in school. For closing they sang a German song for the visitors.
>
> After being hospitably treated and seeing the rich countryside we returned to Giroux.[11]

Once again it was decided not to move. The poor land in Quebec and English schools in Ontario made Manitoba seem less formidable. However, the idea of moving to Quebec did not die completely.

In April, 1928 a final delegation was sent to reexamine the land near Amos. But this delegation also returned discouraged; apparently Amos was still under a heavy blanket of snow in April. In the end no move took place. Those who sought new land found it in Prairie Rose and those who had opposed the public schools learned to live with them. Unlike the leaders of the Bergthalers, the leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde were seemingly more ready to compromise and more aware that their membership was not united in the spirit of emigration. In fact the spirit of migration declined and almost died during the 30s.

It was the second World War which revived the commitment of many Kleine Gemeinde to find a new home. Before and during

the war, the government had passed laws which many felt were similar to the laws passed by the Russian government in the 1870s. During this time, as well, Blumenorters had begun to accept a new lifestyle and a changing church. These changes seemed to speed up during World War II. A general feeling began to develop among many people that, once the war ended, a radical measure would have to be taken to preserve the true faith. The spirit of migration which had waned after 1930 now reappeared.

At the forefront of the move to Mexico were two groups of brethren; one group opposing the new ideas within the church, the other opposing the government's action against the Mennonites. The former group, led by Rev. Cornelius R. E. Reimer, had separated themselves from the other Kleine Gemeinde churches and began meeting for church in the Heuboden School near Kleefeld. The Heuboden group was concerned about the changes within the church which included the acceptance of Sunday School, Jugendverein, harmony singing, non-Kleine Gemeinde visiting ministers, the Steinbach Bible Academy and high-school-educated church leaders. It was believed that these aspects of church life were undermining the Kleine Gemeinde "ideals of humility and separation."[12]

It was the second group, however, comprised of more moderate brethren and led by Elder Peter P. Reimer, which spearheaded the move to Mexico. Many of these brethren enjoyed the prospect of moving to a new country and opening up a new settlement. Some of them had been leading businessmen and church innovators. They shared a fear of the government's policy toward education and military conscientious objection. In a

statement written by Elder Reimer on August 5, 1946, these fears were portrayed as the main reason which led to decide to seek a new land:

> Concerning the desire for a move to Mexico. The reason for this, in my opinion, is that, according to government laws, certain educational freedoms have been taken from us. We are compelled to hire only those teachers in our schools who have become legally qualified with a Normal School Certificate. The school year has been extended to 10 months, during which our beloved children, from 7 to 14 years old, are instructed according to government regulations.
>
> Instead, we want our previously allowed Privilegiums under which we had full control of our education. Also we feel that school should be held for only five months a year with students 7-12 years old. This gives us enough time to teach them to write, read, and do arithmetic and to instill the teachings of the gospel into our beloved children in order to establish them in the old ways.[13]

According to the former Blumenort deacon, Jacob U. Kornelsen, there was a fear that the government was slowly trying to undermine the Mennonite faith:

> When World War II was declared, our young men were not forcefully conscripted to the armed services but to civilian service at bush camps and on farms in order to spend the whole time of the war in such service. Here there was a great opportunity for our youth to fall into worldly ways. This was something very strange for our fathers and mothers and no less strange for our young men. . .While in World War I it was reported that only a very few Mennonites joined the war, in World War II the number apparently was over a thousand. This was attributed in great part to our schools and our small faith. Thus, during the war our parents began planning that once the war was over a new parcel of land in Canada would earnestly be sought where we could operate our schools according to our perspective. . .[14]

By the end of the war the spirit for moving away had grown so strong that an inter-church Auswanderungs committee was elected to look for a country with an agricultural frontier and a country which would grant them a Privilegium (privileges of education, complete military exemption and cultural

autonomy). The seven-man committee included: Ben L. Reimer, Isaac C. Penner, Isaac P. Loewen and David P. Reimer from Blumenort, and Ben B. Dueck, H. C. Penner and Peter U. Brandt from Morris. The committee at once contacted the Mennonite Central Committee for help in seeking a new place. MCC wrote letters to each Latin American country inquiring about settlement possibilities and religious freedoms. At first MCC suggested Alaska, but when it was realized that the United States would grant even less freedom than Canada had, the plan fell through.[15]

Then the committee turned southward and made contacts with the Mennonites who had moved to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s. Hearing good reports about settlement opportunities in East Paraguay, the Kleine Gemeinde became very interested and voted to send a delegation to that country. In 1946, however, Paraguay was at war and the Kleine Gemeinde was forced to abandon this plan as well. Attention now turned to Mexico. In June, 1946, a delegation, which included Rev. David P. Reimer and Deacon Cornelius R. Plett of Blumenort and P. J. Dueck and Jacob D. Friesen of Morris, left for Mexico. For 16 days they travelled through the Mennonite settlements in the northern part of that country, looking at the region and making inquiries about living in a Spanish-speaking land.

After the delegation returned to Manitoba at the end of June, they were approached by a group of Saskatchewan Old Colonists who had been offered the sale of a 52,000-acre ranch northwest of Chihuahua City in northern Mexico. The Old Colonists, however, wanted only one third of the land, and

thus they invited the Kleine Gemeinde to consider purchasing the remainder of this ranch, known as Hacienda Los Jagueyes. After many meetings a general feeling arose that another delegation should be sent to Mexico to see the land and meet with government officials in Mexico City to obtain the same religious privileges that the Sommerfelder Mennonites had received in 1922. At an inter-church meeting on August 12, 1947, C. R. Plett, the chairman from Blumenort, posed the all-important question, "Brethren, are we in agreement to send a delegation to Mexico?"[16] The answer, apparently, was overwhelmingly affirmative.

In September 1947, then, a second delegation, including David P. Reimer and Rev. C. R. Reimer, left for Mexico to look at the ranch and to seek a Privilegium. By mid-November the government of President Aleman extended the 1922 Privilegium to the Kleine Gemeinde, promised them duty-free entry of machinery and household goods and granted them immigration visas.

In January, 1948, a third delegation was sent to finalize the purchase of the Los Jagueyes ranch from two owners, Mssrs. Estrada and Luna of Spain. This delegation included Rev. D. P. Reimer and Isaac P. Loewen of Blumenort, Ben B. Dueck of Morris and two members of the Old Colonists' church. They spent some time closely examining the ranch and meeting with their lawyer in Chihuahua to make sure there were no liens against the land. On February the fourth the deal was closed. The final price was seven dollars an acre with an immediate down payment of $70,000 in Canadian funds. This money was

paid for with a cheque by Isaac P. Loewen, the treasurer of the settlement venture.

After the deal, Ben B. Dueck and Isaac P. Loewen stayed in Mexico to await the arrival of a carful of enthusiastic men from Manitoba who would assist them in mapping out the new settlement. With the help of a local surveyor and the Vorsteher of a neighboring Mennonite colony, the work of dividing the 40,000 acres into sections and planning the sites for the six farm villages was completed by the end of February. The colony was named Quellen Kolonie, the German translation of Los Jagueyes, which refers to water springs.

By springtime the work of making passports, selling land and calling auction sales had begun in Blumenort. Most of the land sold was absorbed by the young farmers who stayed in Manitoba. In July an advance corps of five families left to break the first 1,000 acres and plant it with oats.[17] By August, the first large group of emigrants left Blumenort and were followed by a second group in October. The settlers travelled by train, chartered buses and trucks. As they left, their neighbors and relatives who had elected to stay in Manitoba, gathered to see them off, giving them an emotional farewell. By the end of 1948, 48 families had applied for emigration visas. In total, 85 Kleine Gemeinde families settled at Quellen Kolonie. A third of these families, or about 10 men, women and children, hailed from the Blumenort area.

Settlement in Mexico was difficult. Border crossing at El Paso was a strange and tedious experience. Officials were corrupt and demanded bribes, the Mexican government reneged on

the promise to allow goods to enter duty-free and, of course, everything was Spanish. Once in Mexico, a rocky mountain range had to be crossed to get to the high-altitude valley which awaited them.[18]

At Quellen Kolonie primitive cattle sheds were the only existing shelters. Brick houses, made from red clay earth of the region, were hurriedly put up. At first water had to be hauled six miles. While the first two oat crops were good, they were followed by several successive crop failures, and many families had to turn to their money reserves in Canada for help. Using some of the economic ideas they had developed in Manitoba, the Kleine Gemeinde settlement, however, soon became economically sound. A community pasture, a Hilfsverein and a co-operative cheese factory were started. The first Vorsteher was the former Blumenort businessman, Henry R. Plett, who was succeeded by the former Blumenort cheesemaker Cornelius U. Kornelsen. The first church leader was naturally the elderly Peter P. Reimer. When he died in 1949, Rev. Cornelius R. E. Reimer was chosen as Elder of the Mexico Kleine Gemeinde church.

For the first years relations between Quellen Kolonie and Blumenort were good. Many of those who had supported the move viewed it as a form of colonization which would provide Blumenorters with an alternative place to live. School trustee Isaac P. Loewen kept in contact with the Blumenort school to take ideas of education to Mexico.[19] Even the church leaders kept in close contact and hoped to do mission work together among the native inhabitants of Mexico.[20]

In the early 1950s, however, the Quellen Kolonie church and its counterpart in Manitoba began moving apart. In July, 1955, the Quellen Kolonie church sent a letter to Elder David P. Reimer officially severing its ties with the Manitoba church. According to the letter, the Quellen Kolonie ministerial felt that the differences between it and the Manitoba church were just too great to continue under one organization. Despite this split, close family ties have continued to this day.

In 1957 a faction of Quellen Kolonie moved to British Honduras, where land was readily available. This tropical country, covered with swamps and jungle, appealed to the Kleine Gemeinde because it was under British rule and offered them an even better Privilegium than they had received in Mexico. Although the first years here were very difficult, a prosperous settlement of 975 people had been established at Spanish Lookout by 1974.[21]

Footnotes

1 Ben P. Doerksen, "A Brief History of Harkill County, Satanta, Kansas, Mennonite Settlement," (unpublished writing, 1982), pp.2-4.
2 Interview with Ben P. Doerksen, Blumenort, November, 1981.
3 Interview with Peter K. Reimer, Steinbach, March, 1982.
4 Abe Warkentin, op. cit., p. 344.
5 Peter A. Plett, "Kurze Geschichte von Prairie Rose," Sesquicentennial Jubilee, p. 106.
6 Interview with Peter A. Plett, Landmark, March, 1982.
7 Hundred Years in Our Community, the Landmark 4-H Home Ec. Club, 1970.
8 Steinbach Post, June 4, 1919.
9 Peter F. Unger, op. cit.
10 Klaas D. Reimer, "Tagebuch, 1923", Belize, C.A.
11 Henry E. Plett, letter to Cornelius L. Plett, Satanta, Kansas, 1925, Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.
12 Klaas C. Penner, op. cit., pp. 26-30.
13 Jacob U. Kornelsen, Funfundzwanzig Jahre in Mexico: Beschreibung Von der Quellenkolonie; 1948-1973, (An unpublished history) p. 8.

14 Ibid., pp. 9-12.
15 Harry Leonard Sawatsky, They Sought A Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1971, p. 87.
16 Kornelsen, op. cit., p. 6.
17 Carillon News, August 27, 1948, p. 1.
18 Kornelsen, op. cit., pp. 17-20.
19 George K. Reimer, op. cit.
20 John P. Loewen, interview, December, 1981.
21 George S. Koop, Pioneer Jahre in British Honduras (Belize), (National Printers Ltd., Belize City, 1974), p. 177.

INTRODUCTION TO PART IV: THE ERA OF NEW BLUMENORT

The period from 1948-1982 has been dubbed "The Era of New Blumenort." The idea for this name came from E. K. Francis' analysis of Blumenort in 1950. Francis, an American sociologist, undertook a study of Manitoba Mennonites after World War II. Learning that the business centre he saw in 1950 was the re-birth of a pioneer farm village called Blumenort, he appropriately called the new village Neublumenort. Although local people have never called their community by that name the optimistic spirit of the name cannot be disputed.

In comparison to the Blumenort of the first era (1874-1910), the Blumenort of the most recent era (1948-1982) was new indeed. The countryside with its growing village and paved highways was new. So were the specialized and mechanized farms. The growth of a strong regional business sector in Blumenort was unprecedented. The consolidated school and the openness to universities and colleges constituted a new approach to education. The name change of the church from Kleine Gemeinde to Evangelical Mennonite indicates that a new language and a new theological emphasis dominated the church. Finally, this was an era which saw Blumenort people become more open and similar to Manitobans in Winnipeg and elsewhere.

Part IV, Chapter 1: A New Landscape

The countryside around Blumenort began to take on a new look after 1948. The tiny hamlet of Blumenort, begun in 1940, grew into a business and residential centre. The earthen section roads gave way to a four-lane paved highway and a system of all-weather gravel roads. Finally, the individual farmyards received new appearances as farming became specialized and, for some, even prosperous.

The most notable landscape feature of the area between 1948 and 1982 was the new Blumenort village which rose 1½ miles north of the old farm village site. While other towns in Manitoba steadily declined, Blumenort, surprisingly, grew. Begun after the depression, the Blumenort village had five business firms and 30 households by 1948. From that point, the village slowly grew and gained the attention of outsiders. At least two scholars have given special note to the strange occurrence of the new village.

In 1950 Dr. E. K. Francis, an American sociologist, undertook a study of the Mennonite community in Manitoba. The following is his description of the Blumenort village as he saw it in the latter 40s and which he dubbed Neublumenort:

> Neublumenort, unique in Manitoba and probably in all of Western Canada, deserves a few additional remarks. Here we have a genuine farm village which has been formed in recent years; it resembles one of the old peasant villages although there is no direct connection. While lying within the area of the former village of Blumenort, it is

> actually located some seven (sic) miles north of the old site which is almost completely deserted. The settlement has grown, without any deliberate design, around a cheese factory and store erected in the open country near a few odd farmsteads. . .
>
> By 1946 the community had grown to 26 households. Part of the buildings were arranged, though somewhat irregularly, along the east-west section line, while the others, including the school, formed a row along the north-south section line. The business units included a cheese factory, a store, a garage, a shoe-maker shop, and two gas filling stations. The people had managed to make a living with very little capital by concentrating on poultry and garden crops. . .Community life was focused on the Kleine Gemeinde church, whose building stood south of the settlement along the highway.[1]

Ten years later Blumenort was again described and analyzed by a scholar. John Warkentin, who was studying the Manitoba Mennonite settlements for his Ph.D., visited the East Reserve around 1959 and also made note of the uniquely-growing village.

> New centres have developed to take care of requirements, but one old one, Giroux, has declined, along with the decline in commercial grain growing. Giroux's one remaining elevator burned in 1944, and was not replaced because its hinterland was not producing grain any longer. Giroux's place as the trading centre of the northeastern part of the Reserve was taken by Blumenort, and today Giroux has only a shop and a gasoline pump.
>
> Blumenort is the new trading centre par excellence, and well it should be, because it serves the area that has always been the best farming district in the East Reserve. The original village of Blumenort was located about half a mile south (sic) of the present Blumenort. The new development was started in 1940 when a store was built where a high ridge crosses a road allowance. Soon a garage and machine shop were added, but not until 1953 was the Blumenort Co-op Poultry Killing Plant, together with an egg-grading station and poultry supply store, set up. That same year the proprietor of the first store built a large feed mill. Now the farmers have a local centre where they can secure quick repairs for their machinery, obtain properly mixed feeds, and also market their produce. Blumenort was firmly established when a large Mennonite church was built there in 1952.
>
> Blumenort grew out of the needs of the farmers and exists strictly to serve the farmer. At present it is only a trading centre, but it may become a village in time if

> the growth and prosperity continue. . .It is very difficult to found a new village once the initial settlement of an agricultural area is completed, especially in the present era of better roads and many cars, when the trend is for villages to decline. Consequently it will be interesting to observe the development at this centre. Blumenort might actually be considered a village, if one demands only that a village be a trading centre, but I believe that the mental attitude of the inhabitants should also be considered. In their minds it must be more than a supply and processing centre. It must be a place where the women will willingly accompany their husbands to do their own shopping; and it should have sidewalks on which knots of farmers can move along, where they can collect to discuss the day-to-day events of farming. That is to say, it must have a reason for pedestrian traffic--a street that is more than just part of a through road. Blumenort has not yet reached this stage. Three settlements, Greenland, Landmark, and Linden, north and northwest of Blumenort, serve similar progressive farm areas, but none of them is as well developed as Blumenort.[2]

The size and status of the Blumenort village continued to increase during the 60s and 70s as the local farm economy strengthened. In 1962 Blumenort received official status when it was awarded a post office and subsequently became a name-place on the map. That same year it became an unincorporated village district (UVD). This meant that, although the village remained under the jurisdiction of the R.M. of Hanover, much of its upkeep was left to the locally-elected council. The council oversaw the maintenance of streets, lighting and park grounds. It also made recommendations to the municipality on ways to improve village life. By 1962 the council had pressed for, and obtained a village sewage system, improved recreational facilities and some street paving and curbing. Over the years between 1962 and 1982 the three-man council included Abe G. Penner, Henry L. Bergman, Cornie Janzen, Elden Penner, Abe L. Bergmann and William R. Giesbrecht.[3]

The growth of a strong business community was a second aspect in the development of the village. This growth was directly tied to the advancement of specialty farming in the area which gave support to the supply and processing businesses in Blumenort. By 1960 the district's two largest enterprises, Blumenort Co-op Produce and A.K. Penner and Sons Ltd., had located on the #12 highway. They in turn attracted other businesses to locate nearby. As this occurred, the village centre began shifting half a mile to the east. By 1975 only one company was operating on the site described by Francis and Warkentin above.

The third feature of the village after 1960 was the growth of its residential section. Before 1960 most of the residences lined the east-west mile road. In 1957 John U. Brandt sold a lot for $200 to Johnny K. Reimer from what once was his cow pasture.[4] Around 1960 the pasture was surveyed and Brandt was selling lots along what was to become Oakdale Drive. By 1980, 50 lots had been opened up in this oak-covered ridge lying just north of the church. Some of the purchasers were men who had left farming to be employed by local businesses. Others were outsiders who had observed that Blumenort had the lowest taxes of any village or town in the region. The third group was comprised of retired farmers who had left their farm homes to make room for their sons. Much of the residential district was developed after 1970 by Mr. Abram K. Penner, who fitted the lots with houses built by his company. Spurring on this development was the relocation in 1968 of the new school. It was built in the village, and a community skating rink was

constructed in 1966. In 1981 the Blumenort senior citizen apartments, Oakwood Place, became an important feature in the residential area. By 1982 another 50-lot development had been planned for the area just to the north of the existing residential area.

On December 19,1948, The Carillon News ran a story under the flashy title: "Ste. Anne-Steinbach Super Highway Completed." Although the "superhighway" was no more than an upgraded all-weather gravel road, it was the first real connection between the two towns. For Blumenort the road was "super" because it ran right through its region, providing its first all-weather link to Winnipeg. As well, trade-bearing traffic now came through Blumenort in an unprecedented volume. Because the #12 effectively connected Blumenort to the outside, it must be seen as a central symbol of a new era.

As early as 1928, Steinbach businessmen had agitated for a good road connecting the town to the courthouse, railroad and health unit in Ste. Anne.[5] The government, however, was able to placate the businessmen by building the #52, linking Steinbach to Winnipeg with a gravel road. However, in 1946 there was a renewed demand for a link between Steinbach and Ste. Anne.

That very summer, with a substantial government grant, construction of the new road was begun. By August 8, the R. M. of Hanover portion of the road was completed except for gravelling. Two weeks later The Carillon News reported that Councillor H.W. Schellenberg "will make rounds to collect donations from farmers along the road to help gravel it."

In 1948 the Manitoba government announced that it was spending $140,000 to upgrade further the Steinbach-Ste. Anne road. The program included grading, gravelling and new bridges. Most of the gravel for this project was hauled from Isaac P. Loewen's farm. The real drive to build an all-weather road had now begun. According to The Carillon News, "farmers living between the two areas seemed particularly pleased with the (government's) announcement."[6]

In the years since 1948 the #12 was slowly improved. Until 1953 the highway had ended in Ste. Anne, from where the route to Winnipeg followed the gravel Dawson Road. In that year, however, the #12 was extended northward to connect with the Trans-Canada Highway which had been built through eastern Manitoba only two years before. The first pavement was not put on the #12 until 1955, a year after the Trans Canada was paved. This pavement, however, was merely a "road mix" and had to be redone the next year. Even that job did not stand up and in 1960 the #12 received its third and final layer of asphalt.[7] Pavement had a profound influence on the Bluemenort community as it dramatically cut the distances to Steinbach and Winnipeg.

By 1970 there was talk of rebuilding the #12 to make it a safe four-lane route. Highway traffic counts, RCMP fatality records and strong demands from the Steinbach business community worked together to launch the new project in 1977. In order to keep Blumenort together and its intersection safe, plans were made to bypass the village to the east. In 1980 the first $7.5 million section of the rebuilt road was finished.

The last section, completing the link to the Trans-Canada at a cost of $15 million, was scheduled to be opened in the spring of 1984.[8]

In 1965 the provincial government took over complete reponsibility for the road from Niverville through Blumenort to Giroux, and designated it PR-311. As a result, the heavily-used washboard road was steadily improved. In 1968 the 311 through Blumenort was rebuilt and given an asphalt surface treatment. Another real improvement came in 1975, when the resurfacing project was extended five miles west to connect with the PR-206 leading to Landmark. The result was that the people of Blumenort and Landmark, who had been separated by 10 miles of rough country roads since 1920, had been brought to within 15 minutes of each other. In 1979 the 311 was rebuilt and surfaced through the Ridgewood area, and the Blumenort main street was repaved. Two years later the final project to connect Blumenort to Niverville by asphalt was begun.[9]

The late 1940s also marked the time that a program to upgrade and gravel section roads began. In 1947 The Carillon News complained that there had been "no constructive program in road building during the past 30 years." While country road building increased substantially after 1950, at least some heavily-used roads in the Blumenort area remained impassable during wet times. Evidence of this is found in the following petition presented to the R.M. of Hanover Council. The petition, which bore no less than 84 signatures, was drawn up around 1958.

To Council, R.M. of Hanover:

> We, the undersigned, apply to have the road rebuilt North of 19, 20, 21, 22-7-6E. This road is densely settled by mixed farmers, producing approximately 9,000 turkeys, and about 2,500 breeders are kept for egg production; 6,000 chickens are raised; this means about 75 cases of eggs per week; 600 hogs per year, 24,000 pounds of milk per month, two transfers haul out produce daily, also daily mail route.
>
> This road was partly built and gravelled by local farmers and has been ruined by gravel trucks for gravelling the No. 12 and other roads. We, therefore, request for the Grant fiven by the Government or done by municipality. Local farmers are again ready to assist in gravelling if this project is done properly. We understand there is a plan granting a road by the Government 1 mile South of this road. We feel that road would not replace the purpose of the road that we are looking for.[10]

By 1980 most section roads in the area had become dependable all-weather roads.

One aspect of the Blumenort area which had not changed by 1948 was its high population density. Even for a Mennonite settlement its many farmyards in one section remained high. Already in 1960 John Warkentin could write the following about this area: "Nowhere in either Reserve (East or West) does an observer receive such an intense impression of being in the midst of a dense rural population."[11] After 1960 the number of farms decreased as farm size increased and farms amalgamated. In 1982 there were an average of just over three farms per section in the area within two miles of Blumenort. The number of residences, however, was double that.

With the decrease in the number of operating farmsteads came also a change in their appearance. The great pitched-roof red barns or the white hip-roofed barns gave way to the long, low-lying plywood or metal covered specialized barns. Metal granaries and machine sheds could be seen glimmering

nearby. On dairy farms the dark blue prestigious Harvestor silos spiraled high into the air and could be seen for miles around. The 1½-storey frame houses built before 1948 were replaced in many instances with suburban-type bungalows or split levels. In a growing number of instances the houses and barns were no longer on the same yard.

Footnotes

1 Francis, op. cit., pp. 252 and 256.
2 John Warkentin, op. cit., pp. 395, 396.
3 Interview with Abe G. Penner, Blumenort, February, 1982.
4 Interview with John K. Reimer, Blumenort, April, 1982.
5 Carillon News, April 9, 1948, p. 1.
6 Ibid.
7 Interview with Doug Struthers and Peter Dyck, Department of Highways, Steinbach Branch, April 1982.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Petition to R.M. of Hanover, 1958, Dave P. Loewen, R.R.1, Steinbach.
11 Warkentin, op. cit., p. 441.

Part IV, Chapter 2: Farm Specialization

In the years after World War II local farm incomes rose slowly and steadily. Crops were good, market prices rose and farm management improved. Unlike the good times after World War I, the period of prosperity which began after the depression and gained momentum after 1948 was not based on wheat. In fact, wheat accounted for only one percent of farming incomes during the 40s.[1] It was the products of mixed farming which were in demand and ushered Blumenort farmers into a new era.

Mixed farming had become the way of life for local families during the hard times of the 20s and 30s. A small dairy herd, 80 acres of grain and a few hogs and chickens were all that anyone really needed to make a living. After World War II the very products that local farmers had turned to for protection from falling farm prices began to be profitable. The money came from a growing Winnipeg market for meat and dairy products. According to John Warkentin, it was this demand which turned the "East Reserve into a dairy and poultry producing area for the urban market."[2] Even before the end of the war, farmers in Hanover were earning 40% of their profits from livestock, 17% from poultry and eggs and 32% from dairy products.[3] Hogs, chickens, turkeys, eggs and milk no longer were kept primarily to feed the family but to generate income.

It took Blumenort farmers some time to shed the caution toward expansion and reliance on the outside market. However, with a changing philosophy of farming, local farmers began to invest money to update their operations. New farm equipment, electrical gadgets, bigger barns, pure-bred livestock and the use of scientifically-derived feeding formulas became the characteristics of the new era.

As farmers made investments, farm overhead costs rose sharply. Farms began to specialize. Farms were converted to produce one or two products in order to maximize financial returns. Special poultry farms rose, and were followed by specialized dairy and hog farms.

Tabe 6 indicates the growing importance of livestock and poultry in Hanover over the years.

TABLE 6

Livestock and Poultry in Hanover[4]

	1916	1946	1976
Hogs	2,605	6,610	32,202
Dairy cows	5,000	8,760	6,523
Poultry	3,341*	266,638	1,734,021
Sheep	1,270	2,639	459

*figure for Provencher

Greater government involvement and more farm organization were two other characteristics of local agriculture after 1948. During the war Blumenort farmers readily accepted government bonus payments for cheese and milk production and voluntarily raised meat production in order to win farm leave for their conscription-aged sons. In the years following the war, farmers increasingly relied upon government agricultural representatives

such as Dick Filteau. Even popular self-trained veterinarians such as John Kehler from west of Steinbach were replaced by university-educated veterinarians. During this time, as well, farmers organized into clubs, associations and cooperatives to improve agricultural output. By 1970 Blumenort farmers gave their support and even leadership to provincial boards.

A final characteristic of the farms after 1948 was their increase in size. As farmers moved to tap the Winnipeg market with their new technology and methods, farm output mushroomed. As those farmers who were not interested or financially able to specialize put their farms up for sale, they were purchased by the neighbours who were seeking expansion opportunities. The result was that local farms, which had slowly decreased in size during the depression, began to increase in size after 1948.

The following pages explore in more detail how farming became specialized, mechanized and capitalized after 1948.

By 1950 turkey farming was proving to be such a success that some local farmers were rapidly increasing their flocks. A local Turkey Club was organized to assure a reliable supply of turkeys to its members. A New York dressed (defeathered only) turkey could fetch up to 60 cents a pound in Winnipeg. Both Steinbach and Brookside hatcheries, which produced the popular Broad Bronze Turkey, offered farmers 60 cents for each turkey breeder egg they produced. Throughout the Blumenort area, farmers were putting up small 14 x 14-foot brooder barns and were fencing for the growing flocks.

In 1950 the Carillon News reported that Jacob F. Loewen of Twin Creek was "raising turkeys on a big scale," keeping

100 breeders. Another local turkey farmer at the time was Dave P. Loewen, who kept a flock of 150 breeders. He had purchased his first flock of 15 turkeys from Ben L. Reimer in 1946. The next year he increased this number to 29, but later sold six because the flock seemed too large to handle. By 1950 he realized that he could make as much money with 150 breeders as with his four cows, so he sold the cows and renovated the dairy barn for turkeys.[5] A few years later the Carillon News told the success story of how Jac S. Koop, who had been blind from age three, was making $1,500 a year by producing turkey eggs.

Electricity made turkey raising on a larger scale possible. With controlled lighting, cannibalism was contained and egg production increased. With electricity also came pressure systems. The tedious daily work of pulling a ski-mounted water tank to the range was over. When electricity was first introduced in 1947, there was even some talk of electrifying fences to keep the ever-preying red fox out of the pens.

By the mid 50s the turkey pen became characteristic of the Blumenort area. Around this, Geographer John Warkentin wrote the following description of the Blumenort district: "In driving through this area one still sees grain fields and livestock, but much more striking are the penned-in turkeys on the farmyards and the poultry shelters which dot the fields."

The construction of the federally-inspected Blumenort Co-op eviscerating plant in 1957 boosted local turkey production. Farmers began raising several thousand birds a year. In 1957 Ben L. Reimer, in partnership with Willy Wiebe, built

the first long brooder barn in the area at Reimer's farm in Blumenhof. The barn measuring 32 x 68 feet housed over 2,000 young birds. Similar barns were built by Dave P. Loewen, Benny Plett, Ben P. D. Reimer, John L. Plett, Henry J. Reimer and Ben P. Friesen. These barns were fully equipped with electric fans and pressure systems.

During the 60s turkey production slowly increased. A seemingly unlimited demand for poultry meat, and two local eviscerating plants helped the turkey industry. New hybrid breeds and high protein and medicated feed made production more efficient. Whereas it had required 28 weeks of feeding to produce a 24-pound turkey in 1950, it now required only 18 weeks.

Along with the increased production came bigger barns. By 1970 it was not uncommon to see 200 to 300-foot-long turkey barns. Despite the fact that the Manitoba turkey market had become saturated by the late 70s, several farmers began to erect large vinyl-curtained pole barns. This new style of turkey barn, measuring up to 70 x 400 feet, eliminated the need to keep turkeys on range where they were very susceptible to adverse weather, stray dogs and disease.

Turkey producers were one of the first groups in the province to organize. By 1950 Dave P. Loewen represented the Blumenort area on the Manitoba Turkey Producers Association. The association served to exchange production ideas between producers and to lobby the government. In 1969 a provincial turkey marketing board was introduced. It set up a quota system and stabilized prices. Ben L. Reimer became the first local representative on the board in 1970 and served until 1974.

A year later Henry J. Reimer was elected to the board and in 1978 became its chairman. He held this position until his death in 1979. Ellis Penner became a member of the board in 1982.

Local turkey production in 1981 stood at almost two million pounds or approximately 133,000 birds.

From the earliest years Blumenort farmers had kept a couple of hens on the farmyard. These hens laid eggs in summer and provided meat for the winter larder. During World War II this practice began changing. In the ten years from 1936 to 1946 the number of hens and chickens in Hanover tripled.[7] Encouraged by a growing Winnipeg demand, the availability of electricity and government incentives, local farmers began building special two-storey chicken barns and increasing production.

By 1950 a dozen local farmers were turning to meet this demand in three ways. The most common way was to produce Barred-Rock breeding eggs. The striped grey-and-white Barred Rocks were popular dual-purpose birds; they could be relied upon to produce both a good quantity of brown-colored eggs and a good quality of meat. The leading Barred-Rock producer in the area was Frank K. Wiebe who kept a ROP (Record of Performance) flock and provided pure-bred stock to improve breeder flocks. Local farmers who kept such breeder flocks included: C. R. Penner, Ben P. Doerksen, Peter P. Doerksen and David P. Reimer.[8]

A second group of farmers began keeping light-weight Leghorn chickens solely for consumer egg production. These chickens were kept on barn floors in community cages which housed up to

40 hens. These white-colored eggs were sold to the Blumenort Co-op Egg-Grading Station after 1948, or peddled in Winnipeg. Although this type of production was concentrated in the Greenland area, farmers around Blumenort, such as Isaac F. Loewen, C. P. Unger, Abram P. Friesen and Henry Toews had flocks of several hundred by 1952.

The third type of chicken farming was raising caponized roosters for meat. By 1950 Ed A. Toews, who lived in Blumenort at the time, was caponizing 50,000 birds a year throughout the province. Some of the local farmers who kept small flocks of capons included John L. Plett, Isaac P. Brandt, Jacob Doerksen, Abram J. R. Barkman and Dave J. Reimer. Cornelius A. Reimer had a flock of 2,000 capons in 1950. Although there was a strong consumer demand for these heavy birds, capons had a high mortality rate and proved to be an inefficient meat producer.[9]

Major changes to the local chicken and egg industry came around 1960. At that time local farmers began specializing in keeping either the improved Leghorn layer or the new fast-growing chicken broiler. The day of the dual-purpose chicken, the capon, the first feeble Leghorns was over. New breeds, technology and management devices assured a profit for farmers who began specializing.

One of the first local farmers to go into consumer egg production in a big way was Peter P. Doerksen. In 1958 Doerksen built a large two-storey flat-roofed barn, and five years later installed the more efficient elevated metal cages. The 60s were not easy years for the egg producers who had invested

heavily. The price of eggs was unstable, sometimes falling to the post-war price of 28¢ a dozen. With the introduction of the Manitoba Egg Producers Marketing Board in 1971, prices rose to as high as 90¢ a dozen. With larger barns, better breeds and feed, efficiency also increased. Whereas in 1950 an average Leghorn could lay 16 dozen eggs a year, by 1980 this figure stood at 22 dozen eggs. Total egg output in the Blumenort area in 1981 was more than a million eggs produced from approximately 53,000 chickens on six farms.[10] In 1976 Orville Doerksen was elected to represent Southeastern Manitoba on the Manitoba Egg Marketing Board.

One of the first local chicken broiler producers was Ben L. Reimer. In 1960, after watching several broiler farms rise south of Steinbach, Reimer built a large 42 x 250-foot two-storey broiler barn in Blumenhof. The fast-growing broiler could be raised in only seven weeks, enabling one farmer to produce four batches of several thousand broilers per year. During the mid-60s, other local farmers like Aaron D. Reimer, P. J. Loewen and Bill Giesbrecht began raising broilers. In 1968 the broiler producers organized a marketing board. Local producers who supported the board did so as a way of protecting family farms from large companies who seemed to be attempting to take over all aspects of chicken production. After the introduction of the board, prices rose from 18¢ a pound in 1967 to 50¢ a pound in 1981. In 1979 Stan Antonissen became the local representative on the board.[11]

Local broiler production reached approximately 800,000 birds a year or four million pounds in 1981.

By 1948 several local farmers were shipping their milk to Winnipeg to meet a strong demand for fluid milk. These farmers, including C. P. Reimer, A. P. Reimer, A. K. Penner and Jacob D. K. Plett, were the ones with big dairy herds. The city creameries were forced to compete for this milk with the country cheese factories and thus had offered local farmers higher prices for milk as early as 1932, just as the cheese factory was being built. By 1953 the city creameries were offering substantially more than the $2.00 a hundred-weight paid by the Blumenort cheese factory.

When the cheese factory was forced to close in that year, an era came to an end. Farmers now had to decide whether to sell their herds or obtain milk quota licences from the Milk Control Board in Winnipeg. This government board had been established during the 30s to control the bottle milk market. Two of the local farmers who obtained these quotas at a time when they were freely available were Ben C. L. Penner and Peter K. Plett.

There were several changes which came to dairying in the 50s. One of these changes was the amazing, labor-saving, electric milking machine. Perhaps a more important change was an attempt by local farmers to improve their herds and increase milk production. In 1955 several Blumenort and Ridgewood farmers helped form the Steinbach Dairy Herd Improvement Association.[12] The first directors of the DHIA included C.J. Loewen, Ed Wiebe and Ed Laing. The association scientifically attempted to measure the individual cow's performance and milk quality in an attempt to establish better herds. For 24 years Ed A. Toews of

Ridgewood served as the local DHIA technician, gathering milk samples from farmers and mailing in reports to the Department of Agriculture laboratory in Winnipeg. In time most of the Blumenort farmers joined either the Steinbach or the Ste. Anne DHIA.

The real turning point in local dairy production, however, did not come until 1960. Around this time the refrigerated bulk tank and the mechanical barn cleaner began to be introduced. Farmers were called on to decide whether to invest money and go big or to continue in the old small back-breaking way. Henry T. Braun called his boys together and it was decided to discontinue raising hogs and turkeys, build a new dairy barn, buy a milk quota and concentrate on milk production.[13] Ben R. Plett, another farmer to begin specializing in dairy, increased his DHIA herd from four in 1960 to 31 two years later.[14] Other farmers to specialize in dairy included Erwin P. Reimer, Alvin Brandt, Leonard Brandt, P. J. Penner, Peter B. Reimer, Ben P. Friesen, Ben P. Penner and Martin P. Reimer. Several of these farmers built new hip-roof barns around 1960.

Perhaps the greatest changes in dairy farming during this era came in the area of feed-making. Bob Brandt has given the following description of the change:

> Twenty-five years ago some farmers in our area were raking hay with horses and dump rakes. The hay would be raked into windrows, where it would be picked up by a haysweep mounted on a front-end loader, or it would be pitched onto the hayrack with pitchforks. Then the hay would be stacked outside by hand.
>
> Balers started being accepted in the mid-fifties. After the hay was cut with mowers, it was raked into windrows with side-delivery rakes. The baler followed. . .The bales were stacked on a wooden skid, sixteen bales to a stack.

> These homemade wooden skids served for a few years. They were replaced by 15-bale triangular stooks. The stooks were picked up by tractor and front-end loader, and stacked by hand.
>
> The first steel blue Harvestor silos appeared a few years later. Farmers found that the equipment was easy to automate. . . .Another advantage was that they no longer had to worry as much about the weather, as all feed now could be harvested with a high moisture content.[15]

Another technological advance was the free-stall milk parlor which sped up milking considerably. This practice, however, was confined to very large farms, such as Braunsdale Farms, which milked 400 cows, three times a day.

During the 70s, as well, major advances were made to improve stock and make cattle reproduction profitable by developing pure-bred Holstein herds. Several farms, including those owned by Leo and Larry Penner, David L. Plett, Menno Barkman, Jim Wiebe and Ben P. Penner's sons, had registered ROP herds. Local farmers estimated that in 1982 the production of milk per cow had risen to 5,500 liters a year from less than 4,000 liters only a few years before.

In 1981 the 14 dairy farmers in the area produced over five million litres of milk from approximately 1000 cows.[16]

In 1974 the Manitoba Milk Producer Marketing Board replaced the old government Control Board. Both organizations slowly increased the price which farmers received for milk from about $3.00 a hundred-weight in 1950 to $10.00 a hundred-weight in 1982. In 1980 Leo Braun became the first local representative on the marketing board.

Hog production in the Blumenort area has been strong since the 30s when the price for pork rarely topped 8¢ a pound. It

is said that Mennonite farmers are small-animal producers and find hog farming attractive. Hogs have a high feed conversion and provide for a quick turnover.[17] During World War II, Mennonite farmers substantially increased the number of their pigs to meet government production requirements. Farmers who had not raised hogs before bought a dozen pigs and even built small hog barns. Isaac P. Loewen, for instance, kept 12 hogs which he would haul to Winnipeg on his four-wheel trailer hitched to the car. After unloading the hogs at the stockyards, the trailer was unhitched and the family headed down-town to shop at Eatons.[18]

After the end of the war, hog production throughout Hanover was cut in half from just over 10 hogs per farm in 1941 to under six hogs four years later. Since then production slowly climbed. One of the notable changes which allowed for this increase was the coming of the heat bulb with rural electrification in 1947 and 1948. For the first time piglets could be farrowed during the winter, allowing for year-round pork production. Some farmers, notably Frank P. Reimer and Peter B. Reimer, became efficient hog producers.[19]

Most farmers, however, stayed away from raising hogs on a big scale until the latter part of the 60s. During that decade new barn cleaning systems were invented, and the price of hogs hit 40¢ a pound. It was at this time that many farmers converted their mixed-farming operations to specialize in hog raising. Old barns were remodelled, hammer mills bought and hogs purchased in unprecedented numbers. In 1964 Frank M. Toews and Ben F. Reimer became the first local farmers to build expensive

specialized hog barns, fully equipped with subterranean manure pits. With the new technology available and the possibility of making maximum use of cheap grain, many farmers began making big investments in new hog barns around 1970.

While the price for hogs dipped as low as 18¢ a pound in the latter 60s, the decade of the 70s proved more profitable. Meat prices and low grain prices combined to make this possible. Another factor making hog farming profitable was the acceptance of new production ideas by Blumenort-area farmers. Seminars sponsored by the Department of Agriculture received enthusiastic support from local farmers. By 1982 at least one local hog farm had introduced a fully automatic meal-time feeding system. Moreover, farmers were talking about the introduction of computers and farm-produced methane gas.

Despite the fact that hog prices tended to fluctuate and that Manitoba pork production did not rise during the 70s, local production continued to increase. In part this increase was attributed to skyrocketing land prices which made investments in livestock production more attractive. By 1982 there were 25 farmers in a three-mile radius of Blumenort who were concentrating on hogs. The estimated annual production of pork from this area stood at 8.4 million pounds or about 40,000 finished hogs, 75% of which were farrowed locally.[20]

As other farmers, hog producers organized. In 1970 the Southeast Pork Producers Association was formed to assist in the interchange of ideas and to lobby the government. Three years later the Manitoba Hog Producers Marketing Board was formed to stabilize the volatile hog market. The chairman of

district #7 of the board in 1973 became John U. Loewen. Unlike local poultry producers, many hog farmers remained opposed to a quota and price-setting system.

Red meat production in the Blumenort area was very small until the late 60s. Mennonites, it was said, looked upon beef, which required seven pounds of feed to produce one pound of meat, as an impractical and uneconomical animal.

Little changed in this thinking until the latter 60s, when several local farmers sold their dairy herds and converted the barnyards into feed lots. The early 70s were good years for beef producers. The live-weight price of beef was as high as 60¢ a pound. The price of feed was low. A beef herd could be started with a low initial investment. A good pasture, a low-cost bunker silo and special forage equipment were the only capital costs involved. Only around 1980 did farmers such as John R. Penner and Bob Brandt invest in Harvestor silos, automatic feeding and embark on a program of raising pure-bred Heifer stock. Most local farmers, however, continued to raise beef as a side-line product.[21]

Except for the years around World War I, grain growing in the Blumenort area has been very closely tied to livestock and poultry raising. Thus the major crops have been feed grain. By 1948 oats and barley accounted for 80% of the fall harvest. After 1960 barley began replacing oats. By 1980 locally-grown corn and soft feed wheat had become popular feed grains as well. Because the region has become a net importer of feed grains due to increasing livestock and poultry production, local farmers still concentrate on growing feed grain.

After 1948 sweet clover and alfalfa growing also increased as dairy herds required higher protein diets and the local clay soils lent themselves well to alfalfa growing.[22] The growing prominence of alfalfa and feed grains in Hanover since World War II can be seen in table 7:

TABLE 7
Field Crops in Hanover[23]

	1916	1946	1976
Wheat (acres)	14,786	5,313	24,672
Barley (acres)	4,642	16,274	18,672
Oats (acres)	10,324	17,063	8,658
Flax (acres)	0	1,117	451
Mixed grain (acres)	?	3,023	7,916
Hay (planted)	165	5,650	23,423

The importance of specialty crops and hard spring wheat slowly increased after World War II. In the later 40s several local young men belonged to the "Giroux Seed Club", which emphasized the growing of registered seed and made annual exhibitions at the Hanover Agricultural Fair. Sugar-beet growing also was experimented with after the war. By 1948 Jacob F. Loewen and Abe K. Penner had sizeable beet fields. Because of the heavy clay soils, however, beet growing never gained prominence. Oil seed crops such as flax, canola and sunflowers were also raised only on a small scale. The amount of spring wheat marketed through the Canadian Wheat Board remained small until the 1970s, when local farmers began increasing their acreages.

A basic change to grain growing came around 1960 when herbicides and synthetic fertilizers became popular in the area.

Tom Wiebe of Steinbach had advertised herbicides in the Carillon News since 1947, using the slogan "FREE YOUR CROPS FROM WEEDS: USE 2-4-D." However, because Blumenort was a feed grain area, there was less concern about weeds, and summer-fallowing was used to keep them under control. What finally made use of chemical herbicides acceptable was the introduction of MCP which cheaply and effectively killed the highly-visible mustard and ragweed, which sometimes had been more of an irritation to the farmer's pride than to his crops.

The biggest change in grain growing in the years between 1918 and 1982 was the gradual increase in local farm acreage. Table 8, which reveals what has happened to farm sizes over the years in the Hanover Municipality, is also indicative of what happened in the Blumenort area.

TABLE 8

Farm Sizes in Hanover[24]

	1916	1946	1976
Occupied Farms	628	1113	532
Farms 1-49 acres	42	220	67
Farms 50-99 acres	50	202	76
Farms 100-199 acres	343	422	224
Farms 200-299 acres	108	133	112
Farms 480-639 acres	32	13	44
Farms 640-1119 acres	21	5	34
Farms over 1,120 acres	0	0	29

The largest acreage increases came around 1970. At this time local farmers who had done well with livestock and poultry used their profits to make land purchases. The land of local retiring farmers who had not specialized in the 60s or whose sons had left to seek a stable life in town were quickly bought by younger, ambitious farmers. Land was also purchased in the

less intensive agriculture areas of Clearsprings and Ste. Anne. Thus, by the mid-70s, a dozen local farmers had increased their land holdings to between 640 and 1,200 acres.[25]

The result of increased acreage was an increase in commercial wheat growing and a greater reliance on herbicides and fertilizers. Alongside the growing demand for land came skyrocketing land prices. Most of the land purchased around 1970 did not exceed $120 an acre. This price represented only a three-per-cent-per-year increase since 1950, when land sold for as much as $70 an acre. In the ten years after 1970, however, land prices rose about 25% per year and by 1980, $1,000-an-acre land was not unusual.

The post-war years brought a revolution in farm implements. This was a change experienced by farmers throughout Manitoba. From 1946 to 1948 the amount of money invested in machinery in Manitoba increased from 10 million to 37 million dollars.[26] Farm census figures show that the number of horses in the R. M. of Hanover dropped from 3,246 before the war to 2,910 just after the war. The Blumenort farmers began to accept available technology and borrowed money to pay for it. By 1960 Elder David P. Reimer could write the following:

> Today we have the modern combines as well as all the different electrical gadgets. Each farmer has one or two tractors. The horse, the beautiful animal of the farm, which succeeded oxen in providing pulling power, has also had to leave the farmyard.[27]

By 1948 the popular two-cylinder steel-wheeled Model D John Deere were giving way to the more versatile and luxurious W6 International and AR John Deere. The latter tractor had rubber tires, a road gear and PTO shafts. There was a great

deal of skepticism about rubber tires which, it was jokingly said, could cause a tractor to stay stuck on the smallest amount of cow manure found in the pasture. However, when rubber became available around 1948, and John D. Penner of Steinbach embarked on a province-wide program to replace the old steel wheels, Blumenort-area farmers also changed.[28]

After that time, tractors slowly increased in size and comfort. The change of gasoline-powered W6 to the 65-horsepower diesel 3010 John Deere in the early 60s and the further change of these tractors in the early 70s with cabbed tractors of over 100 horsepower was typical of the Blumenort area. With the coming of hydraulic systems in the mid 50s tractors slowly became more versatile. By 1980, as some farmers substantially increased their grain acreage, the standard two-wheeled diesels were supplemented with sparkling new 200-horsepower four-wheel drives.

Combines really began replacing the old threshing machines around 1950. Although the large grain growers such as A. P. Reimer and C.P. Reimer bought combines right after the depression, the Blumenort area was not as open to combines as other areas. The primary reason for this was that Blumenort, as a livestock raising district, valued straw as a feed and for bedding. By 1950, however, the availability of balers, swathers and small dependable pull-type combines changed the scene. Threshing machines and farmyard straw piles now belonged to a past era. The popular 6A Case, costing only approximately $1,800, could combine up to 1,000 bushels of oats a day. By the mid-50s the small pull-types gave way to the self-propelled

machines, the most popular of which was the Massey Harris 27 and the John Deere 55.[29] In the years following the 50s the only changes in threshing were combines of greater size, complexity and cost. In 1982 the larger combines in the district had a capacity of threshing 5,000 bushels a day and bore price tags of over $100,000.

The other notable changes in farm machinery after 1948 were the introduction of the "deep tiller" and disker-seeder in the early 60s. These implements which replaced the plow and seed drill were better suited for the black clay soils of the Blumenort area.

The truck was another farm machine not in popular use until 1950. The car and the four-wheeled trailer had been the main farm carrier until the coming of the half-tons. And it was not until the 1970s that the average farmer began relying on larger three and four-ton trucks to do the bulk of hauling.

Footnotes

1 Francis, op.cit., p. 225.
2 Warkentin, op. cit., p. 352.
3 Francis, op. cit.
4 Prairie Agriculture Census; 1916, 1946, 1976, Province of Manitoba Legislative Library, Winnipeg.
5 Interview with Dave P. Loewen, February, 1982.
6 Warkentin, Ibid., p. 411.
7 Census, op. cit.
8 Interview with Frank K. Wiebe, March, 1982.
9 Interview with Ed A. Toews, Steinbach, March, 1982.
10 Interview with Orville Doerksen, Steinbach, March, 1982.
11 Interview with Aaron D. Reimer, R.R. #1, Steinbach, March, 1982.
12 Ron Andres ed., Silver Jubilee Steinbach DHIA, 1955-1980, (Steinbach, 1980), p. 19.
13 Interview with Leo Braun, Blumenort, March, 1982.
14 Andres, op. cit., p. 35.
15 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
16 Interview with Leo Penner, Blumenort, March, 1982.

17 Interview with Rod Siemens, Steinbach, March, 1982.
18 Dave P. Loewen, op. cit.
19 Interview with Ben F. Reimer, R.R. #1, Steinbach, March, 1982.
20 Interview with Bernie Brandt, R.R. #1, Steinbach, March, 1982.
21 Interview with Bob Brandt, Steinbach, March, 1982.
22 Rod Siemens, op. cit.
23 Farm Census, op. cit.
24 Ibid.
25 Dave P. Loewen, op. cit.
26 W. L. Morton, op. cit., p. 452.
27 David P. Reimer, op. cit., p. 102.
28 Dave P. Loewen, op. cit.
29 Interview with Ben A. Reimer, Steinbach, April, 1982.

Part IV, Chapter 3: A New Business Community

Local business took on a new shape after 1948. Before the war most business ventures were operated by farmers from their farmyards. This changed after the war when businesses began to spring up in the village. Farmyard businesses either closed down or moved to the villages. The owners and managers of these village firms were a new breed of people who had left or sold their farms and moved into the village to make their ventures profitable. Agriculture, however, remained the backbone of the community's economy. Both the Blumenort Co-op, and A. K. Penner and Sons were directly involved in farm produce and service. One characteristic of Blumenort business which did not change after 1948 was the co-existance and even interdependence of two very different business philosophies; namely the cooperative and the private company.

In the spring of 1948 the Blumenort Telephone Exchange was established. For years the Blumenort-area lines had been overloaded, trouble-ridden and very noisy. John J. R. Barkman, who was Blumenort's telephone operator, tells of the time when he attempted to phone home from a C. O. camp in British Columbia and was forced to give up because of the poor system. By January, 1948, a local committee had been formed to seek to break from the Steinbach exchange and establish a telephone co-operative.

A few months later the plan became a reality. Members who served on the board in the first years included Peter K. Plett, A. K. Penner, Peter J. R. Barkman, Ben C. L. Penner, Jacob F. Wiebe, Peter P. D. Reimer and Peter P. Thiessen. All lines and equipment were now locally owned. Soon after the takeover, all the lines received an additional wire in order to cut down the noise. As well, the number of box-holders per line was decreased to grant better service.

The first operator and lineman of the Blumenort exchange was John J. R. Barkman. For six years he and his wife connected all the inter-line calls from the "central" in their house where A. A. Duecks later lived. In 1954 Barkman's sisters, Annie and Lena, became the operators and moved the exchange to the Abram P. Brandts. They maintained the exchange until 1959, when the Manitoba Telephone System took over all rural lines, made Blumenort part of the Steinbach exchange and introduced dial telephones.[1]

The Twin Creek Poultry Killing Plant was one of the first poultry-related companies in the area. It had its roots in 1942 at a time when most poultry was killed and dry-plucked at home and then peddled to individual stores in Winnipeg. Jac U. Klassen saw a need for a poultry-killing plant in the area which would produce poultry for Winnipeg retailers. Thus, Klassen sold his dairy herd and converted his barn into a small killing plant. For the price of 10 cents a chicken and 25 cents a turkey, local farmers could now have their poultry New York-dressed. Business was brisk, and by 1951 the small plant could no longer keep up with the demand for dressed turkey. In that

year two area farmers, Frank K. Wiebe and Peter P. Doerksen, joined Klassen to form a new company. A large chicken barn two miles west of Blumenort was purchased and refurbished. A cement floor was put in and new equipment, including a thermostatically controlled scalder and motor-driven feather plucker, was installed.[2]

On October 1 the plant opened. The Carillon News was present and ran a full-page article on the event.

Modern Plant Handles 2,000 Birds a Day

> It takes only 15 seconds to kill and pluck a hen at the Twin Creek Poultry Killing Plant. In a day 6 women and 3 men ready 2,000 chickens and 700 turkeys for the market. In the process not one hen gets bruised or spotty. . .
>
> In fact, when the plant opened on Monday, October 1, a shipment consisting of some 400 to 500 birds loaded in 2 trucks came in from an old customer 125 miles west of Winnipeg. Another 'big' customer on this opening day was Jacob Doerksen who brought in 500 beautiful capons. Mr. Doerksen had already sold 2,000 cockerels this summer and felt that a poultry killing plant filled a very definite need in the mixed farming district. . .
>
> Every morning, a truck takes the dressed birds to Winnipeg. In the city Mr. Klassen has established a satisfied clientele, which should go in for making the new district venture a success.[2]

Tina Brandt was one of the first employees at the Twin Creek plant. She remembers how, in spite of getting very tired, she enjoyed working with five other girls on the defeathering line. Her other work-mates included Gerry Doerksen who operated the scalder and Pete Cornelson who ran the motorized plucker. In the fall of 1953, when Blumenort Co-op opened a killing plant, Tina was given a five-cents-per-hour raise by her boss, Jac U. Klassen. "I felt more happy with the 35 cents per hour I was making," recalls Miss Brandt, "than the people do now at $7.00."[3]

Despite its success, the Twin Creek plant closed after three years of operation. Times of marketing poultry had changed and government inspectors began placing more and more demands on the company. A decision had to be made either to build a large brand new plant or to close. Seeing that a co-op killing plant had been started in Blumenort and that a new plant would mean leaving the farm, the owners of the Twin Creek plant decided to close the doors of the company.

Blumenort Co-op Produce, which was to have a far-reaching impact on local agriculture and on the growth of Blumenort as trading centre, had its beginning in 1947 when a small egg-grading station was built. While Peter R. Penner had begun grading eggs in a small way in the 20s, farmers in the 40s were dissatisfied with the old system of grading and marketing. Farmers had seen the marvelous success of the Co-op Cheese Factory and now felt that the principle of the co-op system could be applied to egg marketing. By cutting out the middleman farmers could be assured an immediate cash return for their product and a greater control in marketing the eggs in Winnipeg. Moreover, new equipment, such as an egg dipper which allowed eggs to be stored for the lucrative winter market, could be purchased and used.[4]

Thus seven farmers joined forces, scraped together $700 and started a co-op egg-grading station just to the west of the co-op cheese factory. A board which included Klaas M. Toews, Henry J. Reimer and C. W. Wohlegmuth was elected. A flat-roofed, deep-red-colored 24 x 40-foot building was erected and John Wohlgemuch of Greenland was hired to run the

station. Eggs from farmers in Blumenort and Greenland were picked up by the co-op's truck, and at the station several local girls candled and graded the eggs. After three years the co-op was making money and egg prices in the area rose a cent a dozen. In the ten years that the station operated from the red building, over 1½ million dozen eggs were marketed by the co-op.

Soon after the station started, two of the co-op's board members, Ben L. Reimer and H. J. Reimer, saw a local market for specially-produced layer feed. A granary, loaned to the co-op by one of the board members, and $2,000 worth of bagged feed marked the beginning of the feed division. In 1949 a 30 x 40-foot feed warehouse was added, and, only five years later, yet another addition to the building was made.

By far the most important aspect of Blumenort Co-op Produce began in 1953. In that year the cheese factory which had served the community for 20 years shut down. At about this time local farmers began pressing for an additional poultry killing plant in the area, as the one in Twin Creek was running at full capacity. As well, some of the farmers believed that only a co-op could best serve the farmer's best interest. Thus, the Co-op purchased the old cheese factory building, along with its expensive steam plant, and established what was to become Manitoba's largest poultry eviscerating plant.

The story of Blumenort Co-op Produce for the next ten years is one of growth and ingenuity. It opened the way for farmers to specialize in turkey production and its success surprised everyone from government inspectors to condescending Steinbach businessmen.

When the plant began operation in 1953, it had a capacity to kill and defeather only several hundred turkeys a day. These "New York dressed" birds were sold for evisceration to Canadian Poultry Sales in Winnipeg. A year later capacity increased to 700 birds a day when a semi-automatic scalder was purchased and a three-ton truck was used to haul the turkeys to Winnipeg.

Although business was good, board members were unhappy with the crude way of marketing uneviscerated turkeys. Despite the fact that the plant carefully cooled the defeathered turkeys to avoid discoloration, it was felt that a better product could be marketed if it would eviscerate and vacuum pack the birds itself. Ben L. Reimer remembers how he once watched an inspector at CPS in Winnipeg reject a whole truckload of New York dressed turkeys from a small rural plant. For years Reimer had worked for Reimer Abbatoir in Saskatoon and considered himself a meat-man. He wanted a new full eviscerating plant that was federally inspected and which could proudly market its product anywhere in Canada.

In 1956 a general meeting was called and the problem was presented to the shareholders. The board outlined its plans for a new $100,000 plant built of brick and steel and fitted with the most up-to-date equipment. Ben L. Reimer remembers how surprised he was at the support voiced for the plan. "It was the older people," according to Reimer, "who were the most optimistic." The experience with the co-operative cheese factory and egg-grading station gave them full confidence in the co-op way of doing business. In addition, they saw a way of keeping the young people in the community instead of seeing

them run off to work in the city. When the board applied for a low-interest loan at the Industrial Development Bank, the manager grimly informed them that the bank would grant no more than $50,000 and this only if the community would come up with the other $50,000. The Co-op board quickly made plans to borrow the $50,000 from the farmers at 10% interest. Two weeks later the board was back at the Development Bank and informed the surprised manager that it wished to collect the promised $50,000.

By the fall of 1956 a large lot near the highway had been purchased from Jacob G. Barkman and construction on the new plant began. A 240-foot-deep well was sunk and a large lagoon was constructed by Fast Brothers. The next November the ultra-modern building was completed.

On November 6 production began. Ben L. Reimer was president, Alvin Doerksen general manager and Pete Cornelson plant manager. Sixty workers were hired to operate the new plant, and all produce had to pass the watchful eyes of government inspector Dr. Z. Jablonski.

Tina Brandt, who has worked at the Co-op for 25 years, remembers how hard they worked that first fall, trying to meet the Christmas demand for turkeys. "We had to work long days, even some nights" she recalls. Many of the birds were 40 to 50-pound toms. The knives would become dull, the fingers sore, and still they worked. Miss Brandt recalls how the plant relied on a round, automatic plucking machine that defeathered six turkeys at a time. Although a suction hose and an air compressed leg-cutter was used, all actual eviscerating still had

to be done by hand. After the turkeys came to the end of the eviscerating line, they were cooled all night in ice water, and in the morning they were vacuum-sealed in cry-o-vac bags. Each bag proudly bore the Co-op's trade name, Mellow. It required three daily trips to Winnipeg to get all the birds to the Winnipeg cold storage. As hoped, the product was a success. Mellow turkeys, it was reported, soon found "their way onto the festive tables all the way from miner's cottages in Nova Scotia to Premier Duff Roblin's banquet hall."[5]

The year after the new eviscerating plant was completed a second brick building was erected to house the egg-grading station and feed store. When this building was completed in November 1958, Blumenort Co-op Produce held its grand opening. Tours were given, refreshments served, and much made of the fact that the plant had been built by producers for the benefit of the producers. Even the press was invited. The following is an excerpt of the story filed by the Carillon News on the occasion.

They're Making Things Bloom at Blumenort

> What was just another wind-swept prairie knoll at Blumenort a couple of years ago is rapidly growing up today into one of the busiest corners of the Southeast. Things are really bloomin' at Blumenort and nobody is doing more to make them bloom than the Blumenort Co-op. . .From an incredibly small beginning the enterprise has mushroomed into a 275-member venture with a total of $300,000 in assets.
>
> To see the skilled production-line workers in action when the turkeys are going through at 3,000 a day is a real eye-opener for sophisticated Steinbachers, who don't believe that anything really big could happen at a little place like Blumenort.[6]

In the following years production increased, and more local farmers turned to specialize in turkey and chicken. After five

years of unimaginable growth for the Co-op, difficulties developed. The strict co-op principles that each member had one vote, regardless of the volume of business or interest in the plant, began to make it difficult to operate the large Blumenort plant as a local co-op. To resolve the difficulty it was decided to sell the Co-op to Manitoba Dairy and Poultry Co-operative, a province-wide co-operative with headquarters in Winnipeg. In 1963, in a general vote, the shareholders voted 107-33 to sell their plant to Manco for $1.35 per share. The total price was $300,000.[7] As in the case of the cheese factory, all the money invested by the shareholders was paid out. However, the sale to Manco marked the end of local co-ops in Blumenort after over 30 years of serving as the economic backbone of the community.

Although Manco (later named Granny's Co-op) was a provincial co-op, it continued to receive local support. The majority of local farmers continued selling their poultry to the co-operative, and many local people found employment at the plant. In fact, it was a belief that it could count on this support that led Manco to purchase the Blumenort plant. According to the Progress Report on Manco (1964):

> One of the chief factors lending heavy weight to the decision to purchase was that Blumenort is in an area which has been showing a steady increase in poultry production. In 1947 this area of Manitoba accounted for approximately 35 per cent of the total provincial poultry production. By 1961 the figure had risen to 61%. . .
>
> In addition, the Blumenort plant has the advantage of maintaining a rural industry, providing a convenient service to area producers, and employment for people in the plant area. Blumenort employs 110 people at peak processing periods, dropping to a low of 60 in slack seasons.[8]

Shortly after the purchase, Russel Dutchak, a native of Shoal Lake who had worked for Manco in Swan River and Winnipeg since 1950, was appointed manager of the Blumenort plant. A. K. Penner and Sons Ltd. was hired to build a huge expansion to the old plant. A 100 x 100-foot addition, costing $450,000, was made to provide storage and freezing facilities and a bigger unloading dock and engine room.

In September 1964 the new plant was officially opened. The Hon. George Hutton, Minister of Agriculture in the Roblin government, came out to cut the ribbon. He stated that "the significance of the Blumenort plant is that it is designed to serve as the chief processing plant for every producer in Manitoba."[9] Tours of the enlarged plant were given and coffee and doughnuts served. After almost 20 years of operation, the Blumenort killing plant had become the chief poultry eviscerating operation in Manitoba.

In 1979 Manitoba Dairy and Poultry Co-op reorganized when the dairy and poultry divisions divided into separate co-ops. Granny's, the product label for Manco's poultry, was chosen as the name for the new co-op. In that same year Granny's Co-op launched a 1.6 million-dollar expansion program to increase drastically potential production. When the plant was completed in 1980, it had a capacity to kill 6,000 chicken broilers an hour or 2,200 turkey hens.

By 1981 the plant gave employment to 200 workers and was eviscerating almost 55 million pounds of poultry a year, including over 7 million turkeys and 12 million chickens. This accounted for 40% of all Manitoba's turkeys and 28% of all chicken broilers.[10]

The president of Granny's board in 1982 was LeRoy Johnson, a Ste. Pierre farmer, while the local representative on the board was Dave Loewen. Russel Dutchak continued to serve as general manager, with Peter Friesen as plant manager.

Friendly Family Farms, another poultry-producing enterprise, also had its roots in Blumenort. In 1957, when Blumenort Co-op Produce moved out of the old cheese factory, nine local farmers purchased the building and converted it to a hatchery, called South East Turkey Breeders Hatchery. The farmers included: Dave J. Reimer, Aaron D. Reimer, Ben P. Friesen, Henry J. Reimer, Peter P. Doerksen, Ben L. Reimer, Abe R. Reimer, Henry U. Dueck and Martin P. Penner.[11]

The hatchery was started because more and more Blumenort-area farmers wished to get into turkey breeder egg production and turkey raising. The farmers, however, were dependent on one Winnipeg hatchery which, they felt, had a monopolistic hold on turkey hatching in the area. It seemed that, while prices for eggs kept falling, the prices for turkey poults kept rising.

After the South East Turkey Hatchery was formed, it operated as a shareholder company with each farmer buying shares in direct proportion to the number of breeder hens he kept. The first executive board of the company consisted of Dave J. Reimer, Aaron D. Reimer, and Ben P. Friesen. Abe U. Klassen was hired to manage the hatchery. After about a year, when Klassen left, Dave J. Reimer began managing the plant. Reimer remembers that during the first spring of operation the hatchery produced from 50,000 to 60,000 turkeys. Ten years later this number had tripled.

By 1960 the South East Hatchery was proving to be such a success the company considered expanding into the turkey feed business. In 1961 the Blumenort farmers purchased 80% of Steinbach Feed Service from Frank Reimer, president of Reimer Express Line. The feed mill and hatchery now became one stock company.[12]

The name of the new company was Friendly Family Farms, Ltd. In 1963 when the local Blumenort killing plant was sold to Manco, FFF began thinking of building its own plant. With a $300,000 loan from the Manitoba Development Fund, a large modern plant was built a mile north of Steinbach. The president and general manager of the firm at the time was Ben L. Reimer.

In 1967 a controlling share of Friendly Family Farms was sold to Max Fried, a Winnipeg business man. While Fried took over the eviscerating plant, the feed mill and chicken barns, he leased the South East Hatchery to Henry J. and Dave J. Reimer who formed a new company called the Blumenort Turkey Hatchery. Two years later, when FFF resumed control of the hatchery, the Reimer Brothers had their eggs custom-hatched at the Manco hatchery in Winnipeg. In this way they supplied half a dozen local turkey farmers with turkey poults until 1975, when they sold their interests to Charrison Turkey Hatchery in Teulon.

In 1969 FFF converted the hatchery in Blumenort to a broiler chicken hatchery. Abe U. Klassen was hired to become the production manager. The hatchery, fitted with 10 incubators was designed to hatch all the chickens that the FFF barns required.

In 1977 the hatchery was expanded to include 16 incubators with a total capacity to hatch 100,000 chickens a week. Running at about 65% capacity, the Friendly Family Farm Hatchery produced over three million chickens in 1981. The chickens were distributed to 24 FFF barns and 17 independent broiler growers throughout southeastern Manitoba. This operation gave employment to five full-time and five part-time workers.[13]

By 1948 P. J. Loewen's general store, which had opened in 1939, was a local landmark where farmers who had delivered their milk or eggs came to buy hardware items or shoes for their children. Women came to buy textiles and groceries. At "PJ's" in 1950, butter could be purchased for 60 cents a pound, hamburger for 33 cents a pound, sugar at eight cents a pound and coffee for 39 cents a pound. The store was also the place where employment could be found. By the 50s Loewen was paying his workers $75 a month, up from $12 a month in the early 40s.[14]

In 1951 P. J. Loewen increased the size of his business when he purchased Plett and Co.'s feed mill equipment. The mill was powered by a G.E. 75 Diesel engine, and a few years later the old crusher was replaced by a large new one, custom-built by Friesen Machine Shop in Steinbach. In 1958 the Co-op Egg-Grading building was purchased and used as a merchandise and feed warehouse.

The feed business turned out to be a successful venture and soon comprised two-thirds of Loewen's total turnover. More and more farmers were beginning to depend on specialized feed. In 1965 the feed business peaked during a time of low grain

prices. P. J. Loewen attracted business from throughout Manitoba by introducing a grain trade in which he took grain in exchange for his merchandise and groceries. Loewen even made arrangements with other local businesses enabling him to give tires, machinery parts and other necessities in trade for grain. The idea caught on, and soon 500-bushel trucks began pulling in from places as far away as Western Manitoba. Even the Winnipeg Free Press heard about the trade and called to inquire about the apparent revival of the barter system.

In September, 1972, a huge fire demolished the feed mill. The fire came at the very time that the Loewens were thinking about building a new store. They had considered relocating near the #12 highway to attract more business but had not moved because of the feed mill. Now, with the mill gone, the way was open for the move. During the winter of '72-'73, an attractive 52 x 90-foot building was erected at the highway. In April, the store, bearing the name of Loewen Shopping Centre, was opened.

It was soon evident that the move was a good one. During the first five years the annual turnover increased 400%. During this time as well, Ken Loewen, P. J. Loewen's only son, assumed full ownership of the store. In 1980 he was awarded the job of Post Master for Blumenort. On July 1 of that year the new Post Office was opened in the Loewen Store. In 1982 the store and post office gave employment to four local people.

By 1948 Janzen Garage was a well-established business in Blumenort. John Janzen's mechanical skills had attracted a reliable local clientele and the towering Texaco sign in front

of the garage told people where they could buy gasoline. Both in 1944 and 1958 the garage had to be changed to accommodate the growing automotive repair trade.

In 1969 Janzen's son, Cornie, purchased the business, and the next year enlarged the garage once again. Six years later a new $300,000 six-stall garage was built near the #12 highway. After the business moved, Janzen continued selling Firestone tires but discontinued selling gas for Texaco. The profit margin on a gallon of gas had fallen two to five cents a gallon, and it became unprofitable for a garage owner to sell gas. Despite this, Janzen Garage saw its business increase tenfold during the 70s. Cornie Janzen attributes this to the new garage, the growth of Blumenort as a whole and increased technology. During these years, a computerized tire balance, muffler-bending machine and front-end aligner were installed in the garage. Around 1980 a warehouse and a four-stall enlargement were added to the original building. By 1982 the Janzen business was employing six people and serving some 700 regular customers from throughout the southeast.[15]

Although K. K. Penner's service station had been started during the Depression, it was not until 1948, however, when the #12 highway was built, that the business prospered. Up to that year the Steinbach-to-Winnipeg traffice had by-passed Blumenort by using the #52 and #59 highways. With the increased business after 1948, the old office building was remodelled and two electric gas pumps were installed with new 500-gallon underground storage tanks. The big red and green sign, advertising BA gasoline, was erected. The service station experienced yet

another business increase in 1954 when the #12 was extended south to the American border. By 1960 K. K. Penner's sons, Elden and Leonard, had grown up and a decision had to be made whether to go into farming or business. The boys considered the business aspect more attractive, and thus the old chicken barn, which had stood empty for five years, was converted into a garage. The next year the farmland was rented out, and by 1962 business warranted the opening of a new office. Two years later a large modern brick garage was attached to the office and a mechanic hired to help the two brothers.

Over the years the company began to specialize in tire sales. In 1968 K. K. Penner and Sons was awarded the tire distributorship for Good Year in Southeastern Manitoba. After Elden Penner assumed full ownership of the firm in 1975, it also became the regional distributor for Michelin tires.

By 1982 K. K. Penner and Sons was giving work to 14 employees and selling some 30,000 tires a year. The business was attracting sales from Winnipeg to the remotest part of the Southeast. The spacious new office building constructed in 1979 contained a $40,000 computer capable of keeping inventory and doing the accounting. Several warehouses and installation shops had been established to meet the ever-growing demand for tires. Five fully-equipped trucks, three of which were capable of servicing calcium ballast tractor tires, were meeting business and farm demands for mobile service.[16]

In 1975 the growing business of K. K. Penner and Sons divided into two companies, one specializing in tire sales, the other in automotive repairs. The younger brother, Leonard

Penner, had always had an avid interest in mechanics, spending many evenings readying his 1956 Chevy dragster for the Sunday races at Keystone Dragways. Thus he took over the automotive aspect of the business and built a $120,000 garage just to the south of the old yard. The garage was a 120 x 50-foot building, with a capacity to service eight cars at a time. With his wife, Rhea, as secretary, and four hired mechanics, Penner was able to establish a successful repair business. At first the garage specialized in high-performance engines and service jobs. However, when the demand for this type of work dropped, greater emphasis was put on truck repairs and transmission overhauls.[17]

Fast Brothers, Ltd., a bush-clearing and road construction firm, had its beginning at the end of World War II. Cornie and Vern Fast, the eldest sons of Henry Fast, returned to Ridgewood after serving as CO's at Plett Co.'s sawmill at Roblin. The Fast brothers' only option seemed to be to continue the small farm their father had begun in Ridgewood when he moved there from Ile des Chenes in 1931.

Post World War II, however, was a time of boom and road building. A demand existed for a local firm to haul gravel, grain, and produce. Cornie and Vern Fast decided to move to fill that demand. In 1946 they purchased an army surplus Dodge gravel truck. As it had been designed for the war in Europe it was painted a khaki green and even had the steering wheel on the right-hand side. A barn which Vern had used for raising pigs on Mrs. Henry Fast's yard was renovated as a garage. From this yard their business, which had a total turnover of $5,000 in the first year, grew.

Only two years later, in 1948, Fast Brothers expanded their tiny business by buying a TD-9 crawler tractor and beginning to clear brush for local farmers. One of Fasts' first jobs was clearing 50 acres of bush for Harry Sproule of Giroux for a total cost of $700. In 1949 the second TD-9 was purchased. Now brush clearing was done with two crawlers hitched tandem to a huge brush-breaking plow. By November, 1950, the Carillon News reported that Fasts were "busy night and day opening up land in this corner of the province."

In 1951 Fast Brothers moved to the new village of Blumenort and relocated their garage just west of the new church. Here their business boomed. By 1953 Fast Brothers owned three "cats" and scrapers and received the contract for their first road construction job. This job was building #83 highway for a ten-mile section just north of Melita, Manitoba. That same fall they finished the job. Another one of the big early projects was clearing the bush for the townsite of Thompson, Manitoba.

Around 1960 two International 295 "dirt buggies" were added to their line of equipment, and a new brick garage (50 x 75 feet) was built across the road. In 1970 Fast Brothers reorganized and renamed their business Corven Enterprises. After Vern went into the meat business in 1973, Cornie continued the construction firm. Corven continued to build short sections of roads, clear bush and do local earth-moving jobs. In 1981 it operated with 14 pieces of equipment and employed six men.[18]

At least two other local firms were engaged in bush clearing and earth moving during these years. The firms were owned by Irwin P. Friesen of Blumenhof and Henry F. Reimer of Blumenort.

In 1948 Plett and Company expanded and purchased the box factory, feed mill and smithy at Plettenville for $50,000. In the succeeding five years, Jacob and George Plett operated a prospering business. Financial records for the company show that Pletts' volume of business rose from $119,000 in 1948 to $179,000 in 1953. Half of that turnover came from the box factory and the remainder from feed, coal, lumber, hardware and grocery sales. An encouragement for Pletts was that, despite the closing of the cheese factories and the subsequent end to the cheese-box trade, they were able to land other contracts. Drink cartons, wooden barrels and even fish boxes were built.

In 1953 Pletts won their biggest contract ever. The job was to build 5,000,000 fish-crate bottoms for the fisheries in the Maritimes. Business was looking up and the Carillon News reported the huge contract in an article entitled "Plettenville Industry A-bustle with Huge Eastern Contract." The article reported that the contract had resulted in "a spurt of activity that (Plettenville) has never seen before." Forty men were reported working two shifts a day to fill a total of 56 carloads of crate bottoms. Jacob and George Plett were optimistic that the time to produce a carload of bottoms would be cut from 1,300 to 600 man-hours.

The 1953 contract, however, was to be Pletts' last. There was fierce competition among box factories at a time when cardboard boxes were becoming popular. In 1954 Plett and Company faced substantial financial losses and closed the factory. For two more years it continued the lumber aspect of the business

with a timber lease in Shoal Lake. Pletts, however, were unable to make up their losses and thus, in 1956, finally dissolved the company.[19] While George moved to St. Catherines, Ontario, Jacob took over the home place and went into hog farming.

The lumber industry did not leave Blumenort when Plett and Company folded in 1956. In 1953 Abram K. Penner, who was farming on the northern fringes of Blumenhof, purchased a 160-acre timber right for $100. Around this time lumbering in southeastern Manitoba was at an all-time high. A huge fire had swept through the Sandilands Forest Reserve, and the government wished to clear the logs out of the area. It became quite a common practice for farmers to secure timber rights to provide a supplementary income. Thus, when A. K. Penner drove into Winnipeg in 1953 to put in his bid at the timber auction, he did so primarily to give his sons work during the winter months.

That fall Penners built a tiny camp 10 miles south of Hadashville, transferred their horses and crawler TD-6 to it and began logging. The crew included three brothers: Abe, 24, Alaire, 20 and Ernie, 17. The job was to haul the logs to George Therrien's sawmill and then to haul the rough wood to C. T. Loewens for planing and retailing.

In 1956 Penners decided to cut out the middleman and market the lumber themselves. That year A. K. Penner and Sons became an incorporated company and began retailing lumber. Using their farm sugar-beet truck, the lumber was hauled home, where part of the machine shed was set aside for a retail store. For their lumber supplies the young company turned to Rush Bay, Ontario, where the government had stabilized the logging industry

by introducing the quota system. No longer did Penners have to scurry to secure a timber right at Manitoba's annual timber auction. Soon after the Ontario quota was secured, a 25-man crew was working at Penner's camp, logging lumber and pulpwood.

In time Penners became involved in building construction. The first substantial contract was landed in 1958, when they were hired to erect four large broiler barns for Frank Reimer of Steinbach. It is said that, despite the fact that there was considerable anxiety over the fate of this project, the company went ahead "and never looked back again."[20]

1959 was a landmark year for A. K. Penner and Sons. This was the year that a decision had to be made either to continue the farm or the lumber business. Because there seemed to be a greater economic opportunity in lumber, the latter was chosen. A brand new store, office and warehouse building was constructed on the #12 highway in Blumenort. From here the growing retail sales, logging operations and contracting services could better be run. The part-owners of this new venture included A. K. Penner, his sons Abe and Ernie, and son-in-law Pete Wiebe. Although Abe still planned to continue the Blumenhof farm at this time, it was only a year later that the farm was sold to Dave J. Reimer and all attention turned to business. In the first year after the move, the firm sold almost $350,000 worth of lumber and employed five men at $1.00 an hour.[21]

One of A. K. Penner's first commercial contracts was a huge enlargement of the Blumenort killing plant after Manco purchased it in 1963. The 113,000-square-foot enlargement of a local plant by a local contractor pointed to a new era of

business growth in the community. As farming in the area became specialized, A. K. Penner and Sons moved to build the necessary turkey, chicken, dairy or hog barns.

While "AK's" business foundation was firmly entrenched in Blumenort, it continued to seek new opportunities. It was during the boom years of northern development in the 60s and 70s that the company made its greatest strides to success. Contract after contract was won with the federal government to build everything from schools to houses and hospitals to stores. With the company's activities in the north came new opportunities for local young men to leave Blumenort for a time and seek adventure with the hometown firm up north.

The first big government project that "AK's" undertook was less than 100 miles to the northeast, at the Pinawa Atomic Research Station. Here, beginning in 1963, the company constructed a clinic, curling rink, two schools and 60% of the present housing. Round Lake, Ontario, an isolated Indian Reserve northeast of Red Lake, was the site of A. K. Penner's first far-northern project. Under the supervision of Bill Kornelson of Ridgewood, a school and four residences, as well as a generator station and sewage system, were built. All the material was brought in by cat-train during the winter. The next spring the men flew in, and by freeze-up in fall the six-man Blumenort crew, assisted by several local Indians, had completed the project. Other projects at Deer Lake, Fort Hope, Pikangikum and Winisk Lake followed.

In 1968 Penners launched their most ambitious northern Manitoba project in the mining town of Lynn Lake. Here the

airport facilities which Fast Brothers had worked on in 1960 were expanded, and a meteorological station, a hospital, a store and several town residences and bunkhouses were built. In the following years more northern projects were launched at Leaf Rapids, Norway House, Pelican Rapids and Brochet. By the mid 70s, when the governments began cutting back on northern development, Penners once again turned their attention southward.[22]

In 1981 A. K. Penner and Sons celebrated 25 years as a registered company. These years were marked by a steady and rather phenomenal growth. It was a growth that Penner brothers claim comes naturally to a company which is open to economic opportunities.

By 1981 the company, headed by Ernie and Abe Penner, was pursuing those opportunities in several fields and had in many ways outgrown Blumenort. While the head office was still based in Blumenort, only three main aspects of the business were actually carried out there.

These aspects included the farm service division, the forest products division and the accounting office. A. K. Penner Farm Service was started in 1970 in a new building located across the highway. This division was begun at a time when there was a growing demand for larger and more specialized farm buildings containing the modern livestock and poultry-raising technology. By 1981 this division was employing 25 men. The other division located in Blumenort was Southeast Forest Products, a logging and sawmill operation. In 1981 it was producing 18 million board feet of lumber and 32 thousand cords

of wood chips and pulp wood from its sawmills in Sprague and Swan River. Most of the lumber from the mills was hauled to Blumenort, where it was planed and kiln-dried. The wood was then sold to various firms, including the commercial and farm services divisions of the company. The various aspects of lumber production gave employment to almost 100 workers.

In 1979 the company embarked on a program which would see it expand and move its retail store and commercial construction base from Blumenort to the Clearspring Mall in Steinbach. The move marked not only an expansion for the company but also a new direction into property development. The mall, noted to be the largest shopping centre in Manitoba outside of Winnipeg, was developed and partly owned by A. K. Penners. Another similar project in which A. K. Penners was involved was Steinbach Place, a three-storey office building in downtown Steinbach.

Another division of the company operating outside of Blumenort in 1981 was its Alberta-based commercial construction company. The company, acquired from Ben F. Klassen of Winnipeg, focused its activities in Calgary.

During the years under study, A. K. Penner and Sons had a major influence on the Blumenort community. While it played an important role in building up a prosperous farming region, it also helped to keep in the area hundreds of people who were leaving the farms. Instead of moving to Winnipeg where higher wages could be earned, many local people opted to stay in the community and seek employment with "AK's". Some of the workers in 1982 who had remained with Penners over the years included: Pete Wiebe, forestry coordinator, John R. Dueck, construction

estimator, Carl Doerksen, comptroller, Victor Friesen, commercial construction manager, and Leonard Plett, sawmill-roads-man.[23]

One of Blumenort's unique businesses over the years was the sale of gravel. In 1980 alone, five different gravel pits were providing gravel for local construction, several concrete plants and the new #12 highway. Each of these pits was operating on the long narrow ridge which runs for six miles from section 30-7-6E in an east-northeasterly direction through the Blumenort village to northern Blumenhof. According to soil maps, the ridge is a gravel deposit put there several thousands of years ago by a melting glacier.

Most of the gravel pits were established after the war in response to a new road construction spree. However, even by the late 40s much of the area's gravel came from Isaac P. Loewen's gravel hill. In 1947 Ben P. Doerksen opened his pit when the Greenland road was reconstructed, and he was offered 10¢ a yard for the gravel. Other quarries which opened up in the area after that time were owned by John U. Brandt, Martin P. Reimer, Ben P. Friesen and Henry P. Brandt.

For many years Jake Penner was the foremost pit operator in the area. He began hauling gravel with is 1938 GMC ½-ton truck sometime before his marriage in the 1940s. After World War II Penner found himself hauling more and more gravel for the increasing road construction. Around 1947 he purchased his first actual gravel truck, a brand new Maple Leaf Chevy 2½-ton. Following Fast Brother's example, he renovated the drive shaft on the truck so that it could act as a winch pulling buckets of gravel right onto the truck. Before this

invention, gravel trucks were always filled by hand, a job old-timers insisted took them only 15 minutes.

Jake Penner's first pit, to which he had exclusive rights, was leased from Willy Wiebe of Blumenhof, sometime around 1958. In the fall of 1964 Penner's lease ran out and he looked for a new pit. John U. Brandt, who for years had sold gravel from his pit just north of Blumenort, wanted to sell the whole pit to Penner. Penner, however, was skeptical that the old Brandt pit could supply him with the gravel he needed for the government contract he had just landed. Because no other pit was available, Penner agreed to lease for one year. However, when he realized that Brandt's selling price was little more than the cost of the lease, he finally bought the pit. The purchase proved to be a good deal. Fifteen years later Jake Penner was employing 10 workers and was still hauling 90,000 yards of clean stone and gravel a year from the pit. A huge 100-ton dragline had been purchased to dig out the gravel from 45 feet below water level. Even at that depth there was no end to the gravel deposit. Over the years the gravel operations created a unique landscape feature to the northern edge of the village of Blumenort, namely a 20-acre clear blue-green lake.

In 1980, when the business grew too big for Penner's liking, he sold the pits to Altona Concrete. This company supplied the crushed rock to the Ready Mix mills in the Altona-Winkler area. Jake Penner and his son, Orlando, continued operating on a small scale, meeting the needs of local people by hauling from a pit leased from Jake G. Plett.[24]

Rural electrification in 1947 was a benefit not only to local farmers but also to those men who took the opportunity to make a living from electricity. Farmers who had had Manitoba Hydro lead electricity to their farmyards now required tradesmen to wire their buildings and hook them up to the source of power. Isaac W. Wohlgemuch was, no doubt, the most notable local wirer. Many people recall how this small, friendly bachelor made his rounds on his 1938 Ford half ton, hooking up one farm after another to the hydro lines. Wohlgemuth had been wiring since the inception of the gasoline power units in the early 40s, when he learned the skill from watching a Ste. Anne electrician. He recalls that the first places he wired after electrification included the farms of A. K. Penner, Martin K. Friesen, Peter Unger and Abram D. Reimer, who were situated along or near the Blumenhof line. In 1982, despite his age of 75, Wohlgemuth could still occasionally be found wiring.[25]

By 1952 enough farmers were relying on electrical motors to warrant the opening of a repair shop. In that year Abe P. Reimer, whose father, Abram R. E. Reimer, had had a vivid interest in electricty, built a small shop at the spot where the Blumenort Cafe was later located. Here Reimer was kept busy rewinding motors and repairing electrical appliances. On an October night in 1956 the small shop, which included the Reimers' residence, burned to the ground. Having lost most of their possessions, the Reimers moved on to Kleefeld, where a similar shop was started.[26]

In 1963 John Thiessen opened an electrical repair shop in the front part of the old egg-grading station next to P. J.

Loewen's general store. Three years later a new shop, bearing the name Johnny's Electric, was built at the highway. Over the years, as more and bigger electrical motors came to have a prominent place on farms, Thiessen was able to narrow his repairs to rewinding electrical engines. All sizes of motors, from the ¼ h.p. to 75 h.p. units found their way into the repair shop. Thiessen estimates that in the course of 1982 he and his son repaired around 2,000 engines.[27]

Another man to benefit from hydro-electricity was painter A. A. Dueck. Dueck began his painting business in the late 30s in Rosenort, where he lived as a bachelor. When he married Katherine Barkman in 1954, he moved his business to Blumenort. By this time the business included a Fargo Van equipped with a 220-volt electrical pressure paint sprayer. For many years A. A. Dueck specialized in exterior spray painting whether it was high hip-roofed barns or bungalow houses. In 1979 Dueck retired.[28]

A year before the large new Co-op plant was built in 1957, a small abattoir was established a short distance to the north of the Blumenort corner. The abattoir was Bergmann Meat Products, owned and operated by Abe L. Bergmann, of Ste. Anne. For some three years prior to this, Abe Bergmann had been slaughtering a few hogs a week on his father's farm near the Ste. Anne sand pits. The pork was all made into farmer sausage and peddled in Winnipeg.

Until the Blumenort plant was built, life had been a struggle for the Bergmanns. Abe himself was born only two weeks after his parents, the Abe P. Bergmanns, arrived in Canada after fleeing famine and terrorism in Russia. Over the next decade the

Bergmanns moved from farm to farm eking out a living in a new land. Finally, in 1933, the Ste. Anne farm was purchased. Here Abe grew up and farmed with his brothers, Henry (who today also lives in Blumenort) and George. Abe remembers they often went cross-country to visit the Janzens and Ungers in Blumenhof. They found the people friendly and polite and even attended evening services in Blumenhof School. It was this early encounter with the Kleine Gemeinde people which endeared the Bergmanns to the area and was a major factor leading them to establish a killing plant at Blumenort.

Business was good. The new 30 x 40-foot plant had to be enlarged twice in the first four years. The idea behind the plant was to make farmer sausage for the Manitoba market. For a time the plant even experimented with a meat counter. However, as time passed, Bergmann realized that a demand for custom-killing existed in the area and began to rely more and more on that line of work.

Ten years after the plant had started, Bergmann was employing 10 men and butchering up to 350 hogs and 125 cattle a week. In 1973 Bergmann turned his attention to beef raising and sold the plant to Vern Fast and his son, Lloyd. The name was changed to Fast Meat Products. Four years later, however, ownership of the plant reverted to Bergmanns. The Bergmanns, however, operated on a smaller scale than they had in the 60s. Its operation was restricted almost entirely to custom-slaughtering. The 125 hogs and beef that went through the plant weekly were cut and packaged, or cured and smoked to the customer's specifications. The remaining work was dedicated to making farmer sausage, a

skill for which Abe Bergmann remained well-known. The plant, managed by Bergmann and his son, John, gave employment to five full-time and three part-time workers.[29]

No modern village is a community without a place where town folk can gather to visit over a cup of coffee. Just such a place was first provided by Albert and Lena Schinkel in 1958 and, after 1972, by George and Margaret Born.

The Schinkels had farmed in the Prairie Rose area, but, because of health reasons, it was decided to go into the restaurant business. A site at the Blumenort corner was chosen and a lot was purchased from Abram P. Reimer. Rev. John M. Penner, Mrs. Schinkel's uncle, was hired to build the cafe. Mrs. Schinkel remembers that "the idea that each town needs an eating place was somewhat premature when we built at the Blumenort corner in 1958. The only building near the corner was the K. K. Penner garage and the Blumenort Co-op. In time, however, A. K. Penner and Sons and the high school located nearby." During the first year in the community, Mrs. Schinkel taught the junior room at the Blumenort School.

As Blumenort grew and attracted more and more business, it became necessary to have a local post office. With the active lobbying for such an office by the Blumenort Co-op and A. K. Penner and Sons, the government finally granted the community a post office in 1962. Because there was room for a post office at the cafe and because Mrs. Schinkel was interested in that type of work, it was natural that she should become the village post mistress. She recalls that on June 14, 1962, MP Warner Jorgenson came to the cafe to notify her that she had been awarded the

position. Three weeks later the post office room was ready and officially opened.

The first 78 steel mail-boxes, however, were not installed until May, 1963. In the early 70s an additional 72 boxes were added. During this time as well, the Schinkels sold their cafe to George Born and built a new house. In September, 1972, the post office was moved into the Schinkel residence where it remained until Mrs. Schinkel retired in 1980. Ken Loewen was then awarded the post office.[30]

After the George Borns purchased the Blumenort Cafe, they remodelled it and gave it a new name: Happy Dutch Mill. Several renovations, including a windmill entrance and a dining room, were completed later.

The Borns, who hail from Steinbach, purchased the cafe because Mrs. Born was a cook by profession and the idea of working together as a couple appealed to them. Shortly after the restaurant opened, the seating capacity was increased to 86 and a full-time waitress was hired. Although the business was hurt somewhat when the new highway was built around Blumenort, the Borns were optimistic that local people were beginning to see the restaurant as a community meeting place where farmers could drop in for coffee and whole families could come for supper.[31]

Blumenort Textile Centre was begun in 1964 by Margaret and Mary Reimer. A small 30 x 40-foot shop was built alongside the highway and a stock of textiles and some underclothing was purchased. Mary, who had become familiar with storekeeping while working for P. J. Loewen, became the manager of the new store. Margaret, however, continued her office job at Blumenort Co-op.

In 1972 the Reimer sisters sold the Blumenort building and moved to Steinbach, where their store continued for a couple of years before closing for good.

The first plumbing and heating business in Blumenort was established in 1974 by Jake Hiebert from Landmark. Hiebert had been an employee for Landmark Plumbing and Heating for some time when he purchased the former Blumenort Textile Centre building. In Hiebert's opinion the building was in an excellent location. Near A. K. Penner and Sons and in the midst of a prospering farming district, Hiebert was assured that he could not go wrong.

In the years after Southwinds opened, business grew. A large 40 x 80-foot warehouse was added to the existing shop in 1976. The firm provided many services including plumbing, heating, air conditioning, septic tank installation, sewer disposal and back hoe work. In 1982 Southwinds was employing 16 workers, three of whom worked in the office.[33]

Driedger Marshall Wells was begun by Jake Driedger who came to Blumenort with his family in 1968 to attend Bible School in Steinbach. Two years later, when they planned to return to their farm near Carman, P. J. Loewen offered Driedger a job in the store. Because the prospects of farming were not good, Driedger accepted the job. It was a type of work he had always been interested in, and thus, in 1972, when he was given the opportunity to manage the Manco store, he immediately took it. Although Driedger enjoyed working for the Co-op, he was looking for the opportunity to go on his own.

In 1976 he did just that, building a furniture store between Southwinds Plumbing and Heating and Janzen Garage. Over the next years Driedger slowly began specializing more in hardware sales. When the Manco store closed in 1978, he purchased the store's stock and in 1980, he took a franchise with Marshall Wells. Besides hardware, the Driedger store also sold Co-op gasoline. In 1980 over 120,000 gallons of gasoline were sold at Blumenort's only gas bar. The store was operated by the Driedger family with one full-time employee.[34]

In 1975 Peter Martens of Winnipeg, with the aid of a Federal Business Development loan, built a canoe factory in Blumenort. The idea of building canoes had hit Martens one day in 1972 when, after examining his brother's fiberglass canoe, he figured he could build one more cheaply. Despite the fact that, after building his first canoe for just five dollars less than he could have purchased it, he enjoyed the work and began building them for others. In 1974 during the Arab oil embargo on the United States, a serious shortage of fiberglass materials developed, so Martens bought a stretching machine to make aluminum canoes. A year later he moved from Winnipeg to open the Central Cruise Craft Factory in Blumenort.

In 1977 the factory was sold to Ken Loewen of Steinbach. He renamed it Misty River Marine and, with a few stream-lining changes to Marten's canoe, he continued manufacturing. Unlike Martens, however, he turned from selling canoes privately to selling them through dealerships. By that year as well, the factory was employing 10 laborers and was putting out 1,000 canoes and aluminum fishing boats a year.[35]

In 1976 Centre Farm Equipment was begun by Alvin Brandt and Cornie Friesen. The next year they took out a White equipment dealership and added other short-line equipment shortly thereafter. In 1978 Brandt assumed complete control over the business. Despite the slow-down in the economy after 1980, the business continued to grow. By 1982 Centre Farm was operating with a 40 x 100-foot service area and employed six parts and service men.

The automotive repair activity increased in Blumenort in 1976 and 1981 when Pete's Auto Repair and John's Auto Repair began in small shops in the old section of Blumenort. Peter Friesen, who had worked in a garage at Quellen Kolonie in Mexico since the age of 14, came to Blumenort in 1971 where his father, David Friesen, a noted chiropractor, had earlier settled. Here he opened a small shop on his yard where he fixed cars and sold used parts.[37] John Klassen, who had come to Blumenort when he was hired as a mechanic at Janzen Garage, opened his own shop in 1981. By leasing a former garage from Allan Koop and operating it with a low overhead, he was able to attract business from places throughout southeastern Manitoba.[38]

In the years between 1948 and 1982, then, Blumenort business establishments came to play a central role in the comunity. Figures for 1981 show that 18 different businesses were in operation. The smallest of these businesses employed only one helper, while the larger ones employed over 200 people. In total these businesses gave work to 480 people, 300 of whom actually reported to work in Blumenort. These 300 employees

drew in a total wage of 5.5 million dollars. The total value of the products and services sold by the business community exceeded 63 million dollars.[39]

Footnotes

1 Interview with John J. R. Barkman, Blumenort, February, 1982.
2 Jac. U. Klassen, correspondence with author, December, 1980.
3 Tina Brandt, correspondence with author, August, 1980.
4 Interview with Ben L. Reimer, Steinbach, January, 1982.
5 Carillon News, November 9, 1957.
6 Ibid.
7 Carillon News, December 15, 1962.
8 "Blumenort Plant: A Welcome Development." Progress Report on Manco, September, 1964, p. 10.
9 Ibid.
10 Granny's Poultry Co-operative, Annual Report, 1981.
11 Interview with Dave J. Reimer, Ste. Anne, January, 1982.
12 Ben L. Reimer, op. cit.
13 Interview with Abe U. Klassen, Blumenort, January, 1982.
14 P. J. Loewen, correspondence with author, December, 1980.
15 Interview with Cornie Janzen, Blumenort, December, 1981.
16 Interview with Elden Penner, Blumenort, January, 1982.
17 Interview with Leonard Penner, Blumenort, January 1982.
18 Interview with Cornie J. Fast, Blumenort, January, 1982.
19 Interview with Delbert F. Plett, April, 1982.
20 Peter Dyck, "A. K. Penner and Sons, Ltd." Manitoba Mennonite Memories, edited by Julius Toews and Lawrence Klippenstein, Steinbach, Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee, 1974, p. 226.
21 Abe G. Penner, correspondence with Betty Plett, 1979.
22 Interview with Victor Friesen, Steinbach, January, 1982.
23 Abe G. Penner, op. cit.
24 Interview with Jake Penner, Ste. Anne, January, 1982.
25 Interview with Isaac W. Wohlgemuth, January, 1983.
26 Interview with Mrs. Abe P. Reimer, December, 1982.
27 Interview with John Thiessen, Blumenort, January, 1982.
28 Interview with Norman Dueck, Steinbach, April, 1982.
29 Interview with Abe L. Bergmann, Blumenort, January, 1982.
30 Mrs. Lena Schinkel, correspondence with author, February, 1981.
31 Interview with George Born, Blumenort, January, 1982.
32 Interview with Margaret Reimer, Steinbach, April, 1982.
33 Interview with Jake Hiebert, Blumenort, January, 1982.
34 Interview with Jake Driedger, Blumenort, January, 1982.
35 Interview with Ken Loewen, Blumenort, January, 1982.
36 Interview with Alvin Brandt, Blumenort, January, 1982.
37 Interview with Peter Friesen, Blumenort, April, 1982.
38 Interview with John Klassen, Blumenort, November, 1982.
39 These figures were derived from totalling individual figures provided by each Blumenort business.

Part IV, Chapter 4: New Approaches to Education

By 1948 many aspects of school life were still changing. German and religious instruction were given less importance. More and more students were beginning to take high school correspondence courses. Patriotic exercises, picnics and sports were beginning to be integral parts of school life. Despite the number of changes which had come to local education before 1948, it was during the 50s and 60s that the greatest changes were experienced. Young, well-trained teachers, a local high school, a unitary school board and a large central school became the symbols of these changes.

The 50s marked the beginning of a new era in education. Young university-educated teachers who had come from Kleine Gemeinde backgrounds were hired to teach in local schools. With them came a greater emphasis on the outside world, more field trips, stricter school discipline and more sports events. In addition, a new generation of parents wanted their children to succeed in Canadian society. Enthusiasm for education increased as more and more people began to see it as a positive tool. This enthusiasm is vividly revealed in the following yearbook messages written by Principal Ben B. Dueck and Miss Laura Plett, teachers at Blumenhof.

Principal's Message 1957

> What a race these ten months have been! ... For most of the students the race-track was, to say the least, rugged in many places. Science and mathematics (not to mention social studies) were either stony places where knees might be skinned or miry swamps in which it was all too easy to get bogged down.
> If it hadn't been for the occasional "refresher" tossed to the runners in the form of a rugby match, hockey game or field trip, the pace might have been crippling. However, with the particular form of stamina and endurance typical of our rural-Manitoba young people, every obstacle was overcome and left behind. Such persevering candidates surely deserve the laurel wreath.

Teacher's Report 1958

> Shall we turn back the records of the past year and review them briefly together? We see children working and we see children playing...One of the most important subjects these boys and girls are taking is Reading. For a few really breath-taking thrills we catch the look in a child's eye as he comes back from an exploration in his reader or story book. Where has be been? Perhaps to Arizona, South America, or watching David looking after sheep.
> A few other mysteries we see these children exploring are how to arrange twenty-six letters in proper patterns to make words, and how lovely the world is around them. They learn to recognize and admire the frail butterfly and the dusty moth. They see why we have a day and night; why it's colder in some parts of the earth. And they find different places on the globe...

Not all schools in the area changed at the same time. Blumenort, which was the home of church leaders and generally the more conservative of the Kleine Gemeinde, held a tighter grip over education and interschool sports competitions. Until the mid 60s it was generally assumed that the Blumenhof and Twin Creek schools were more progressive than Blumenort.[1]

The acceptance of higher education in the Blumenort area also slowly increased during the 50s. For years a person with a grade eight education was thought to be highly educated. Students pursuing grade eight were noticed and community folk

would turn to one another and say, "Hei schrift Grade acht." This was a designation that put the student in a category all by himself. John C. Reimer recalls that under his guidance Henry W. Wohlgemuth passed the departmental grade eight exam in 1924, and became the first student in the community to do so. In 1930 George S. Koop passed the exam as well.

Time did not stand still, and, as early as 1937, students such as Margaret Toews, helped by the community teacher, had returned to school to study past grade eight.[2] By 1950 several local young people had taken some high school. Dave J. Reimer earned grade 10 by correspondence, and Clara Plett attended the private high school at Three Hills, Alberta. Around this time Melvin Penner and John R. Reimer travelled to Steinbach each day to attend the Collegiate. By the early 50s both the Blumenort and Blumenhof senior teachers were guiding several students a year through correspondence courses. In Blumenort they included Betty Plett, Edward Brandt, Tina Reimer and Gerry Doerksen.[3]

Higher education was becoming both more acceptable and in greater demand. Elder David P. Reimer is said to have admitted publically that the church's discouragement of higher education had made it difficult to have good, Christian teachers.[4] Melvin Penner recalls that he finally decided to attend the Winnipeg Normal School in 1952 after his father, a local school trustee, complained to him about the difficulty of getting good teachers. On June 30, 1952, the matter of higher education came up at the church ministerial meeting and the following historic statement was recorded: "We want

to be more open to young men and women who feel the calling to train as teachers." The idea of training to be teachers caught on, and, ten years later, 16 members of the Blumenort Church had qualified as teachers.

The acceptance of Bible School education was more slow in coming. There was an ambivalent feeling towards schools such as the Steinbach Bible Institute during the 40s and 50s. It was felt that secular education was not as dangerous as the Bible Schools where foreign ideas, often quite anti-Mennonite, could creep into the church.[5] In 1951 when Frank Koop left to attend Prairie Bible Institute at Three Hills, there was a concern raised about the school's militaristic stance. Othersquoted James 1:5 as an indication that Bible Schools were unnecessary.

By the latter 50s, with the growth of the mission emphasis in the Blumenort Church, several local people were attending the Steinbach Bible Institute. In March, 1962, the SBI had become so accepted that the Blumenort Church decided to have a monthly offering for the school.

Perhaps nothing did more to encourage higher education in the community than the Blumenhof High School. Begun in 1955, its aim was to accommodate the growing number of students who were taking high school by correspondence or travelling to Steinbach for it.[6] The trustees had hired Ben B. Dueck, a Steinbach teacher who was working toward his BA, a few years before. Now they set aside one room of their big new building as a high school. Nineteen students in grades 9-11, and hailing from Blumenort to Ridgewood, made up the first

student body. For 11 years local students, often over the age of 21, attended BHS. The enthusiasm for the high school is well depicted in the following excerpts taken from the first Blue and Gold yearbook.

Editorial - Alair Penner

> The writing of our examinations in June is drawing near and we see history being made as the first year of the Blumenhof High School is drawing to a close. We as students realize the great privilege that is ours to be able to attend high school in our home district.

President's Message - Bill Penner

> When I glance back to the beginning of the year, I find that the year has been crammed with all the different activities such as the Red Cross programs, literary, sports and socials. Especially I remember the wiener roast last autumn. It was evident that we were a resolute group of people.

Valedictory - Anna Loewen

> For the first time in history Blumenhof has had a group of Grade Eleven graduates. We, the graduates, wish to extend a sincere thanks to the school board...To our parents, who have sacrificed to provide an education for us which many of you were denied, we give our thanks...

The enthusiasm for a local high school never declined. Even the church leadership supported the idea. It offered the church building for the graduation ceremonies and, in 1959, it extended its blessing to the school in a yearbook message.

Surrounding districts encouraged their students to attend the school. One student in support of this wrote, "It is good to get together from different districts, for it helps us to get new ideas, gain more friends, and remove some of our rough edges."[7] By 1958 BHS had a record number of 16 graduates. The loyalty which local people felt toward the school was clearly demonstrated in the spring of 1959

when the district almost unanimously voted against a provincial plan which would put the high school under a unitary school board.[8]

Outweighed by the opinions of other school districts, however, a unitary high school board was formed. In the following years BHS began to feel the effects of a new government policy toward education. Soon after the new board was formed, there was talk of separating the high school from Blumenhof's elementary school and moving it to a more central location in the Blumenort village. Understandably, the ire of many a loyal Blumenhofer was raised. It was felt that the school should stay in the district where it had been born and had matured.

The philosophy of centrality however, prevailed, and in 1962 the school was moved to Blumenort. Here, housed in two unpainted huts, it had every appearance but that of a high school. The school continued to grow, and soon one and then another hut was added to the complex. In 1963, when school attendance became compulsory to the age of 16, the student body rose to 56.

It was apparent to many in the community, however, that the high school would not continue in the primitive setting of four huts. It was equally apparent to those who talked of building a new high school such as Landmark had that Blumenort was just too close to Steinbach ever to be awarded one. By the mid 60s there seems to have been a general feeling in the community that Blumenort would eventually lose its high school. There was a strong feeling, however, that Blumenort

should retain its grade nine. In this way students could attend Steinbach Bible Institute's private high school without having to attend Steinbach Collegiate first to take grade nine. A Blumenort-based grade nine also allowed for the possibility of one day establishing a Junior High School in the village.[9]

In 1967 BHS closed without much ado. The country high school with its crude huts, car pools, snow-packed soccer field, gravel pit skating parties, church graduations and outdoor toilets had come to an end. Over the 11 years no more than 137 students had graduated from the school, which never had more than 78 students. Yet the spirit of the tiny school had a lasting effect on the community.

That fall two of the huts were pulled to the Blumenort school to house the grade nines. The vast majority of the high school students enrolled at SBI, located on the north side of Steinbach. The tradition of attending SBI (later changed to SBC) instead of the Steinbach public school did not let up during this era. In 1982 two-thirds of Blumenort high school students still attended the SBC instead of the Steinbach Regional Secondary School.

The Duff Roblin government's policy of centralizing schools and raising the standard of education began to affect Blumenort by the mid 60s. By 1966 a unitary school board had replaced local boards and by 1969 children from all directions were being bussed into the central elementary school in Blumenort. The story behing these developments is a long and sometimes bitter one.

In 1953 Blumenhof built a new three-room school. A

few years later Blumenort made application to replace its dilapidated two-room school building as well. Times, however, had changed since 1950. The government was no longer interested in putting up small country schools. Thus, in 1961, the board was forced to put up a hut to accommodate the growing number of students, which had reached 80, up from 65 in 1948. Dave Loewen recalls how, time after time, representation was made to the government for a new school. But each time the government stalled, suggesting to the board that it should consolidate with other districts and then apply for a large graded school.

It was only after it appeared to the Department of Education that Blumenort was in a central location and the logical place for a consolidated school that permission was suddenly and unexpectedly granted. The board was instructed to build the school in such a way that it could easily be enlarged. In preparation for a large graded school in the future, the board purchased a centrally located, eight-care lot. By the spring of 1965 construction on the $90,000 brick three-room school had been started by A.K. Penner & Sons. On a balmy October morning in 1965, 86 pupils ceremoniously marched the one mile from the old to the new school. Blumenort had its first new school building in 30 years.

The process which would make Blumenort a school centre began the next year. In December 1966 Twin Creek School burnt to the ground. Only a few books and desks were saved. The Twin Creek board, consisting of Jac U. Klassen, Abe U. Klassen and Aaron Reimer realized that they stood no chance of convincing the government to build a new one-room school and made

arrangements to send their students to Blumenort. The Blumenort school board was more than happy to see their tax base increased and the school enlarged to include four classrooms. A hut was hurriedly put up and, a few weeks later, the Twin Creek bus pulled up with the first pupils.

The biggest change to local education since 1919 came the next year when the government moved to disband local school boards. Bill 16, passed in 1967, outlined the establishment of unitary school boards and the dissolution of small rural schools. That spring a referendum was held to seek approval of Bill 16. Predictably, the Blumenort and area people rejected the plan, along with the majority of Hanover residents. Education was seen as a local matter, and few were ready to entrust the right to hire teachers to strangers.

The government, however, had not given up. By fall it had moved to make it virtually impossible for local school districts to finance their operations. Meanwhile, it was offering increased grants and 100% government financing for new school buildings in school districts with unitary boards. Responding to a petition by Steinbach businessmen, the government called for a second referendum that very fall.

The results of the December vote show that many people had changed their minds. While Blumenort still voted against Bill 16, the margin of defeat in the community was much smaller. This shift was seen throughout Hanover and resulted in the unitary plan being accepted by a slim majority.[10]

TABLE 9

Unitary School Plan Referendum: 1967

Referendum I - March 10	For	Against
*Blumenort and area	37	120
Steinbach	436	238
Hanover total	922	1336
Referendum II - December 15		
Blumenort and area	74	101
Steinbach	902	423
Hanover total	1802	1794

*Blumenort and area includes Blumenhof, Giroux, Twin Creek and Ridgewood.

As they had done in 1919, people quickly accepted the new educational system once they realized they had no real choice in the matter. Dave P. Loewen, chairman of the local board, recalls that, "It has not been a very big struggle. People had begun to realize that this whole thing would come about anyway. The government made the system so much more attractive with the promise of full capital grants, buses and a graded school. We could see some benefits, and so it was accepted." Other observers of the change talk of a spirit of disillusionment and apathy that spread through the district at this time. People's interest in the school seemingly waned for a time after they realized that they had lost a direct say in education.

By January 30, 1968, the last local school boards had disbanded. Abe G. Penner, who had represented Blumenort in the unitary high school board, was named the area's trustee on the new board, by acclamation. Penner, who provided Blumenort with strong representation after 1968, pressed strongly for Blumenort to be the school centre it eventually became.

The new school board moved quickly to close small schools and to bus students to school centres. By 1969 the Blumenort, Blumehof, Moray (formerly Bergthal) and Ridgewood schools had amalgamated. The elementary students were sent to Blumenort while the Junior High students were accommodated at the existing facilities at Blumenhof. Gerry B. Doerksen was hired as principal for both schools. A short time after this the Montezuma School closed its doors and sent a number of students to Blumenort. When the Greenland Church established its own private school, however, the Montezuma students attended it instead.

To meet the sudden increase in the number of students at Blumenort, five huts were temporarily set up. Finally, in 1971, a large new complex was built. A four-classroom open area, an office and small gymnasium were added to the existing structure. The empty huts were then used to accommodate the Junior High students who were moved back from Blumenhof that fall. For a time it appeared that Blumenort might lose the Junior High to Steinbach.[11] The Americal model of super-schools of 3,000 students was being pushed by some government people. After several years of uncertainty, the school board finally approved a K-9 school for Blumenort. In 1976 the second addition, housing the Junior High students, was completed. It included several classrooms, a multi-purpose room, a library, a science room and a seminar room. The Blumenort School was finally fully equipped to handle its 325 students.

The Blumenort School was highly acclaimed by local parents

in 1982. The suspicion toward higher education or toward consolidated schools had seemingly disappeared. In fact, it appeared that interest in and support for the school had steadily increased since the schools were amalgamated. The Home-School Committee had become increasingly active in proof-reading new library books, aiding the teachers and even organizing seminars on school problems.

Abe G. Penner, who served the community as trustee in the years between 1962 and 1982, lauded the new school system. He claimed that "The community in 1982 has more control over education than it has ever had. A teacher is hired only upon the approval of the local principal and the local trustee. A teacher who does not respect the basic values and beliefs of the community is simply not hired." He also strongly supported consolidation. "Without a larger tax base," he said, "the modern school facilities could not have been built and the qualified teaching staff could not be hired."[12]

Former principal, Gerry Doerksen, also gives credit to the big school. In the years after consolidation, the significance of the highway, which used to divide Blumenort and Blumenhof areas, disappeared. The hand of friendship was extended across district boundaries, bringing together people from different church backgrounds. In prior times pupils saw only children from their own church, and the trustees, who administered the school, also represented only the local church. According to Doerksen, students need to interact with those of different backgrounds in order to shed an unhealthy narrowness. For this reason he bemoans the decision by Greenland

people to withdraw their students from Blumenort and to establish a private school. Doerksen claims that Blumenort had no need of a private school because of the continuing strong Christian emphasis in the school.

Melvin Penner, who was the principal of the school in 1982 and who also served as a lay-minister in the local church, was equally optimistic about the school. The pendulum which was introducing more and more liberal ideas during the early 70s had begun to swing back by the 80s. The open-area classroom had permanent partitions built into it in the mid 70s. Teachers were spending more time in their homerooms. Parents were asking for more discipline and accountability from the teachers.

At the same time the liberal 70s introduced many things which Penner applauded. Being part of a large school district gave the school the resourses of the Hanover School Support Services, which included two psychologists and a speech pathologist. The larger school was able to provide for new programs particularly in the areas of music and sports. These programs led not only to students developing their abilities, but also, to an increased school spirit. Students were noted to be more proud of their school than they had been in the past. A final aspect of the school which had improved by 1982 was the teacher himself. According to Penner, not only were the teachers better qualified than they used to be, they reflected as much wholesomeness and dedication as ever.[13]

Along with the growth in interest in elementary education came a growing openness to post-secondary education. During

the 50s and 60s, it was assumed that only prospective teachers would go to university and only prospective missionaries to Bible School. By 1970 it was not uncommon for local students to be studying for psychology, theology, medicine, business, music, science and arts degrees. While by the beginning of the 80s the emphasis on academic training had begun to let up, the popularity of post-secondary education remained high. In fact, the number of post-secondary students rose as Bible Colleges and Community Colleges became more important.[14] In 1982 about 25% of the Blumenort Church membership over 18 had taken some post-secondary training. This compares to about 7% in 1962.

FOOTNOTES

1 Interview with Dave P. Loewen, February, 1982.
2 Interview with John C. Reimer, February, 1982.
3 Interview with George K. Reimer, Steinbach, February, 1982.
4 Interview with Ben L. Reimer, August, 1980.
5 Interview with John P. Loewen, January, 1982.
6 Interview with Ben B. Dueck, Steinbach, January, 1982.
7 Blumenhof High School Yearbook, 1963, p. 27.
8 Abe Warkentin, op.cit. p. 295.
9 Interview with Gerry B. Doerksen, Blumenort, February, 1982.
10 Carillon News, various articles from March, 1967, to January, 1968.
11 Gerry Doerksen, op.cit.
12 Darlene Reimer, "Blumenort - a Community Study," (a research essay, University of Manitoba, November 15, 1980), p. 9.
13 Interview with Melvin Penner, Blumenort, February, 1982.
14 Gerry Doerksen, op.cit.

Part IV, Chapter 5: The Evangelical Mennonite Church

While the Blumenort Church went through many changes before 1948, the changes that it underwent after that time were even greater. During the years after 1948, there were new leaders and new theological emphases. Worship services became less formal and changed to include English and music. A spirit of evangelism grew, and the name of the church changed from Kleine Gemeinde to the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC). Youth activities mushroomed as did other special services. Finally, new church buildings were erected in 1951, 1958, 1967, and 1981 to accommodate a growing congregation and a more complex church program. One aspect of the Blumenort Church which did not change after 1948 was the singular importance of the church in the community. It was estimated that in 1982 70% of Blumenort adults were members of the 550-member church. And, except for a short time around 1950, it remained the only church in the area.

In 1948 Elder Peter P. Reimer moved to Mexico, and Blumenort elected a new Elder. David P. Reimer, a younger brother to Peter, was elected the leader. David had farmed on SE 21 since he married Justina Brandt in 1914. However, for several years after he married, he also taught school. After he was elected a minister in 1929, he became increasingly involved in church work. During the years that Peter was in charge

of the whole Kleine Gemeinde body, David became a leading minister in the Blumenort Church. Before the war he had led the way for Sunday School, "Singstund", and "Jugendverein" to be introduced. During the war, he served Blumenort and the rest of the Kleine Gemeinde as C.O. advisor and chaplain. He became known as a dynamic, diplomatic, and even by some, as a progressive leader. Thus, it was not surprising that he was elected Elder with a very large majority.

One of the pressing issues which David P. Reimer faced as leader was the question of missions. Formal mission involvement was a new thing for the church, and there were differing opinions about it. While Elder Reimer was noted to be a strong evangelical, he was leery of independent mission organizations. According to Peter J.B. Reimer, David P. Reimer's "view was that evangelism should occur through colonization and not by going overseas."[1] However, when the EMC Mission Board was started in 1953, he lent his entire support to it.

Elder Reimer was a man of order, and as such, he supported a mission board in which the church would be directly involved. Similarly, he wanted the Steinbach Bible Institute to be an EMC shcool. As moderator of the EMC, he worked hard for a conference constitution which would bring uniformity to the various churches. As a man of order he was a strong supporter of the traditional practice of electing church leaders for life instead of for terms.[2]

Another issue which the church faced during Elder Reimer's leadership was an apparent erosion of the simple life. During the 50s, the lifestyle of many church people, who were becoming

more affluent and mobile, was beginning to change substantially. Many of these issues were discussed at brotherhood meetings. During these years the brotherhood was warned about the moral danger in "worldly" magazines, radios, and television. Similar warnings were given against "the practise of sister working in Ontario" and the practice of "working in the city and using wage money unwisely." A whole spectrum of social events such as hockey games, 4-H clubs, picnics, wiener roasts, inter-school sports events, dating, summer vacations, and late-night Christmas caroling were matters of concern which were raised during the 50s. More tangible things such as short hair on women, finger rings, musical instruments and wedding dresses also came up for criticism. The brethren who raised these issues voiced concerns about frivolity, arrogance and competition.[3]

Not only did David P. Reimer stress the simple life, he also emphasized the Anabaptist values of non-resistance and peace. After the war he edited a book on the experiences of conscientious objectors during World War II in order to strengthen the belief of non-resistance among Mennonites.[4] In 1951 he joined the Mennonite, Quaker and Brethren churches in thanking the Canadian government for recognizing their "sacred convictions against participating in war of any form" and in requesting that it respect those views in the future.[5] Throughout the 50s he kept in close contact with the MCC Peace Committee.

Early in 1962, at the age of 69, Elder Reimer stepped down as the active leader. He had been the leader of the

Blumenort Church for 14 years and an influential minister for 33 years. On July 2, 1963, he died. He was remembered by many for his warm personality, sincere faith, sharp intellect and gifted leadership.

Voted to replace David Reimer as intermim leader for two years was John P. Loewen. Only 42, he was now the senior minister of the church. In 1954 he had been elected a deacon, and the year after he was called to the ministry. In 1958 he and his wife, Helen, spent a year in Mexico, giving leadership to the small Quellen Kolonie EMC Church and doing evangelcial work among the Old-Colonist Mennonites. After their term the Loewens returned to their Blumenort farm and Mr. Loewen attended winter classes at the Steinbach Bible Institute.

Two years after becoming interim leader in Blumenort, John Loewen was elected pastor for a five-year term. In an historic decision the church brotherhood had decided that the era in which a leader was elected for life was over. Loewen's leadership was re-endorsed by the brotherhood in 1969, 1974, 1979 and 1982.

Looking back in 1982 over his 20 years as leader, Loewen saw many changes. He noted that the pastor was looked upon more as a spiritual leader than an authoritative head. Instead of being an administrator and carrying the whole weight of the church, the leader was able to concentrate on preaching and teaching. At the same time the role of the pastor had evolved from a part-time to a full-time and full-salaried position. He also noted that preaching, which once emphasized a simple lifestyle, evolved to emphasize evangelism, and then,

to emphasize the Christian life. Pastor Loewen summed up the main theme in his preaching as "commitment to Jesus Christ and obedience to His Word."

The Sunday worship service changed greatly in the years after World War II. This change affected the church language, preaching style, service format and singing. The free delivery of sermons seems to have become quite acceptable in Blumenort by the end of the war. Rev. Henry R. Reimer's influence in this matter was so great that ministers in most Kleine Gemeinde Churches began discarding their written texts for sermons preached spontaneously, from the heart. In 1949 the possibility of preaching in Low German was even discussed. The effect of this was that the worship services became much more informal. Another effect was that the quality of preaching deteriorated. Sermons were cited for being unorganized and without substance. The problem was so great that, in the late 50s, the EMC organized homeletics classes for ministers.

Another deviation from the set ways came shortly after the war, when English began to be used in the church. Church attenders still recall the Sunday when David P. Reimer stood up and announced that he would preach part of his sermon in English. Although Elder Reimer was reputed to know the English language quite well, those in attendance that Sunday remember that he had some trouble with his new assignment. Other people were very skeptical about introducing the language of the world into the church.

English, however, slowly became the prominent language of the church. Isaac P. Loewen began selling English-German

New Testaments for the church in 1949, something he had done for the school since the 30s. In 1950 it was decided to translate the catechism into English and use it as Sunday School material for the younger classes. That same year a library, containing English books used in C.O. camps, was begun under the direction of John R. Dueck, Abe R. Reimer and Edward F. Reimer. By January, 1951, English was accepted to the point where the brotherhood agreed on the following statement: "As we are aware of the need for English in our gatherings, it is decided to have English in our worship service on every other Sunday for half the service." At the same brotherhood meeting it was decided to buy English hymnals and, a few months later, 200 copies of Spiritual Life Songs were purchased.

By the mid 60s every other service, including the songs and service bulletins, was in English. Twenty years later, German had been relegated to an opening sermonette in one service a month.

The worship service format changed with the language. As early as 1949, it was agreed to have an opening and a main message called the "text" instead of two sermons of equal length. A few years later it was agreed to begin the service with an oral prayer and close the service with a silent kneeling prayer. (Oral prayer had been opposed by Peter P. Reimer as a sign of pride.)

Around this time as well, David P. Reimer suggested that song leaders stand to lead the singing. A short time later songleaders no longer sat on the platform with the ministers as they had done for years and were no longer elected for life.

The last of this old school of songleaders were Peter P.D. Reimer and John P. Doerksen. Even the ideas of church choirs, and unsegregated seating were discussed at a brotherhood meeting in 1952. The brethren were, however, admonished to watch out for these practices.[6] Fifteen years later even these practices had become acceptable, although some segregated seating remained in practice until the new church was built in 1981.

In the years between 1948 and 1982 some special services were discontinued while others were started. Services on religious holidays such as Epiphany, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Easter Monday ended. Services in honor of British monarchs, such as memorial service in honor of King George VI in 1952, were also seemingly part of a past era. Even Jugendverein, which was so popular during the 50s, suffered a lack of interest, and, in 1969, it ended. In its stead the occasional mission night was held.

One type of church service which was held more regularly and frequently after 1948 was the revival meeting. The first such recorded meeting occurred in 1951 when Cornelius P. Dueck, Morris, and J.R. Friesen, Kleefeld, were invited to hold meetings in church. Other speakers at meetings during the 50s included Abe P. Unger and Archie Penner. Blumenort remained leery about non-EMC speakers, however, and was quite concerned about some of its sister churches who invited preachers from other denominations.

By 1957, revial meetings, which sometimes lasted up to two weeks were an annual event in Blumenort. In that year Elder P.L. Friesen from Rosenort was invited to speak. Accord-

to David P. Reimer's report in the EMC Year Book, "over 80 souls 12 years and over, made decisions during this time and were counselled to follow the Lord. Forty souls from about 14 years and over were baptized upon their confession of faith and accepted into the church."

During the 1970s revival meetings were shortened and held more often throughout the year. The theme of these meetings shifted from a purely evangelisitic thrust to a greater emphasis on a deeper mature Christian life.

Other services which were begun after 1960 included Wednesday night prayer meetings (held twice a month). In 1979 Golden Age Fellowship services were begun for the elderly of the community. These German services were held on every second Tuesday of the month. A final program which needs to be mentioned was the service for the community's deaf people. The program was begun in 1974 after Deacon Henry P. Unger felt that the deaf were neglected and that it was his duty as a deacon to look after the spiritual and social needs of the handicapped members of the community. Special church meetings, held once a month, were begun for the deaf. By 1982 the program had attracted a dozen members from neighboring communities to join the church.[7]

Sunday School, which began in 1932, slowly became a more vital part of the church program. With the roomy new church building in 1951, graded Sunday School classes and teaching material printed by the Mennonite Publishing house in Pennsylvania were soon introduced. Abram C.L. Penner, who had previously been the Sunday school leader, was now designated superintendent.

Three years later Sunday school was extended to the adults and no longer held during the morning worship service. By 1957 Blumenort's Sunday School enrollment stood at 483 (363 of which were under 16), taught by a staff of 57 teachers. Because of the cramped building space, Sunday School was held on alternative Sundays for those under the age of 10 on one Sunday and those 10 years and over on the next. In 1958 when the Ridgewood Church was e tablished, Sunday School was extended to include everyone each Sunday. Blumenort's Sunday School superintendents in the 30 years after 1951 included: Abram C.L. Penner, Abram R. Reimer, Levi K. Reimer, Dave J. Reimer, Edwin B. Reimer and Emil D. Reimer.

A name change in 1952 symbolized the new direction the church was taking with regard to missions. Some of the more mission-minded Kleine Gemeinde churches had been agitating for a name change since the late 30s, when it was felt that the name Kleine Gemeinde, meaning small church, was a hindrance to growth. By 1950 a new movement was afoot to change the name.

In a vote in Blumenort that year, 49 brethren voted for a name change and 33 against. Some of the names discussed at the Blumenort brotherhood meeting were the Molotschna Church, the Christian Mennonite Church, and the Evangelical Mennonite Church. In a vote in 1952, Blumenorters overwhelmingly chose the latter name. Their vote coincided with all the other Kleine Gemeinde churches with the exception of the one in Mexico. The old name, which had described the ideals of the simple and humble lifestyle, had now been replaced with a name which identified the new ideal of evangelism.

The acceptance of evangelisitc missions had begun in the 40s when Blumenort, together with the other Kleine Gemeinde churches, financially assisted Gerhard Thiessen, an EMB missionary in China. After World War II it became common for missionaries to visit Blumenort and give reports about their work at special mission nights. Susie Plett of the Prairie Rose Church was invited to speak at such a service in December, 1949. She had just returned from Bolivia where she had served as the first Kleine Gemeinde missionary. Also speaking at the December meeting was Rev. Henry R. Reimer, who gave a report on the MCC conference he had just attended in Chicago. Other missionaries who reported in the Blumenort Church around this time include a Mr. Thomas from India, a Mr. Dempster from Lepers' Mission and a Mr. Davis from the Bible Society. (The latter even offered to show a "sound film". Elder Reimer suggested that a more simple program would be more acceptable.) Each of these missionaries, especially Susie Plett, were given the proceeds of special offerings.[8]

Still Blumenort hesitated to become directly involved with missions herself. Elder Reimer, who had been the Kleine Gemeinde CO chaplain during the war, had grave misgivings about missions that were not under the auspices of a conservative Mennonite Church. The leadership was also hesitant about supporting the Western Gospel Mission, which had been begun by several Steinbach Kleine Gemeinde ministers. Blumenort opposed the practice of immersion baptism and the use of musical instruments in the mission. Similarly, they were skeptical about the sincerity of applicant missionaries who wore jewelry

and had fashionable hairdos. Other members who were hesitant about missions stressed that the need to do missin work at home was too great to begin sending spiritual leaders to other countries.[9]

Yet, even Blumenort could not escape the mission movement. As early as 1948 the Elder's own son, Peter J. Reimer, had gone to France to serve under MCC. Around this time a mission-oriented group sprang up in Twin Creek, where a Sunday School was begun as a form of an evangelistic outreach. This group of young adults included Margaret K. Wiebe, John R. Dueck, Peter F. Klassen, Edward Reimer, Ben F. Klassen, Helen Loewen and Henry R. Loewen. It had grown impatient with the mother church and thus began to meet independently to organize mission outreaches. They went witnessing in the Brokenhead Park at Beausejour, organized a Sunday School at Grunthal, and Henry Loewens prepared to go out with New Tribes Mission in Brazil.[10]

In time the church became more sympathetic to the cause of the Twin Creek mission-minded group. Throughout 1950 the church brotherhood, in response to the evangelical group, struggled with the idea of organizing a local mission board. In 1951 the church leadership met with the eager Twin Creek group and agreed to organize such a board.

That summer the church undertook its first offical mission outreach. David P. Reimer and Henry T. Braun went to Pansy to open the way for starting a Sunday School and an occasional worship service there. Henry Braun, who was involved in the Pansy work for five years, recalls that the people in Pansy were very open to them and that lives began changing rapid-

ly. In 1962 the Pansy work received a boost when the Leonard P. Barkman family mived into the area. Four years later the Pansy Chapel was organized as an independent EMC church.

The idea of doing mission work through colonization also gained momentum in 1951. That year several Blumenort families were working to establish a Mennonite settlement in Riverton. The church hoped to use the settlement as a base for a mission outreach to the Ukrainian and Icelandic neighbors. Thus, in 1951, Peter P. Friesen was given the responsibility to organize church services there every third Sunday, as well as Vacation Bible School. The idea of extension mission grew rapidly in Blumenort also, and by 1955 VBS was held in Pansy, Joffrey, Loraine, Giroux, Ridgewood, Clearspring and Twin Creek. In later years this work included Caliento, Anola, Vita and the White Dog Indian Reserve. In 1970 the Home Missions Committee extended this ministry to a children's summer camp at Beaver Creek.

As the idea of local missions became acceptable to the church, so did the idea of foreign missions. David P. Reimer had been opposed to Blumenort's involvment in independent mission organizations. He wished to see Blumenort become involved in a mission under the umbrella of EMC or MCC. Elder Reimer, who was sympathetic toward MCC, hoped it would become directly involved in mission work. In 1952, after attending the World Mennonite Conference in Basel, Switzerland, he travelled to meet with Orrie Miller, the director of MCC, to consider mission work in Central Africa. However, that very year, the EMC mission organization was begun and David

P. Reimer lent his support to it.[11] Henry P. Friesen, a layman, was elected to represent Blumenort on this board. In 1959 John P. Loewen, who was to represent Blumenort on the board for more than 20 years, was elected.

Blumenort's main interest in mission lay in Mexico, where it hoped to work together with the Quellen Kolonie church. When this did not work out, Blumenort joined Rosenort in establishing a mission station in Mexico.[12] One of the first results of Blumenort's interest in Mexico was sending Rev. John G. Barkman to help lead the tiny EMC Church in Quellen Kolonie. Later Henry P. Friesen and John P. Loewens served in this way as well. Other early workers in Mexico were John R. Duecks, who taught school at Camp 72 (the Isaac Reimer camp), and Elizabeth F. Reimer who worked as a nurse at the mission station at Pichacho.

By 1957 the EMC Mission Board was ready to organize a mission outreach in Mexico and so it took over the Rosenort-Blumenort work. Edmar Fasts became the first missionaries from Blumenort to go out under the auspices of this board. In 1957 they joined the mission station at El Pichacho. That same year John R. Duecks returned to Camp 72 for a second term. The next year Annie Isaac went to Pichacho as a mission school teacher. In 1959 Maria Koop began her long career as a nurse and missionary when she also joined the Picacho mission station.

In the years after 1960 the Blumenort church strongly supported both local and foreign missions. In 1982, 32 mission workers from the Blumenort Church were stationed in 10 different countries around the world.

A symbol of the tide of change within the church community was the Blumenhof Mission Hall situated a mile east of the main church. It was begun sometime around 1949 by a group of men and women who had grown impatient with the mother church's reluctance to change. They were looking for a freer expression of their faith and a more open fellowship with Christians from other denominations. According to Leland Harder, the Mission Hall represented a "spiritualistic stirring among certain members who were seeking for something more inspiring to replace the conventional piety and traditional patterns of worship experienced in their rural church."[13]

The Mission Hall had its roots in Plett and Company's Roblin logging camp. Although Blumenort ministers regularly went there to conduct services, travelling pentecostal ministers visited the camp as well. One of the workers at the camp recalls that the young men usually looked forward to the more lively services of the pentecostal ministers.

After the Roblin Camp closed, the Plett brothers who had operated the camp sought a way to continue these services in Blumenort. Thus, a small chapel was built in Blumenhof and a Rev. Bohmer invited to conduct meetings. Although the Mission Hall was not organized into a separate church, about six families attended regular services at the Hall and participated in separate communion services. This caused great concern in the mother church. According to Harder, it consulted "with the free faith adherents and with a representative of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada who had been sent into the community to make converts and conduct meetings." It was

the idea that communion services were held outside of the main church that caused the mother church its greatest concern. In 1951 the brotherhood agreed that it could not "tolerate communion services held in small groups, for God is a God of order." Later that year the leaders of the Mission Hall were excommunicated.[14]

The Mission Hall, however, which had become an established aspect of the community, slowly grew in size. In 1958 the group had outgrown the small Blumenhof chapel and a small square building, bearing the name of Bethel Pentecostal Chapel, was built in Steinbach, marking the first pentecostal church there. It also turned Blumenort, once again, into a one-church community.

By 1948 the response of the church to the misfortuned had changed dramatically. To an increasing extent the inter-church organizations, foreign relief agencies and the government strove together to assist the needy. The traditional role of the church meeting the needs of individuals as they arose had diminshed, and the work of the deaconry was eventually redefined.

During the 50s several inter-church organizations received the support of local people. Isaac F. Loewen served for many years on the Steinbach Hospital Board and made frequent appeals to the Blumenort church for money. A.K. Penner and Peter K. Plett served on the Senior Citizens' Home Board and Mrs. Isaac P. Brandt became the first local woman to serve on the Steinbach Hospital Ladies' Aid.[15]

The most noted relief organization during the 50s was

the Canadian Mennonite Relief Committee. From 1948 to the early 60s the Blumenort Church channelled most of its relief money through the CMRC. At a brotherhood meeting in 1949 the brethren were admonished to support the organization as much as possible instead of contributing to unknown foreign missions. Records show that in 1952 the church gave $1000 to the CMRC, a sum which the deacon in charge noted was below the average for the EMC. During these years the church also supported the Lepers' Mission, the Red Cross and MCC. The construction of the Quellen Kolonie hospital was another special relief project for the Blumenort Church during the 50s. The Mexican brethren had experienced a severe crop failure, and Blumenort felt that some form of assistance should be given to them.

It was also during the 50s that secular organizations stepped up social assistance. That the church was uncomfortable with the increased government social services is clear from the following entry into the minutes of the brotherhood on February 2, 1950.

> It was mentioned that the widows and orphans should be visited more often. Also various pensions and family allowances were described and somewhat questioned.

It seems, however, that disability pension, family allowance and Blue Cross Hospitalization plans were quite in vogue among Blumenort people by the mid 50s.

During the 60s and 70s the government became even more involved in areas that had at one time been exclusively the concern of the church. During this time the government began funding hospitals and senior citizens' homes and providing

larger old-age pensions and more comprehensive medicare programs. Deacon Henry P. Unger described his changing responsibility in 1974: "Today with a socialist government the physical needs of the people are being met. So as deacons we will have to look more to the spiritual and social needs of the people."[16] By 1980 the deacons of the church were looked to for leadership in promoting foreign relief, for accommodating missionaries on furlough, and for assistance in visitation. The work among the deaf people and the assistance given to Vietnamese refugees in the late 70s were of this nature.

Blumenort teenagers had participated in church programs such as Singstund and Jugendverein since the 30s. By the mid 50s, however, many of the young people wanted a more direct and exciting involvement in church programs. When a community choir was formed in Blumenhof in 1953, it became a very popular social outlet for the community's youth. Ben B. Dueck, the leader of the choir, recalls that it seemed that the youth were starved for activity.[17] The importance of the choir was recognized by the Blumenort church leadership in 1958, when it invited the choir to practise in the church.

It was a Young People's organization, however, which marked the first program initiated and organized by the youth. In the summer of 1955 some of the young people, led by Bill (Willy) Penner, asked the church leadership for the permission to have their own fellowship meetings. On July 28 the ministerial and the young people got together at the church to discuss this matter. After a long and controversial discussion at the next brotherhood meeting, permission was granted and a Young

People's committee elected.

By the 60s the Young People's meetings were a vital part of the church. These meetings were held on every second Wednesday. The program was similar to Jugendverein, except that it was held exclusively for youth between 14 and the age of marriage. In time the Young People's organization branched off to form a tract club which in 1968 alone mailed 3,000 evangelistic tracts. Youth Horizons, a monthly youth paper, was begun in 1967 for the purpose of keeping in contact with the growing number of young people who were studying, working, or on "Christian Service" away from home. Other types of activities during the 60s included "Going Forth Night", Bible studies, Christmas banquets and a day-long summer picnic at Grunthal Park. In 1970, after permission had been granted by the brotherhood, the Young People's committee planned a weekend youth retreat. Over 100 youthful enthusiasts showed up at Red Rock Bible Camp that fall to socialize and listen to Rev. Melvin Koop speak on the topic of "Christian Freedom".[18]

Young People's activities continued to grow during the 70s. According to a church report in 1977, youth activities of that year were "filled with Bible studies, exciting films, enthusiastic singing, prayer times, cleaning church windows, an Easter sunrise service, a wiener roast, a watch-night service, two music concerts, a mini-missions conference, carolling, and a roller-skating social."[19]

By 1982 Blumenort's young people remained an integral part of church life. The youth came in for frequent praise for its initiations and sincerity. Statistics from the 70s show that

over 80% of the church members' children remained in the church and eventually joined it.[20]

There had been few changes in church music before 1948. Musical instruments were forbidden and harmony singing and new songs were discouraged. Sunday morning services were bound to use the Grosse Gesangbuch. With the growing popularity of Singstunden in the 40s and church choirs in the 60s the traditional approach to music began to change.

With the weight of the approval of men such as Deacon Aaron R. Reimer, the Evangeliums Lieder Buch began to be used at Singstund in the 40s. This songbook was different from the old one in that its songs had a mission emphasis and had notes. By 1951 the church had purchased copies of the English Spiritual Life Song Book, and, by the end of the decade, the collection of the Grosse Gesangbuch had been donated to the Quellen Kolonie church. In its stead a full set of the Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Breudergemeinde and the Christian Hymnal, an English songbook published by the Holdeman Church, had been purchased.

One of the biggest changes in music came with the introduction of a church choir. The first choir in the area was started in 1954 by Ben B. Dueck, the Blumenhof school teacher. Practises were held Friday nights and attracted young people from Blumenort to Ridgewood. Unlike the Singstund, the choir practised in order to perform, and sometimes musical instruments were even used. In May, 1954, the choir made its first appearance in church when it was invited to sing at the wedding of Martha Braun and Jim Loewen. In time it even presented special concerts in the church. The concerts inevitably were English

and German contatas complete with poetry, Scripture reading and duets.[21]

A significant year for music in the church was 1958. Brotherhood records show that in that year a special effort was made to improve congregational singing. On April 10 a special meeting was held for the ministerial and song leaders. Discussion centered around the quality of congregational singing, the need for another song leader and the possibility of having a church choir. That fall an offical church choir, with Ben B. Dueck as its leader, was started.

By the 60s the choir, under the directorship of Melvin Penner, was an essential part of the church. From its place on the balcony at the back of the church, it sang at revival meetings, Christmas programs, funerals and even at an occasional annual Conference gathering. A children's choir was started, and for some time the loyalties of young people were divided between the Senior Choir, led by John J. Doerksen and the Junior Choir, led by Cornie Janzen. As the years went by the choirs became more active outside the church. Weekly trips to the Canadian Institute for the Blind in Winnipeg and a choir tour to Flin Flon in 1968 were examples of this.

Musical instruments remained a great controversy for the church till the 70s. Perhaps no other issues since the car had caused the church such controversy. Throughout the 30s the Kleine Gemeinde leaders spoke out against musical instruments. After most of the other churches in the EMC had accepted instruments, Blumenort still stood guarded against them. The use of a guitar at a Jugendverein in 1952 was met with strong

church disapproval, and the brotherhood was warned to watch out for things which contradicted the Kleine Gemeinde ideal of a simple and humble life.

It was not until 1968, when the church choir directors appealed to the church leadership for a piano, that musical instruments were considered. A year later the first of three "piano votes" was held by the church brotherhood. For two consecutive years the vote failed to reach the required two-thirds majority. Even the final vote held in 1971 almost did not meet the required majority. While 58 votes were cast in favor of the piano, 25 brethren voted no.

With the approval of a church piano, great strides were made in music. A music committee, headed by Aaron D. Reimer, was elected to purchase instruments, new song books and plan the music for Sunday worship services. The first piano was purchased in 1971 and, three years later, a grand piano costing $6,000 was purchased for the main sanctuary. After a great deal of discussion, a $12,000 computer organ was purchased by the church in 1977. With the introduction of the piano, the use of the guitar, violin, and other instruments and special "musical numbers" became fully accepted in church services. Much of the church music by 1982 was directed by members who had special training in music.

In September, 1951, a large new church building was officially opened in Blumenort. The need for a new building had first been recognized by the brotherhood early in 1950, when a six-man committee was elected to devise a plan to deal with the cramped quarters of the old church. It was decided

to build a new church a mile north of the old one. The three reasons given for the relocation were: better shelter, a lower water table and the proximity to the growing hamlet of Blumenort.[22] By January, 1951, over $9,000 had been pledged for the new building. As well, a special committee, which included David P. Thiessen, John U. Brandt, Abram P. Brandt and Abe R. Reimer, had been elected.

The committee in turn hired three local men, Abe R. Reimer, P.K. Reimer and John K. Penner, to draw the blueprints for the new church and to work full-time on the building site. All other help came from local volunteers. Lumber was obtained from C.T. Loewen and Sons in Steinbach, as well as from the old building itself after it was torn down in May. Carpenter P.K. Reimer still recalls how all the work was done by hand; rafters were hoisted up the tall structure by rope, and the concrete basement floor, poured in the course of one day, was trowelled entirely by hand.

By June 26 the first service was held in the basement of the church. By September the $25,000 structure was entirely finished except for the Sunday School rooms in the basement. They, however, were completed by the end of the year.

Only six years after the roomy new church was built, it had become to small to contain the growing membership and Sunday School program. In July, 1957, a special committee, named to look into this problem, recommended that Blumenort be dvided into three districts, each with its own church. The central district would include the area one and a quarter miles on either side of the highway. The remaining territory would

then be divided into the Ridgewood and Twin Creek districts. The brotherhood, however, rejected this plan by a vote of 48 to 18 and, instead, approved a $14,000 addition to the existing building. Even a building committee was elected. In April, 1958, the committee, after having met several times, recommended against enlarging the Blumenort Church and, instead, proposed a new church to be built in Ridgewood. Although an occasional church service had been held in the Ridgewood School since the 1930s, all Ridgewood EMCers were members of the church in Blumenort. Many of them had to travel more than five miles to attend church functions. The new plan was approved by a vote of 63-16. At the same brotherhood meeting $3,600 was pledged for the new Ridgewood Church and a joint Blumenort-Ridgewood building committee, consisting of Dietrich Thiessen, P.K. Reimer, Cornelius J. Loewen, John U. Brandt and Dave P. Loewen, was elected.

By October of that year the new $16,000 church at Ridgewood was completed, and over 100 members had transferred their membership to it. Included among the members who transferred were Rev. Peter P. Friesen, who became the Ridgewood leader, and Henry Kornelsen, who was elected a minister by the new church.

In 1967 Blumenort once again faced a shortage of room, particularly in its Sunday School department. There was some consideration given to building a completely new structure. The building committee, headed by Wilbert Fast, however, recommended the following:

> Let the existing church stand where it is. Take out the balcony, build the choir loft and pulpit at the south end. Build a 60x54-foot entrance at the north end into

> which goes the office, baby room and cloak room. Build a 36x66 foot three-storey Sunday School building at the north end.[23]

The plan was accepted. A financial committee, headed by H.J. Reimer, was chosen to collect the $85,000 needed for the project. A.K. Penner and Sons was given the contract for the building. In November, 1968, the remodelled building was completed, and Rev. P.L. Friesen of Rosenort was invited to preach the dedicatory sermon.

By 1977 Blumenort was faced with a serious shortage of room for the fourth time in less than 30 years. In August of that year a study committee headed by Dennis Plett was elected to seek a solution. However, it was a year-and-a-half of studies, discussions and presentations before the brotherhood was ready to vote on a proposal. In the intervening time two daughter churches, Anola and Pansy, pursued building programs with which Blumenort was involved. However, the real issue which delayed the building vote in Blumenort was a deep feeling by a number of members that the church district was too large. Serious consideration was given to establishing a new district in the western part of the community. However, in January, 1979, the committee recommended that a new building be built at the existing site. Although two-thirds of the brethren voted for the proposal, it was another year-and-a-half before the building was actually started. While the building committee, headed by John J. Doerksen, and the finance committee, headed by Dave P. Loewen, were preparing for the building program, attempts were made to reach an understanding with the members who favored a smaller church. It was not until August 29,

1980, that a final decision was made by the brotherhood to start building.

Enthusiasm among members for the new building was great. It took volunteers only four days during September to tear down the old building. A.K. Penner and Sons set to work in October erecting the large 800-seat brick-and-steel structure. Meanwhile, the members gathered for church services in the Blumenort school. By June, 1981, the new structure, with a capital cost of almost one million dollars, was completed. On June 14th the church was opened with the dedicatory sermon preached by Henry Kornelsen of Ridgewood.

Another change to the church around 1980 was the introduction of a written constitution. Until that time tradition had dictated the roles of the church leaders and the church organization. The church leaders' opinion and the consensus of the brotherhood were the central factors in church decision-making. Reflecting a world of growing sophistication, a constitution was written and adopted by the brotherhood.

For the first time the organization of the church was put into writing, with the role of each church officer fully described. Instead of the ministerial being the administrative and co-ordinating body of the church, a council, consisting of four laymen and three members of the ministerial, was now in charge. For the first time, as well, the council chairman and not the pastor chaired the brotherhood meetings. The constitution also provided for church business to be moved from the brotherhood to membership meetings, where women were allowed to vote on all matters except the elections of ministers and deacons.[24]

One matter which was part of the draft constitution was the description of the Pastoral Care Units. This plan called for the division of the church into small fellowship groups. Although the plan was enthusiastically supported by many as an ideal way to alleviate the disadvantages of a large church, it was eventually shelved for possible acceptance at a later date.

FOOTNOTES

1 Peter J.B. Reimer, interview, June, 1981.
2 John P. Loewen, interview, February, 1982.
3 Blumenort Church Bruderschaft Protokollbuch, 1948-1960, Blumenort E.M. Church.
4 David P. Reimer, ed., Erfahrungen der Mennoniten in Canada Wahrend des Zweiten Weltkrieges (Steinbach, Derksen Printers, ca. 1946).
5 David P. Reimer Papers, Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg.
6 Bruderschaft Protokollbuch, op.cit.
7 Interview, Betty Plett, April, 1982.
8 Bruderschaft Protokollbuch, op. cit.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 John P. Loewen, op. cit.
12 Ibid.
13 Harder, op. cit., p. 70.
14 Bruderschaft Protokollbuch, op. cit.
15 Ibid.
16 Blumenort Church Yearbook, 1974, p.4.
17 Interview with Ben B. Dueck, Steinbach, January, 1982.
18 Blumenort Church Yearbook, 1969.
19 Ibid., 1977.
20 Statistics derived from the 1979 church membership list in the Church Yearbook, 1979.
21 Ben B. Dueck, op. cit.
22 Interview with David P. Thiessen, Blumenort, January, 1982.
23 Blumenort Church Yearbook, 1967.
24 Constitution of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Blumenort, 1980.

Part IV, Chapter 6: The Colonization Movement

There is no community in Canada where people do not come and go. After World War II large cities grew rapidly at the expense of small communities. There were few exceptions to this. Blumenort was one. The majority of the people who left the community did not head for the city. There were two primary reasons for this; first, the growth of the business sectors in Blumenort and Steinbach gave employment to those who left the farms, and secondly, for 16 years Blumenort actively undertook a colonization program. Colonization was, no doubt, the most dominant feature of Blumenort migrations in the two decades following 1948.

Talk about moving away and establishing new settlements did not end with the exodus to Mexico. Throughout the rural Evangelical Mennonite Conference - dominated communities, there was a growing interest in beginning new farming settlements within the boundaries of Manitoba. By 1949 a Colonization Board had been elected by the Blumenort Church to search actively for new land and to encourage people to move.[1] In the succeeding years small E.M.C. farming settlements were begun throughout the province. The communities that were begun primarily by Blumenort-area people included places near Riverton, Maryfield, Arborg and Wawanesa.

There were several reasons why colonization occurred. First, as in the move to Mexico, colonization was based on

the belief that the true Christian should never become complacent and too established at one place, particularly in places where worldly influences could creep in.

Secondly, colonization was seen as a solution to the problem of farmland shortages. The land which had been made available by the 1948 emigrants had quickly been bought up by those who stayed. By 1950 land was selling for as much as $70 an acre in the Blumenort area. Thus, many young, ambitious farmers who had looked forward to expending their energies in farming in a big way were caught in a land squeeze. Some even began heading for Winnipeg, where wages could be earned and a higher living standard pursued. This was of grave concern to church leaders, who saw city life as spiritually dangerous.[2] In an attempt to stop the drift off the farms, the church encouraged the founding of new agricultural settlements.

The growing spirit of evangelism in the church was a third reason behind colonization. The idea, held to by an elderly local preacher in the 50s, that the church was like a pile of coal which would lose its fire if spread about, was giving way to the idea held by the younger preachers that the church was like salt which was truly useful only when it was spread about. Elder David P. Reimer, who had misgivings about non-Mennonite foreign mission, strongly supported colonization as a means to mission outreach. Some of the more evangelical people of the church, thus felt a strong calling to leave Blumenort and move to areas where a Christian witness was needed. According to Abram C.L. Penner, who moved to Arborg in 1960, "we should not only go out to do missionwork in the area on Sundays,

but we should live among those to whom we wish to be a Christian witness."[3] Thus, shortly after each of the settlements began, Summer Bible Schools and extension Sunday Schools were started for non-Mennonite neighbours.

A fourth reason for colonization was the feeling that a small church was better than a larger one. As one colonist pointed out, it was a "healthier church where we all are active. Where there is a small group they must be active to make a go of it." Interestingly, the moves to Riverton, Maryfield and Wawanesa took place at a time when Blumenort was faced with shortages of room and was considering building a larger church.

A settlement 10 miles north of Riverton bearing the name Washow Bay, or Mennville, was the first to be established. It was the direct result of the 1949 Colonization Board, formed by Blumenort people interested in moving out. The first board included Henry F. Reimer, Jacob F. Loewen, A.K. Penner and Peter K. Plett. The board was commissioned to look for suitable sites in Manitoba. After a few months the board returned with reports on sites near Virden, Mafeking and Riverton. The Blumenort group chose the latter. A large tract of new land had been opened by the government in the swamps and bush north of Riverton. While the low-priced land had been reserved for returned soldiers, individual farmers were allowed to make purchases if they promised actually to farm on it.[5]

By September, 1949, there was a drive on in Blumenort to recruit interested buyers. Most of the land could be purchased for $6 to $13 per acre with only a 10 per cent down

payment. Another attraction was that the clearing and development of the land would be done co-operatively for the first years. By the spring of 1950, 21 quarter sections had been purchased and four development groups formed. The groups included the Loewen brothers (Jacob F. and Isaac F.), the Reimer group (H.F. Reimer, H.J. Reimer, Klaas B. Reimer, Jacob L. Kroeker and D.J. Reimer), the Barkman brothers (Jacob and Peter) and a Morris-area group.

In 1952 the Jacob L. Kroekers from Morris and the Jacob and Peter J.R. Barkmans of Blumenort became the first settlers to move to Riverton on a permanent basis. They were followed in the next five years by the John J.R. Barkmans, Aaron D. Friesens, Frank P. Brandts, Peter U. Loewens, Frank D. Pletts, Henry R. Pletts, Klaas B. Reimers and Rev. David P. Thiessens of Blumenort, and several Morris-area families.

As early as September, 1950, church services on alternating Sundays were organized by the Blumenort ministerial. In 1952 Rev. Peter P. Friesen was temporarily sent to Riverton to administer the church. Two years later, when Rev. David P. Thiessen moved, he was installed as the leader of the church, and in 1961, he was officially elected its Elder.[6] In 1956 a church building was finally erected for which the mother church in Blumenort raised $1200. Five years after the first permanent settlement, the Washaw Bay Church reported a membership of 81.

The second colony was founded on the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border south of Maryfield in 1957. Once again the Blumenort church actively supported and helped organize the move. Between

April 9, 1957, and January 11, 1958, no less than 10 special colonization meetings were held to plan the beginning of the new settlement. At the founding meeting in April, both the dangers of city life and the need to be "a salt to the world" were cited as the primary motives for colonization. It was also at this meeting that a decision was made to elect a group of 20 colonizers, of whom 10 would be expected to move.[7] Over the next three months the group earnestly began looking for a possible settlement site. Land was examined in the Elma-Whitemouth region, but it was considered to be priced too high. As several Landmark families were buying up land in the Butler area, 20 miles west of Virden, the attention of the Blumenort group was drawn to the farmland 10-15 miles southwest of Butler. By July three farms had been purchased, and that year Peter P. Thiessens, Menno Thiessens, Norman Thiessens, John K. Penners and Isaac L. Penners began moving to Maryfield. In 1958 they were joined by Ben P. Thiessens and Herman G. Friesens, and, in 1959, by Diedrich P. Thiessens.

In 1961 the Maryfield settlement organized a church and named it after the Heron School District. The Butler church building was purchased and moved into the district. Because no minister from Blumenort had been willing to move to Maryfield, the E.M.C. ministerial council was approached for help. By the summer of 1961 the Rev. Frank P. Kroekers of Morris had moved to Maryfield to take up the church leadership for a term.[8] Five years after the Maryfield settlement began, the Heron Church membership totalled 35.

The third place which attracted Blumenort families was

the Morweena district, 14 miles northwest of Arborg. In 1960, the Colonization Board, led by Klaas P. Friesen, found several farms for sale here and began to look for five or six families to settle this area. The leaders of this move stressed the need for "a group to move to the area where a witness...could be given, both in word and practical everyday example."[9] That very year six local families, including Rev. Henry P. Friesens, Abram C.L. Penners, Menno R. Penners, Henry D. Pletts, Abram B. Reimers and the elderly John P. Reimers relocated at Arborg. In that year, too, a church was organized, and Rev. Henry P. Friesen was selected as leader. After meeting at Abram C.L. Penner's home for a year, the members erected a new church building.

In the following years the Arborg settlement attracted several Plett families who had moved to Mexico in 1948. According to one writer, they found the Arborg area "very suitable, because the land was cheap and plentiful, and this more remote place provided them with some isolation where they could adjust to the Canadian lifestyle."[10] Five years after the initial settlement, the Morweena Church had a membership of 50 and had established a private school.

The latest Blumenort colonization project was the start of a settlement north of Wawanesa in the Treesbank district in 1966. As the other projects, it was initiated by the church Colonization Board and several interested families. Several places at Beausejour, Lac du Bonnet and Peace River, Alberta, were examined before an opportunity to purchase a two-section farm at Wawanesa was discovered.

In the spring of 1966 the farm was purchased by eight families, and the cooperative effort of settling had begun. Several men went ahead to do the seeding, and in summer a flurry of activity followed as new farmyards and buildings had to be established. By fall, the Levi Pletts, Ed Wiebes, Peter P.D. Reimers, Levi Reimers, Diedrich Friesens and Neil Wiebes from Blumenort, as well as Irvin Pletts from Ridgewood and Cornie Duecks from Rosenort, had made the move. The next year this small group was joined by the Peter D. Friesens and Wilmer Brandts of Blumenort, the Dennis Barkmans and Frank Thiessens of Ridgewood, as well as several families from Landmark.

While the EMC settlement in Wawanesa was a farming community, Dietrich Friesen, its first pastor, said that it strongly emphasized mission work. Within a short time after settlement, house visitations, Bible studies and singing groups had been established to minister to the non-Mennonite neighbours.[11]

The Treesbank Church was organized in 1966 under the leadership of Rev. Diedrich Friesen. After meeting in the home of Ed Wiebes for the first year, the Treesbank school house was purchased and renovated into a church building. In 1979 a new sanctuary was added to the old building. In 1971, five years after the initial settlement, the Treesbank Church had a membership of 52.

By 1970 the colonization movement seemed to be over. During the 70s a few families did move into the Pansy, Anola and Stratton, Ontario areas. However, new settlements were no longer planned and the church Colonization Board had been allowed to lapse. There were several reasons why colonization

ended. In 1968 the chairman of the Colonization Board reported that there no longer was a need to secure new farmland:

> In the past, colonizing was considered to be for the agriculturally-minded and those who wanted to stay on the farm. Therefore, the possibility of obtaining farmland was one of the main issues when colonizing was considered.
> With the changes in scale and methods of farming, the percentage of people seeing themselves fit to farm has decreased considerably. The result is that the number of our people taking up employment has increased greatly (i.e., only 36% of local adult males were engaged in farming in 1968). Employees can migrate more easily than an established farmer can. Jobs are usually available in other areas with fair wages or even better than in our area. Thus daily contact with the unsaved enables these employees to be witnesses for Christ...Also, we should remember that the very small groups i.e., Pansy, Anola who have gone out would be so glad for a few more people.[12]

There was at least one other reason for ending colonization. This was that the city of Winnipeg no longer stood as a threat to the community's leaders. With the rapid growth of a business sector in Blumenort many young people found employment without having to leave for the city. Then, too, as E.M.C. churches were established in Winnipeg and as more and more local young people began attending university, the fear of the city as a place to live seemingly dminished. The Blumenort Church began to encourage its members who had moved to Winnipeg to join and work in city churches as early as 1966.[13] In spite of this only few Blumenort-area people moved to the city on a permanent basis. Many Blumenorters who moved to the city each year were students who often found their way back into the community.

FOOTNOTES

1 Bruderschaft Protokollbuch, 1949.
2 Colonization Meeting Minutes, April 9, 1957, Dave P. Loewen, Blumenort.
3 Bruderschaft Protokollbuch, May, 1960.

4 EMC Yearbook, 1957, p. 8.
5 Interview with Henry F. Reimer, March, 1982.
6 Jacob L. Kroeker, "The Washow Bay Church," The Sesquicentennial Jubilee, p. 59.
7 "Colonization Minutes", op. cit., 1957.
8 Frank P. Kroeker, "Heron Evangelical Mennonite Church," The Sesquicentennail Jubilee, p. 77.
9 H.P. Friesen, "E.M. Church at Morweena," The Sesquicentennial Jubilee, p.67.
10 Fast, op. cit., p. 4.
11 Interview with Diedrich P. Friesen, Landmark, March, 1982.
12 Dave P. Loewen, "Colonization Report," Church Yearbook, 1968.
13 Blumenort Church Brotherhood Minutes, August, 1966.

Part IV, Chapter 7: New Blumenort Lifestyles

Some aspects of life in Blumenort had not changed by 1982. The basic foundations of the community were still to be found in the church, the family and its historical identity. Yet there were aspects of culture and lifestyle which had changed dramatically. The appearance of the countryside, the way of making a living, and even the structure of the church and school had become similar to that of other Western Canadian places. Similarly, the Blumenort homes and the community's social activies and times of leisure, to a large extent, lost their peculiar Mennonite characteristics. By 1982, Blumenort, along with most rural Western Canadian communities, had seen its ethnic distinctiveness greatly diminish.

In 1947 hydro-electricity was led from Ste. Anne through the Blumenhof area. Within a few months it had been extended westward into the Blumenort and Twin Creek areas.

Not all families readily accepted hydro in the first year. Deacon Aron R. Reimer is said to have wondered about the apparent contradiction of the Mennonites accepting the post-war benefits such as hydro just after having objected to fighting in the war. Another local farmer, although lending money to enable his poorer neighbour to hook up to hydro, declined to accept it for himself.[1]

The vast majority of the local farmers, however, readily accepted hydro for their barns, and most of them also took the

477

opportunity to lead it into their homes. The first local family to be connected with electricity is said to have been the Klaas R. Pletts of Blumenhof. Some families, for example, the Abram R.E. Reimers, had had electricity derived from a gasoline motor before 1948. Others such as blacksmith Cornelius R. Plett had an electrical generator driven by a home-made windmill as early as 1942. By 1951 even the most conservative families in the area had their homes connected with hydro.

It was the electrification of rural areas, as well as improved roads, which historians say "ended all the old distinctions in tastes and manners between the city and country folk."[2] While this seems like an oversimplification, these factors did have a great effect on the homes and, especially on the work of women in the home. Electricity ended the need to pump water by hand, maintain an outdoor toilet, burn firewood and kerosene, and wash by hand. The electric stove, fridges, freezers, lights, washing machines, clothes dryers, vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, hot water tanks, furnaces and indoor plumbing which were taken for granted in 1960 had been unknown only fifteen years before. Increasingly the farm home began to resemble the home of the Winnipeg suburbia.

Similarly, roads changed the life of Blumenort women. With first a gravel and then a paved corridor to Steinbach and to Winnipeg, the distance to the market-place shrank. Women learned to drive the smooth, dependable post-war motor cars and gained the unprecedented ability to leave the farm house at will. Rising farm and business incomes made shopping for groceries, finished clothing and kitchenwares a common

occurrence for rural women. Increasingly, too, whole families travelled to Winnipeg to shop and to participate in the luxuries of eating out and of enjoying city entertainment. A survey conducted in 1982 showed that 78% of the Blumenort families with young teenaged children drove to Winnipeg at least once a month, and a third of these once a week.[3]

Another symbol of a changing lifestyle during this era was the growing interest in clubs, associations, and even in government politics. These non-church organizations invariably helped foster interaction with the outside world.

Local 4-H clubs began around World War II. As early as 1938, a children's Red Cross Club began at the Blumenhof School. It raised money for the Red Cross and organized health drives. By 1946 a Blumenhof 4-H Calf Club had been formed with the assistance of Dick Filteau, the "Ag. Rep." from Steinbach, and Frank M. Toews, a local farmer.[4] Each club member had a calf which he fed, kept records of, and exhibited at the annual fair in Steinbach. Melvin Penner, a member of the club, recalled how keen the competition among the boys had been. The best calves were presented at the fair at Portage la Prairie and the Dairy Calf Club in Winnipeg. Other 4-H clubs at the time included a Seed Club, Tractor Club, Garden Club and Sewing Club. Another 4-H club with active Blumenort participation was the Red River Rangers horse-riding club, organized by Menno Barkman in 1968.

Farmers, too, actively participated in secular organizations. During the 40s, some Blumenort-area people began to support the Hanover Agricultural Fair in order to advance new farming

methods. Local farmers like Jacob F. Loewen, Frank K. Wiebe, Frank M. Toews and Peter P.D. Reimer also show that, by 1948, families from the Blumenort area were actively exhibiting farm products at the fair.

By the time the Hanover Agricultural Fair closed in the late 70s, it had become an important annual event for many people in the Blumenort community.

Local poultry clubs, regional cooperatives, dairy, turkey, and hog associations also rose during this time and received strong local support. (These organizations are discussed in greater detail in Part IV Chapter 2).

With the general acceptance of the radio in the 60s and the television in the 70s, local people also became more familiar with provincial and federal policies. It was not until 1968 that Blumenort had a separate polling station and not until 1972 that more than a handful of Blumenorters voted. In that year Jake Epp, an evangelical Mennonite from Steinbach, ran for federal office. The result was that the number of voters in Blumenort in 1982 was four times higher than in 1968.

TABLE 10

Blumenort Voting Patterns at Federal Elections[6]

	NDP	Lib.	PC	Socred
June, 1968	2	12	24	5
October, 1972	8	8	157	3
July, 1974	1	13	145	2
June, 1979	5	12	248	0
February, 1980	3	9	249	0

In the late fall of 1944, several local boys got together to flood a portion of John U. Brandt's barnyard in order to

make a skating rink. The boys put up rough boards around the ice and converted an old chicken barn into a warming hut. A hockey team was formed, and several times a week it convened to practise. Members of the team included: Leonard Brandt, Melvin Penner, Abe Penner, Peter Wiebe, Levi Plett, Richard Plett, Cornie Plett, and Willie Plett. Although few members of the team had uniforms, the blue Maple Leaf sweater was most common, and so it became the team's symbol. Hotly contested games were played against Kleefeld, Mitchell and Ste. Anne. After the rink had been at John U. Brandts for two years, it was moved to Jac U. Kornelsen's place. In 1948, when the Plett boys moved to Mexico, the team folded.[1]

This was the story of local sports for many years. Neighbour boys, often without their parents' full approval, got together to play baseball, organize hockey or go swimming. It was not until the 1950s that any local sports activities were really organized.

Unlike the Blumenort School, which took quite a cautious attitude toward sports, the Blumenhof pupils were allowed to form teams and play against other schools. This excerpt from a grade IX student's essay in 1957 reveals the enthusiasm for inter-school sports in Blumenhof:

> This dinner recess there is hockey again. It seems as if it is always hockey. But tomorrow Ridgewood is coming, and we just have to win! Blumenhof couldn't be let down to losing to Ridgewood in hockey. No, that wouldn't work.[7]

By the late 50s the Blumenhof boys had even organized a Hockey Club which played in the Hanover-Tache Hockey League. The level of hockey talent and enthusiasm for the game was shown

by the fact that in 1958 the Blumenhof team won the league championship.

Around 1964 Blumenort received its first public skating rink. For some years before this, Vern and Cornie Fast had had a skating rink in their backyard for their children. It also proved to be an attraction for their neighbours. The need for a public community rink was evident, so an ad hoc recreational committee was formed to improve and operate the facility. The group of people involved in the committee in the first years included: Vern J. Fast, Klaas F. Janzen, Cornie J. Fast, Cornie Janzen, Abe G. Penner, Henry L. Bergman and Leonard Brandt. The first year A.K. Penner and Sons donated some concrete-form plywood sheets for the rink boards, and Fast Brothers undertook to do the flooding with their water truck.

In 1966 the committee set out to build a better rink. With donations from village people and small grants from the RM of Hanover and Ste. Anne, four lots were purchased on First Avenue. Enthusiastic villagers volunteered their help to put up a warming shack, new boards and pole lighting. A program which included public skating and some hockey was introduced. Around this time as well, the ad hoc committee became an incorporated, non-profit Recreational Association. The executive of the association was elected at an annual meeting and was put in charge of all aspects of community recreation.[8]

As Blumenort grew in size, the committee began to plan for a park and even for a possible site for an arena. Because the lot on First Avenue was too small for such an expansion, a 10-acre parcel of bushland was purchased just to the west

of the new school. By the fall of 1980, brand new facilities costing around $70,000 had been completed at the park site. The facilities included a warminghouse which could be attached to a future arena. The park soon became known as the Blumenort Community Centre. In 1981 a 20x30-foot picnic shelter and several barbecues were erected in the park. Future plans called for a children's playground and tennis courts.[9]

Not only did facilities improve in time, but also the recreation organization itself improved. As early as 1969, Blumenort had a Bantam team coached by Don Toews playing league hockey. House leagues and Old Timers' hockey teams followed. A very popular annual winter event which began in the 70s was the family carnival day. Complete with log-sawing contests, hockey games, Blumenort vs. Blumenhof tug-of-wars and relays, the event attracted folks from throughout the area.

To finance and maintain the park, the Recreation Association became eligible for an annual tax grant of about $12,000. This money was derived from a $2\frac{1}{2}$-5-mill tax assessment of Blumenort and area property. The president and secretary of the association in 1982 were Jake Driedger and Jim Wiebe.

Despite a changing lifestyle, the Blumenort people maintained several strong Mennonite characteristics. This statement holds true whether one defines a Mennonite as a member of a faith or of a cultural group. There were few Blumenorters in 1982 who would question the central importance of the church in the community and who would not subscribe to a deep faith in God. But there were cultural traits, characteristic of Russian Mennonites, which also remained. The prevalence of

Low German and the popularity of traditional family gatherings reflect this fact. A survey taken among Blumenort Junior High students in 1982 showed that, although Low German had taken a back seat to English, it was still used extensively. Table 11 shows the results of that survey.

TABLE 11

Junior High Language Survey: 1982

1. What language do grandparents usually speak to their grandchildren? English 41%, Low German 57%, High German 2%.
2. How often do parents speak Low German to each other? Usually 43%, Sometimes 47%, Never 10%.
3. How often do parents speak Low German to their children? Usually 23%, Sometimes 52%, Never 25%.
4. How often do children speak Low German to their parents? Usually 14%, Sometimes 30%, Never 56%.
5. How often do children speak Low German to each other? Usually 0%, Sometimes 34%, Never 66%.

A much more dominant Mennonite characteristic than language was the importance of the family. For most Blumenorters a strong feeling of identity with a certain clan or family line was maintained. The best example of this, no doubt, were the large clan gatherings held in Blumenort in the 40s and 50s.

On July 2, 1945, several hundred descendents of Cornelius S. Plett (1820-1900) gathered at the David L. Plett farm in Blumenhof to celebrate a Plett reunion. Volunteers had erected a platform, temporary benches and even a microphone system. All day the various Plett families participated in a program involving singing, poetry, and family histories. Pletts from as far away as St. Catharines, Ontario, and Santana, Kansas, attended. The interest generated by the gathering resulted in the publishing of the Plett Familienregister in 1953.[10]

Another similar gathering, but of even greater proportions, was the Reimer gathering held on July 8, 1954 at the Blumenort Church. All descendents of Elder Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) were invited to attend. Invitations were printed in both languages in several newspapers. A large tent was set up at the church and seating accommodations for 700 people prepared. As at the "Pletten Tag", the Reimer gathering consisted of an extensive program, complete with singing and family histories. The gathering also saw the beginning of a family geneaological book published in 1958.[11]

While the giant clan gatherings seemingly had become part of a past era by the 1980s, extended family gatherings continued to be an important social event for Blumenorters. Most Blumenort people maintained a close affinity with their relatives, and a child's best friend was often a cousin and not a schoolmate. At Christmas time, family gatherings held a strong predominance over business and school-sponsored Christmas socials. The Junior High Survey mentioned earlier indicated that 88% of local families continued to attend at least two family gatherings at Christmas. Another statistic showing the continued importance of the family was the family size. The average family size of parents between ages 30 and 45 who had Junior High children in 1982 was 4.5 children.[12]

A third indication that Blumenort continued to be a predominantly Mennonite community was the small number of people of non-Mennonite backgrounds who lived there. School registers indicated that only about five per cent of Blumenort students had non-Mennonite family names. Another statistic revealed that,

of the 81 marriages in Blumenort between 1970 and 1980, 86% involved unions between two Mennonites.

The aspect of Blumenort which by 1982 had changed less than anything else was its sense of community. The way people lived together and supported common values had remained firmly entrenched since 1874. Members met each other on the road, at the cafe, in the church or at family gatherings and would share the experience of living together. Blumenort continued to be a community where members worked independently, yet readily convened in times of need, sorrow or joy. Together the community strove to seek the welfare of each member, the positive education of its children and the peace and security needed for its elderly. The community prided itself that it was attractive enough for the elderly to return "home" after living away, and for the majority of its youth to remain to make it their home. Blumenort in 1982 was a community which still sought strength from togetherness, yet was finding an increasing satisfaction from openness.

FOOTNOTES

1 Interview with Ben L. Reimer, Steinbach, January, 1983.
2 Morton, op. cit., p. 452.
3 "Survey of Blumenort Junior High Students," April, 1982.
4 Interview with Melvin Penner, January, 1982.
5 Carillon News, September 4, 1948.
6 Interview with Leonard Brandt, Blumenort, April, 1982.
7 Agnes Hesse, "What Students Think Of," Blumenhof High School Year Book, 1957, p. 17.
8 Interview with Cornie Janzen, Cornie Fast and Henry L. Bergman, all of Blumenort, April, 1982.
9 Interview with Jim Wiebe, April, 1982.
10 Gerhard Thielmann, ed., Bericht von dem Pletten-Tag zu Giroux, Manitoba, 2. Juli, 1945, (Steinbach Post, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1945), p. 1.
11 John C. Reimer, "Reimer Reunion," Familienregister: Klaas und Helena Reimer, 1958, pp. 36-37.
12 "Junior High Survey," op. cit.
13 Blumenort Church, Yearbooks, 1970-1980.

Conclusion

The changes which Blumenort underwent between 1874 and 1982 transformed the community from an isolated, culturally peculiar settlement into a community which had all the appearances of a rather typical Western Canadian town. This thesis has suggested that every aspect of Blumenort society changed under the pressures and opportunities of a new land and of new times. It has also shown that despite these changes Blumenort withstood total assimilation and absorption into mainstream society. Blumenort in 1982 remained very much a Mennonite community, albeit one qualitatively different than the Blumenort of 1874.

This ethnic community was not unique. Blumenort was only one of many communities through-out Canada which adjusted its peculiar characteristics to match more closely the cultural norms of the receiving society. It is this phenomenon which makes the story of Blumenort relevant to Canadian historiography. As the village's dependence on the goods and institutions of the modern state grew and as access to the outside improved with roads and communications systems so did her interaction with the outside. And as the interaction increased in number they also increased in scope. More and more of Blumenort's society came to be affected and in time successive spheres of the community lost their cultural distinctiveness. With each change Blumenort redefined what it meant to be a Mennonite community.

This phenomenon is one which Frederick Barth describes in his book, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. According to Barth, change in ethnic communities can best be understood by focusing on the way in which social boundaries, set up by the community members to define their characteristics and protect the identity of the group, change. Cultural change occurs when the codes which the society erects to structer cross-boundary interaction shift to allow members to advance the economic and social status of the community in a stratified society.

Blumenort is an example of a community with shifting social boundaries. As boundaries changed so did the community's cultural appearance. Some interaction with the Winnipeg market-place was sanctioned from the beginning so long as it did not affect the community's customs, values and language, causing only an increase in the community's economic and social well-being. Technology which assisted agriculture was allowed to cross the border while personal amenities such as moving pictures which would threaten the religious view of the simple life were not. In time the codes regulating the border crossing changed and the car, telephone and newspaper were introduced. Similar changes in the social boundry eventually resulted in an acceptance of the public school system and the English language.

Yet these changes were introduced without the deterioration of Blumenort's ethnic identity. What changed was merely Blumenort's definition of its ethnicity. During World War II it was a young Mennonite's non-resistant stand and not his insistence on the right to speak German, his pietistic lifestyle and not his ethnic dress and diet which defined him as a member of his group. By

the time of Blumenort's third era the social boundary had changed substantially. Certain types of interaction which had been proscribed during the first era because they were seen as posing a threat to the community's identity now were encouraged as a way of protecting that identity. This was particularly true in business. While most early farmers held the belief that hard and successful farm work was a desirable way of maintaining community order, self-sufficiency and God's favor, business enterprises which required a sustained and regular exchange with the outside were discouraged. As it became apparent during the economically volatile time of the 30 and 40s that an aggressive cheese factory cooperative and a privately-owned industrial complex could ensure the economic and social viability of the community, the boundary shifted to allow for almost unlimited market exchange with the outside. Faced with the possibility of an economically weakened community and possibly the breakdown of residential segregation as the poor and young looked to the outside of economic security, the villagers tacitly agreed to shift the boundary. The successful, competitive business enterprise, once the symbol of the "world", now became one of the symbols of a viable Mennonite community.

The cultural symbols of Blumenort, however, were not the only aspects of the community which changed. The very structure of community organization was altered, as was illustrated by changes in the role of the church. During the first era Blumenort possessed a high degree of institutional completeness in which the collective organization of the Kleine Gemeinde church was central to every aspect of community life. In the undifferen-

tiated world of the first era the church actively sought to regulate and define the community boundary and was the support institution behind the school, welfare system, village organization and the maintenance of the German language. As interaction with the outside increased, the church leadership was less able to shape the values of the community, define the boundary and regulate its crossing. Moreover, government assumed the responsibility for the school, welfare and language. As a result the church came to assume a narrower, more spiritual and advisory function as it resigned itself to the realities of a differentiated community in which members assigned their loyalties an increasing variety of institutions.

Despite the changes which caused Blumenort to appear progressively more Canadian it is posited that it remained an ethnic community. Although the codes regulating boundary crossings were relaxed and the symbols defining Blumenort's ethnic identity changed a boundary which protected the integral features of Blumenort's culture from outside influence persisted. The changes in the village did not constitute assimilation, an entire absorption into the white Anglo Saxon Protestant receiving society. Nor was the change part of an amalgamation process in which the Mennonites in Blumenort assumed the identity of an amalgum of Canada's various ethnic groups. Yet, the changes which affected Blumenort were too great to simply designate the community as an inherently ethnic one, thriving unaffected in a culturally pluralistic society.

It is the modified assimilation theory posited by Milton Gordon in his book, Assimilation in American Life, which best

seems to portray what happened in Blumenort. Gordon suggests that assimilation and cultural pluralism can exist side by side. Total assimilation occurs only after an ethnic community has undergone both cultural and structural assimilation. Among most ethnic groups in the United Sates according to Gordon, only the former has occurred; that is, ethnic communities have lost some expressions of cultural distinctiveness such as dress, food, customs and language and are thus able to interact on a secondary level in society. Structurally, however, the members of the ethnic groups have not changed. They continue to see themselves as members of an ethnic group and use this distinction to assert their identity and secure a better position in the larger society. They also carry out their primary, more intimate relationships, with fellow-ethnics with whom a common understanding of life is shared. It is in the primary arena of life, then, that the basic continuation of Blumenort as an ethnic community can be seen. It reveals its cultural marriages and in sharing most leisure and recreational time with the family and fellow ethnics.

Perhaps the most important unit of primary relationship, one which plays a central role in defining the social boundary and one which changes alongside other community factors such as the landscape, economic patterns, religion, education and social life is the family. Tamara Hareven, a social historian, has shown how the family functions as a primary boundary and maintainer of ethnicity. She had also shown how an examination of the family life cycle can assist in the analysis of assimilation. This thesis, too, has suggested the importance of the

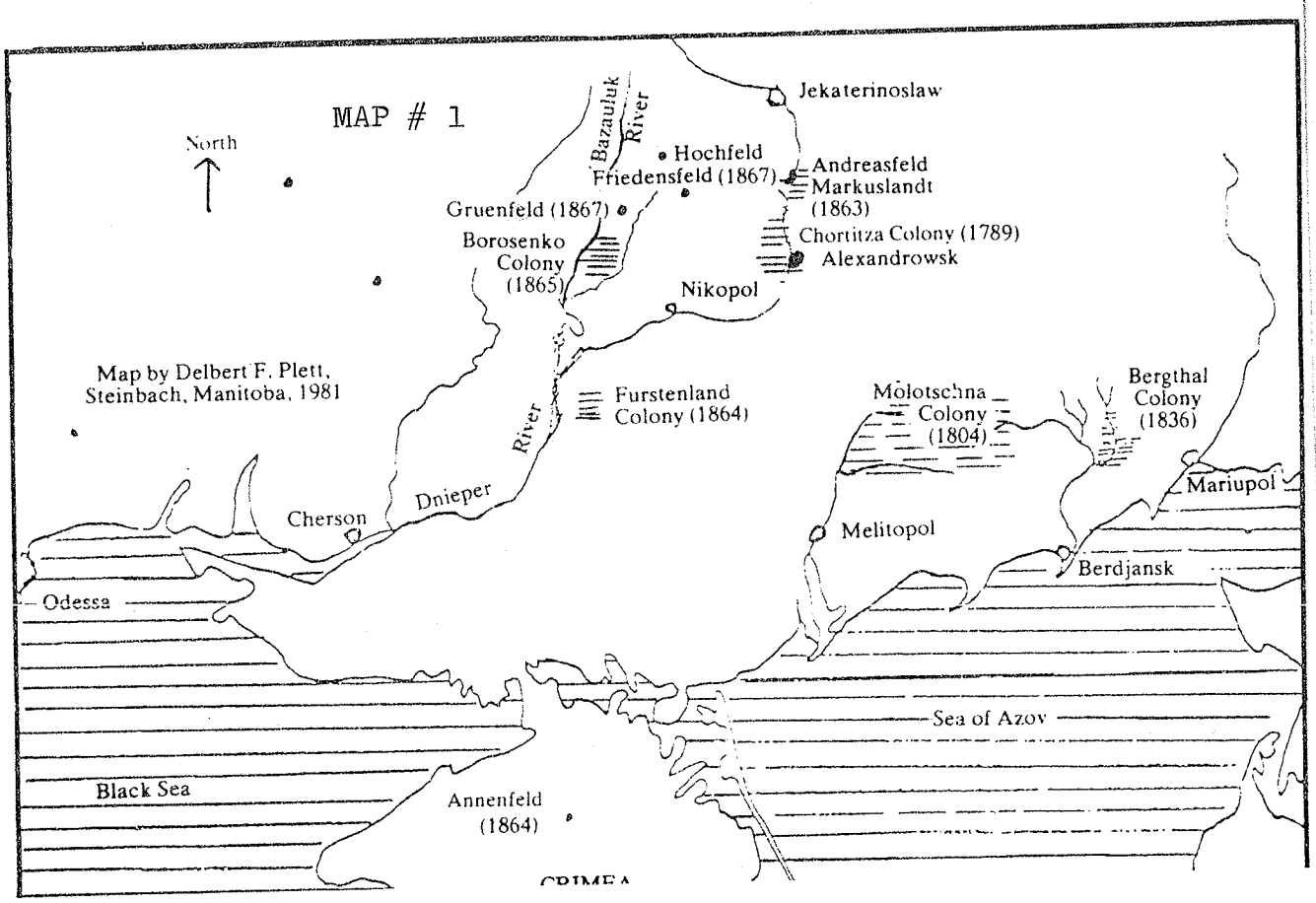
family unit in upholding the ethnic language, traditional religious beliefs, residential segregation, old world social customs and religious holidays of a North American ethnic enclave. These factors are particularly evident in the chapters which describe times of communal stress such as the 1874 migration, the 1882 religious schism, and the World War with their assimilative pressures. A further examination of the family would no doubt have shown that, despite its role as a boundary maintainer, the family itself has undergone substantial changes. The definition of childhood, the attitudes of the youth, the role of the father and the position of the elderly have shifted to reflect new social realities.

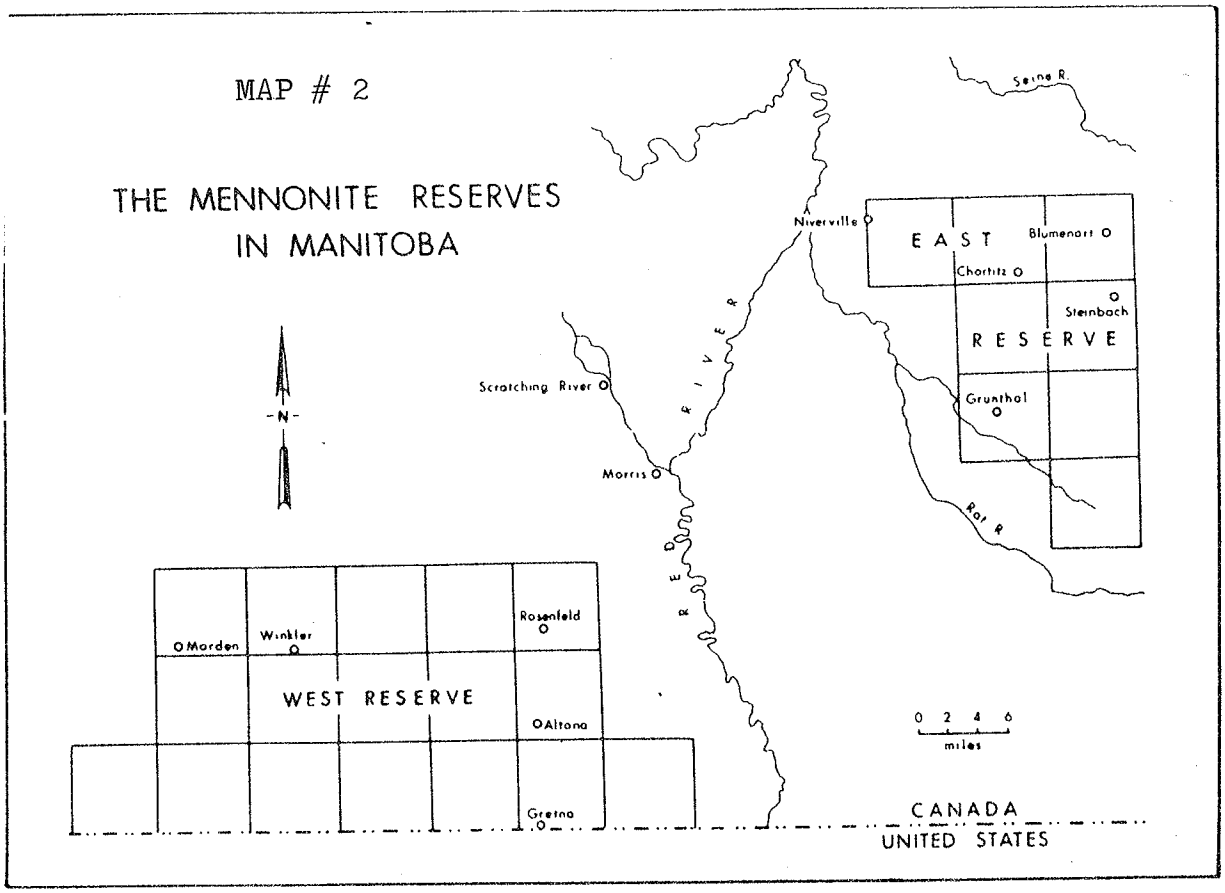
Despite the obvious value of undertaking an elaborate analysis of the family's role in Blumenoort's transition, the central problem of the availability of data remains. Hareven states that the family records which are readily available tend to be census materials which serve little useful function in portraying a dynamic view of the family. Additional research into personal letters and diaries - often treasured family artifacts - as well as many interviews would be required to do justice to an examination of the family as a separate factor in Blumenort's change.

The story of Blumenort, then, has been the story of an ethnic community which has undergone a major cultural change without losing its ethnicity. By 1982 Blumenort had to a large degree been culturally assimilated without losing its strong sense of being a Mennonite place. Many of those cultural traits which would have put Blumenort at a disadvantage in

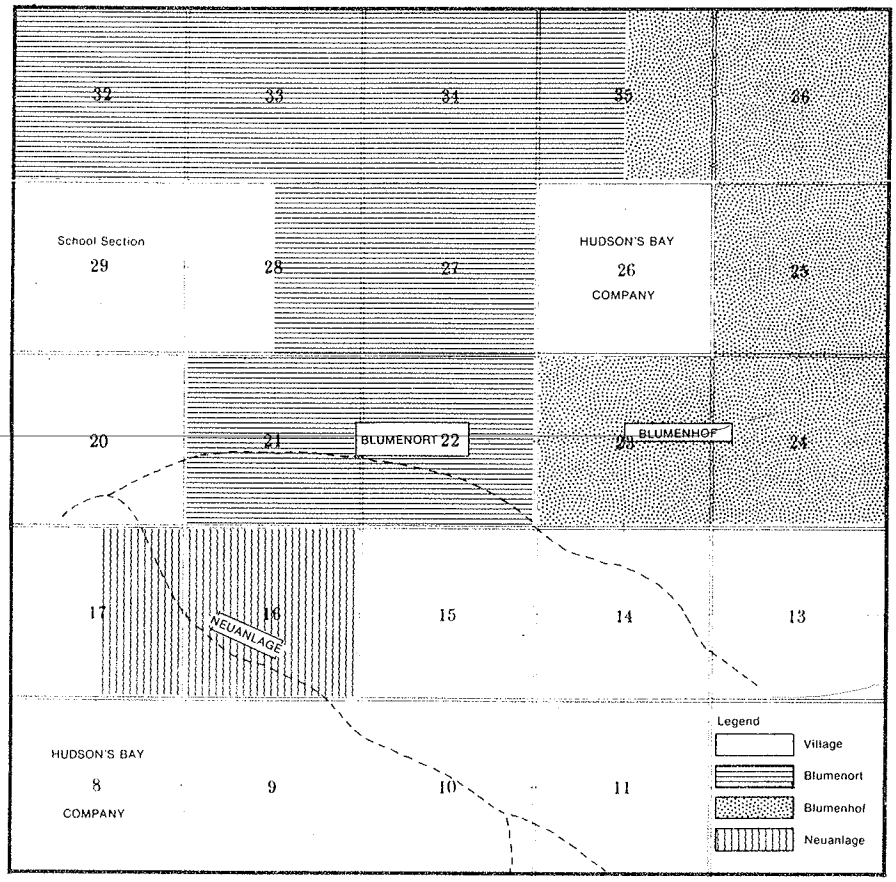
securing economic and social equality within the Canadian context had been put aside. Alongside this reality, however, was a continuing social boundary which defined Blumenorters as Mennonites. In fact there appeared to be a strong belief that there was some gain in self-perpetuation, that the community was stronger from the standpoint of a Mennonite one than from the standpoint of just another small prairie town. It may be concluded that although ethnicity was rapidly losing its descriptive value in Blumenort it had by no means lost its functional value of assisting Blumenorters in maintaining a psychologically healthy and socially stable community.

MAPS


MAP # 1
North
Jekaterinoslaw
Bazauluk River
Hochfeld
Friedensfeld (1867)
Andreasfeld
Markuslandt
(1863)
Gruenfeld (1867)
Chortitza Colony (1789)
Alexandrowsk
Borosenko
Colony
(1865)
Nikopol
Map by Delbert F. Plett,
Steinbach, Manitoba, 1981
Furstenland
Colony (1864)
Molotschna
Colony
(1804)
Bergthal
Colony
(1836)
Dnieper River
Cherson
Mariupol
Melitopol
Berdjansk
Odessa
Sea of Azov
Black Sea
Annenfeld
(1864)
CRIMEA

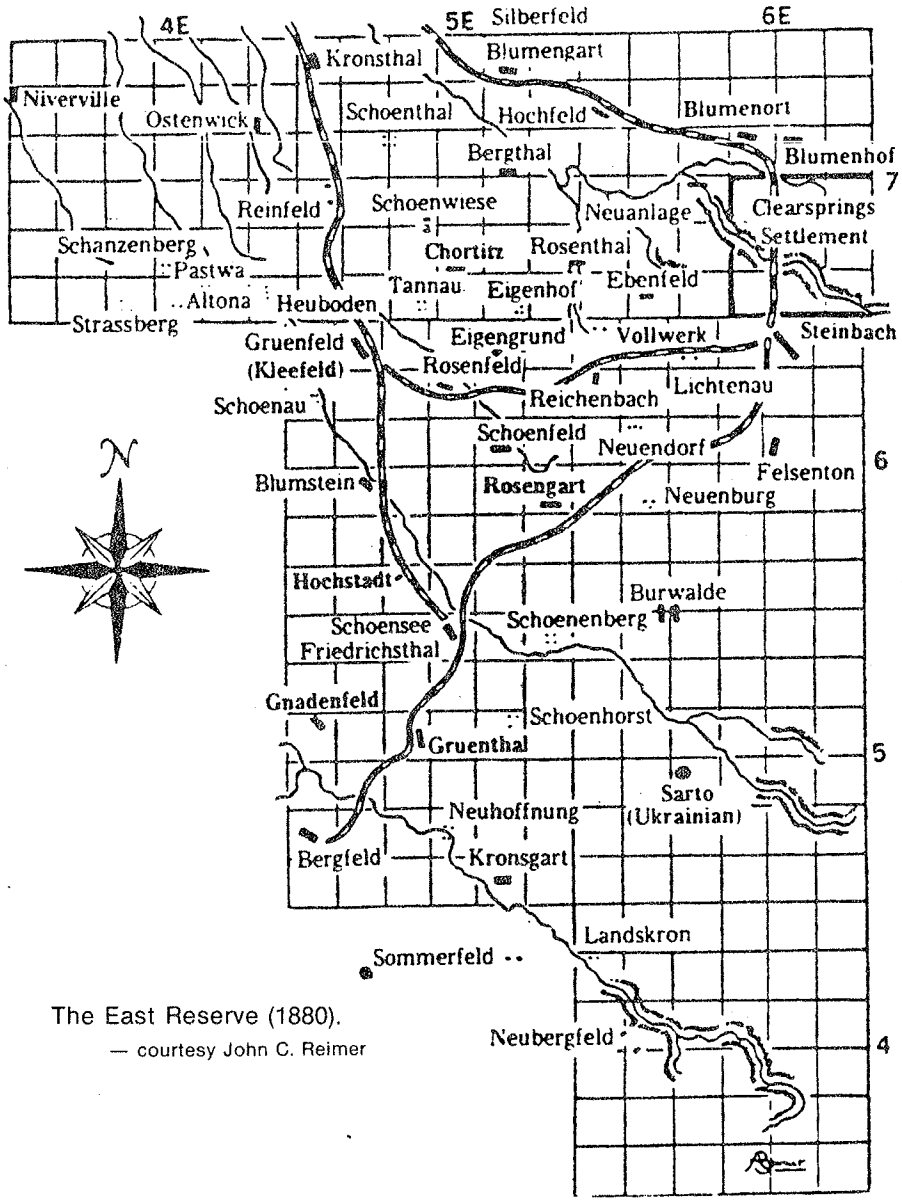

MAP # 2
THE MENNONITE RESERVES
IN MANITOBA
Seine R.
Niverville
EAST
RESERVE
Blumenort
Chortitz
Steinbach
Grunthal
Scratching River
Morris
RED RIVER
Rat R.
N
Morden
Winkler
Rosenfeld
WEST RESERVE
Altona
Gretna
0 2 4 6
miles
CANADA
UNITED STATES

MAP # 3



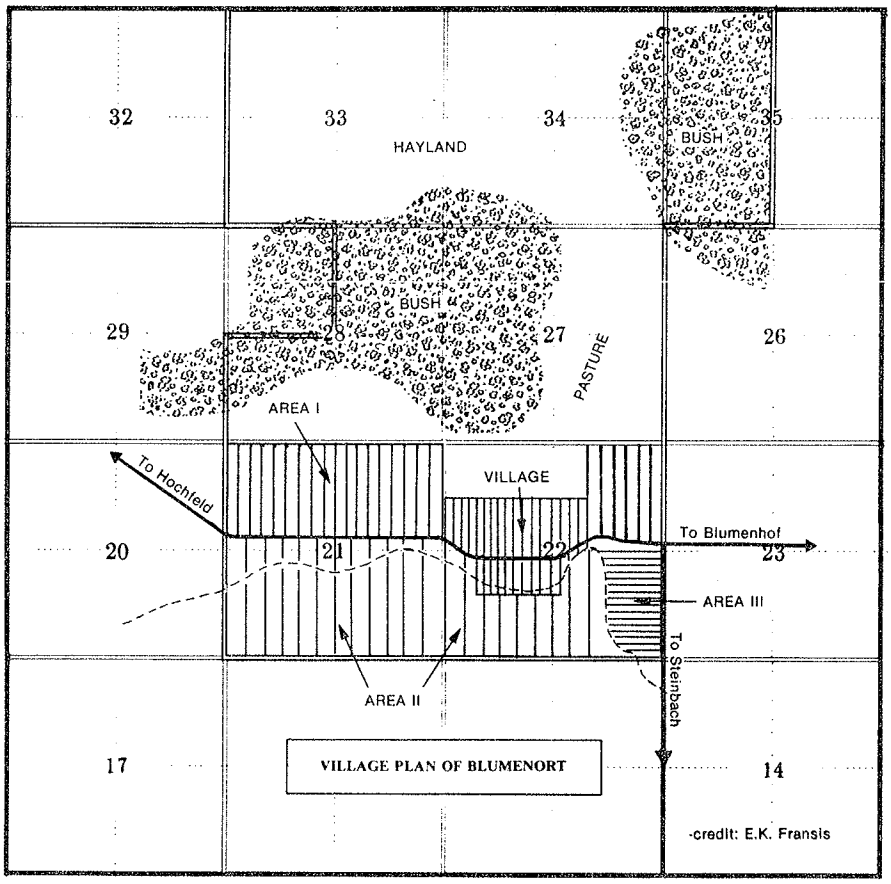
The Blumenort, Blumenhof and Neuanlage Districts (1880).

MAP # 4



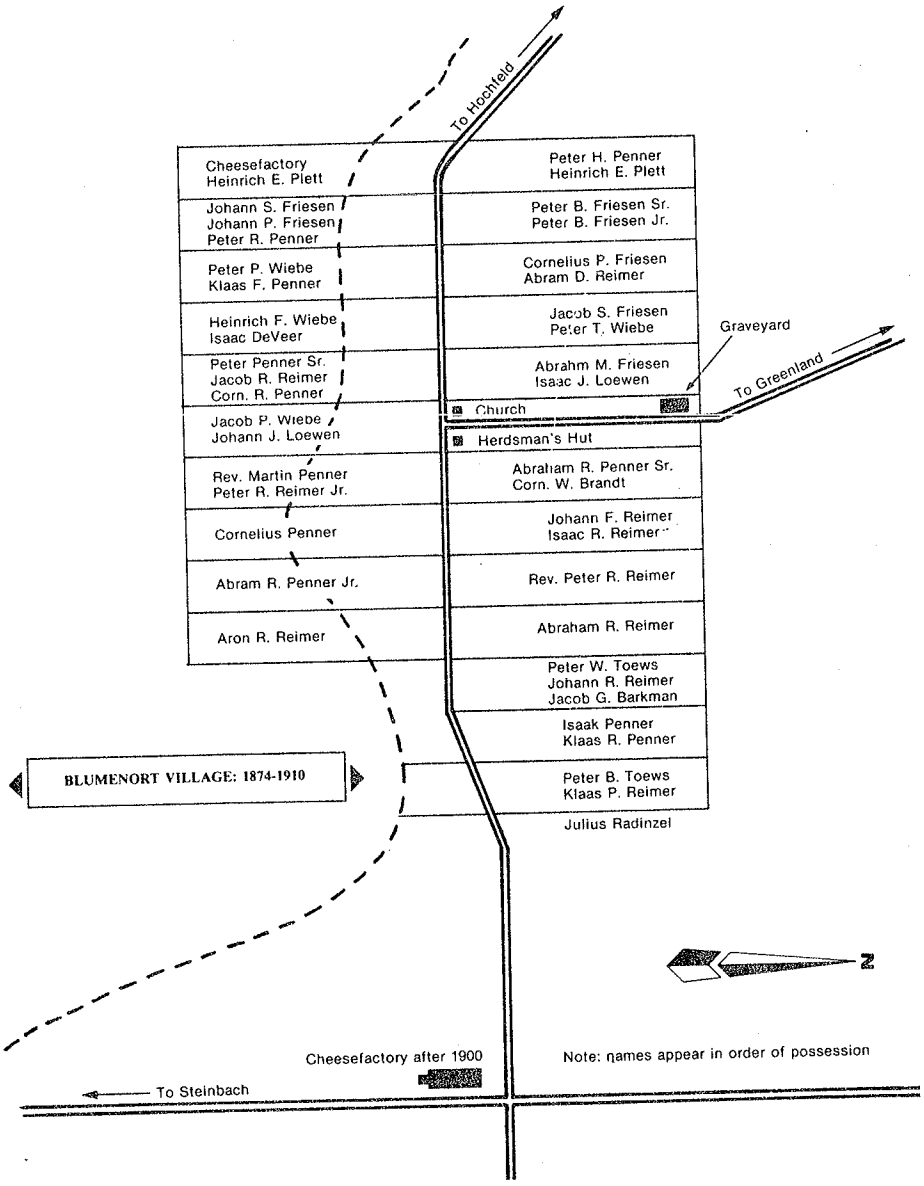
The East Reserve (1880).
— courtesy John C. Reimer

MAP # 5



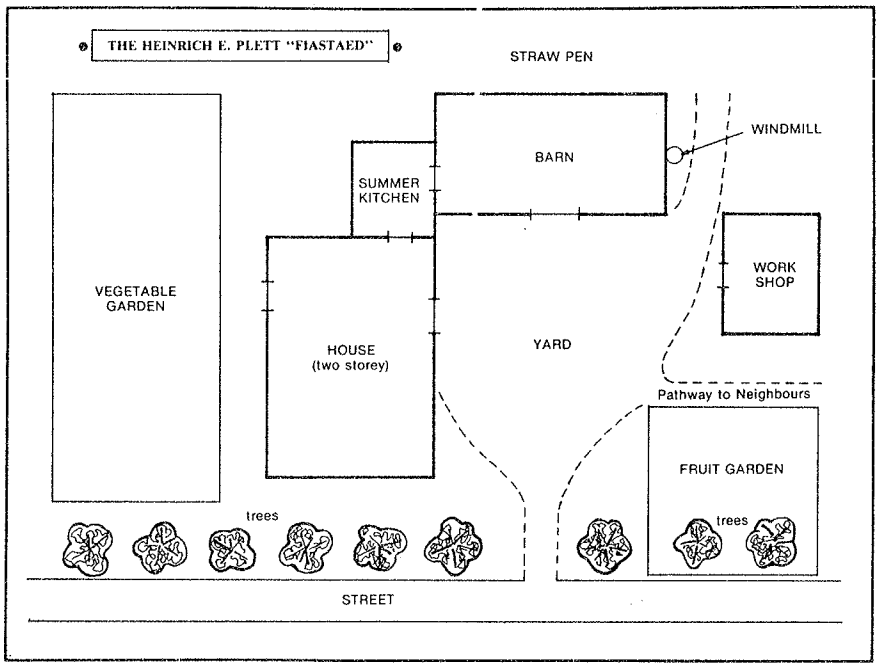
Village plan of Blumenort (1890).

MAP # 6



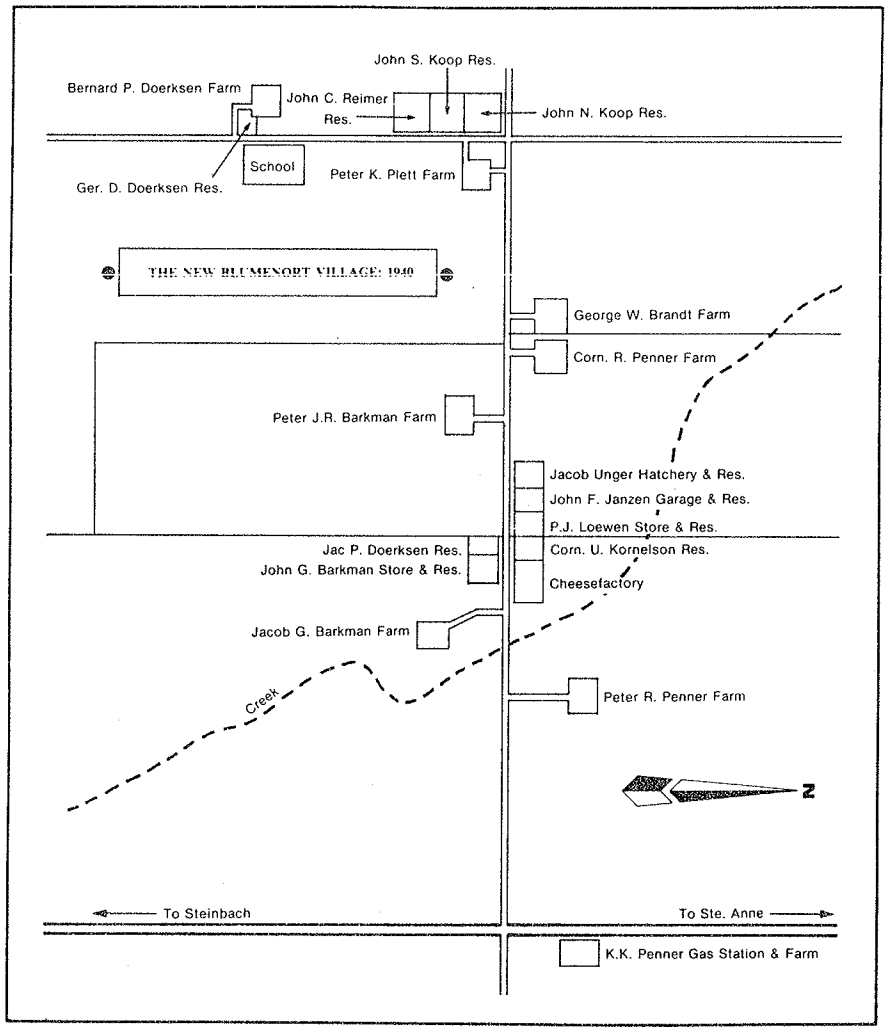
Blumenort Village (1874-1910).

MAP # 7



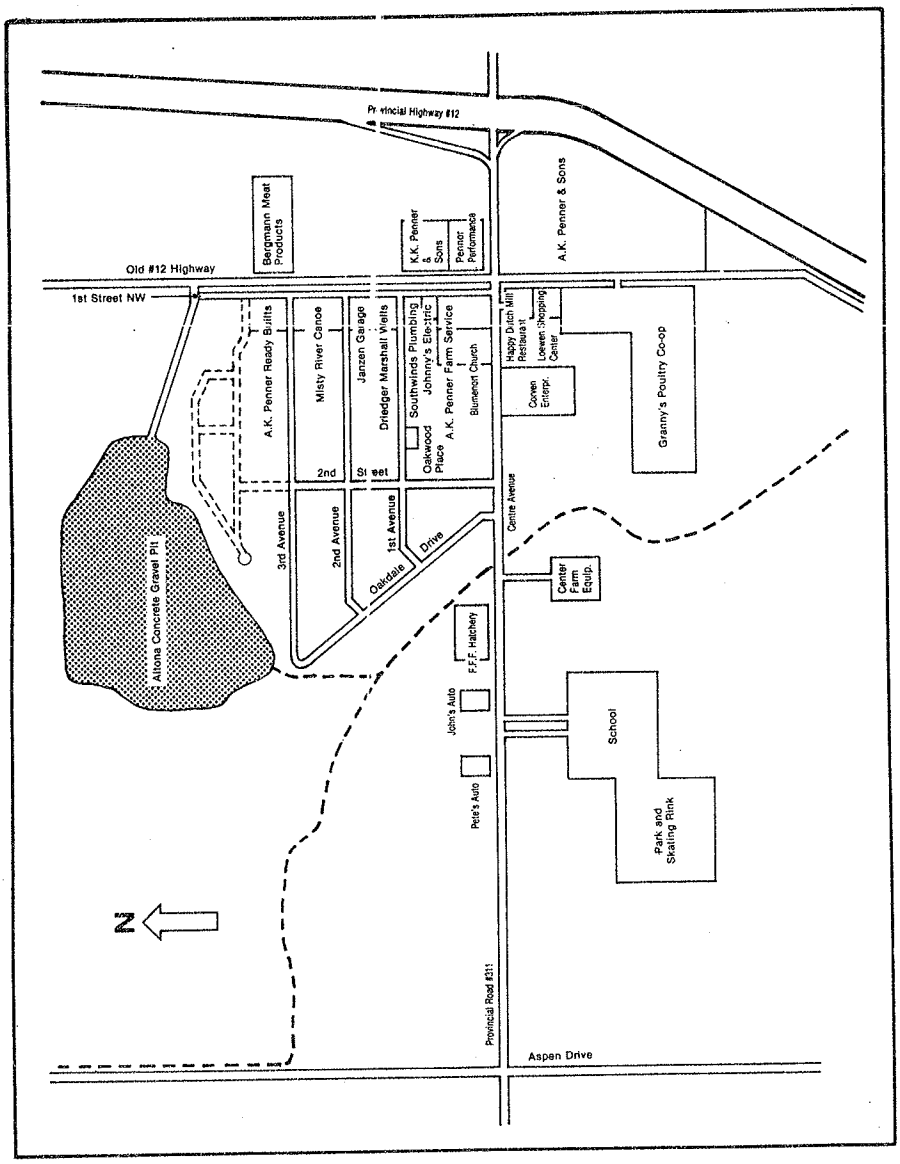
- credit: Rosabel Fast.

MAP # 8



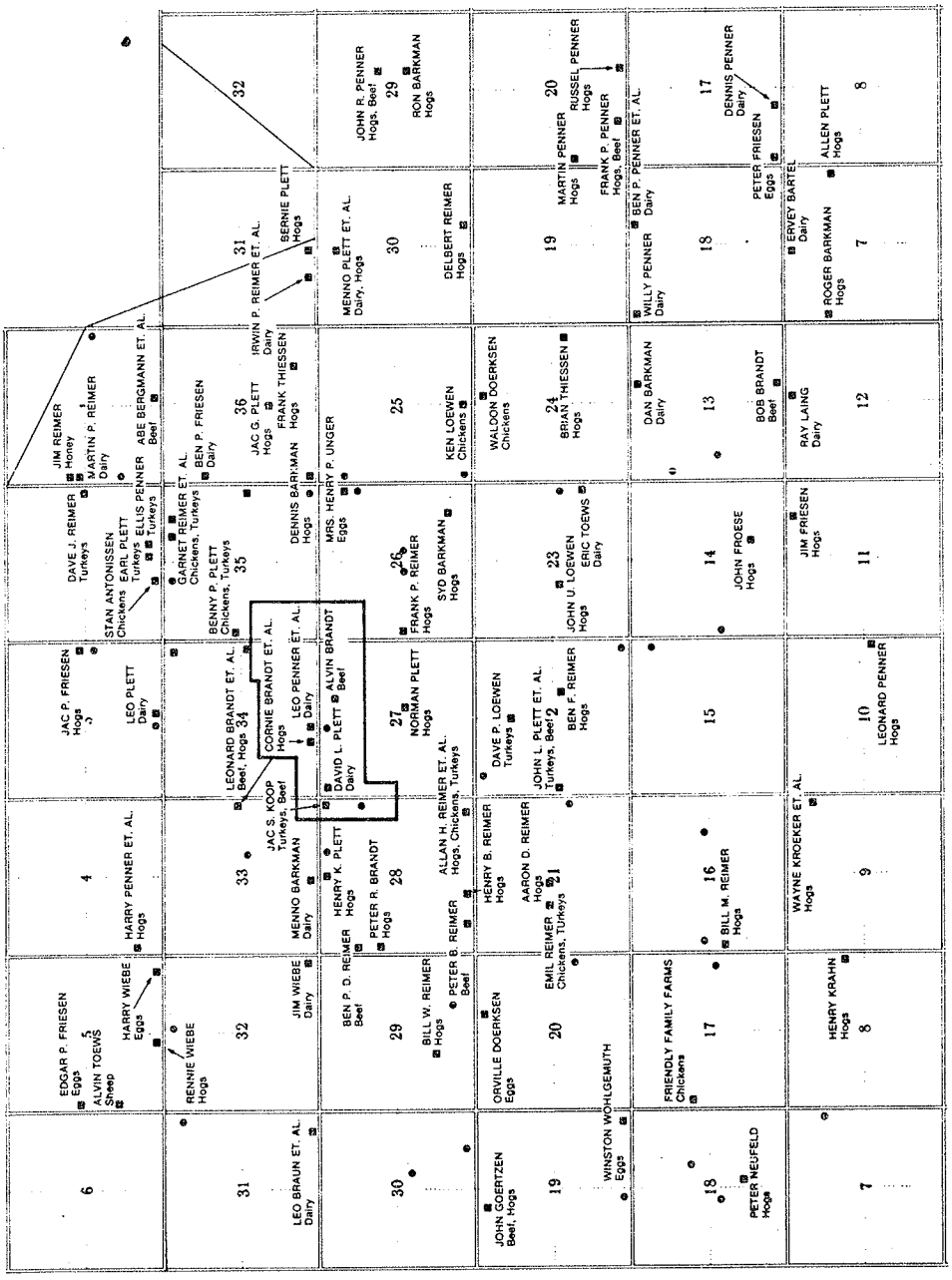
New Blumenort Village: 1940

MAP # 9



Blumenort business district (1982).

MAP # 10



Blumenort farming district (1982).

BIBLIOGRPAHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Articles

Andres, Ron, ed. Silver Jubilee Steinbach DHIA, 1955-1980. Steinbach, 1980.

Artibise, Alan F. J., ed. Town and City Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1981.

Balzer, Heinrich. "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered in a Treatise of 1833." ed. and tr. by Robert Friedman. The Mennonite Quarterly Review, Vol. XXII, No. 2, pp. 75-93.

Barth, Fredrich. Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969.

Bender, Harold S. "Kleine Gemeinde." Mennonite Encyclopedia. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: The Mennonite Publishing House, p. 197.

Breton, Raymond. "Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and the Personal Relations of Immigrants." The American Journal of Sociology. January, 1964. pp. 193-204.

Dahlie, Jorgen and Tissa Fernando, editors. Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada. Toronto: Methuen, 1981.

Driedger, Leo, ed. The Canadian Ethnic Mosaic: A Quest for Identity. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.

Dyck, Cornelius J., ed. An Introduction to Mennonite History. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1967.

Epp, Frank. Mennonites in Canada: 1786-1920: A History of a Separate People. Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1974.

_____. Mennonites in Canada: 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival. Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1982.

Epp-Tiessen, Esther. Altona: The Story of a Prairie Town. Altona, Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1982.

Francis, E. K. In Search of Utopia. Altona, Manitoba: D. W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1955.

Friesen, Gerald and Barry Potyondi. A Guide to the Study of Manitoba Local History. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1981.

Friesen, P. M. History of the Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia. Fresno, California: General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978.

Friesen, Patrick. The Shunning. Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1980.

Funk, John F. "Notes By The Way." Mennonite Reporter. November 25, 1974.

Gibson, James R., ed. European Settlement and Development in North America. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974.

Giesinger, Adam. The Story of Russia's Germans from Catherine to Krushev. Battleford, Saskatchewan: Marion Press, 1974.

Glazer, Nathan and Daniel P. Moynihan. Ethnicity: Theory and Experience. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Gordon, Milton. Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Harevan, Tamara K. "The Family as Process: The Historical Study of the Family Cycle." Journal of Social History, October 15, 1973, pp. 322-329.

Harder, Leland. Steinbach and Its Churches. Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, 1970.

Hiebert, Clarence. The Holdeman People: A History of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, 1859-1969. Hillsboro, Kansas: Tabor College, 1973.

Histories of the Congregation. Hesston, Kansas: Church of God in Christ Mennonite Publication Board, 1963.

Klippenstein, Lawrence. That There Be Peace: Mennonites in Canada and World War II. Winnipeg: The Mennonite C. O. Reunion Committee, 1979.

Koop, George S. Pioneer Jahre in British Honduras. Belize City: National Printers Ltd., 1974.

Kornelson, Jacob U. 25 Jahre in Mexico: Beschreibung Von der Quellenkolonie: 1948-1973. Cuauhtmoc, Chih., Mexico, 1973.

Krahn, Cornelius. "Blumenort." Mennonite Encyclopedia. Vol. I, p. 372.

_____. "Molotschna." Mennonite Encyclopedia. Vol. III, pp. 732-737.

_____. "Villages: Hollaenderdoerfer." Mennonite Encyclopedia. Vol. IV, pp. 821-827.

Morton, W. L. Manitoba: A History. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1979.

Newman, William M. American Pluralism: A Study of Minority Groups and Social Theory. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973.

"One Hundred Years in Our Community." Landmark 4-H Home Economics Club, Landmark, 1970.

Penner, John M. A Concise History of the Church of God in Christ. Hesston, Kansas: Gospel Publishers, 1951.

Penner, Lydia. Hanover: One Hundred Years. Steinbach, R. M. of Hanover, 1982.

Plett, Delbert F. History and Events. Steinbach: Delbert F. Plett Farms, 1982.

Poettcker, Henry and Rudy A. Regehr, editors. Call to Faithfulness: Essays in Canadian Mennonite Studies. Winnipeg: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, 1972.

Reimer, David P., ed. Erfahrungen der Mennoniten in Canada Wahrend des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Steinbach: Derksen Printers, n.d.

Reimer, John C., ed. 75 Gedenkfeier der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada. Steinbach, 1949.

Reimer, Klaas J. B., ed. Das 60 Jaehrige Jubilaeum der Mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba, Canada. Steinbach: Warte-Verlag, 1935.

Reimer, Peter J. B. and David P. Reimer, editors. The Sesquicentennial Jubilee. Steinbach: The Evangelical Mennonite Conference. 1962.
Rempel, P. A. "Borozenko." Mennonite Encyclopedia. 1955, Vol. I, p. 247.
Sawatzky, Leonard. They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971.
Smith, C. Henry. The Coming of the Russian Mennonites. Berne, Indiana: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927.
Toews, John A. A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Hillsboro, Kansas: M. B. Publishing House, 1975.
Toews, Julius and Lawrence Klippenstein, editors. Manitoba Mennonite Memoirs. Steinbach: Manitoba Mennonite Centennial Committee, 1974.
Warkentin, Abe. Reflections on Our Heritage. Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 1971.
Zacharias, Peter. Reinland: An Experience in Community. Reinland, Manitoba: Reinland Centennial Committee, 1976.

Unpublished Manuscripts

Baerg, Peter. Personal church chronicle, 1881-1890. Transliterated by Menno D. Loewen family. Handwritten copy in possession of Klaas C. Penner, Belize, C.A.
Correa, Oscar. "A Geographical Study of Township 7 Range 6 East of the Principle Meridian of Manitoba." Unpublished Research Paper, University of Winnipeg, 1978.
Doerksen, Bernard P. "A Brief History of Haskell County Satanta, Kansas Mennonite Settlement." Unpublished Writing, 1982.
Dyck, Harold. "The Theological Development of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Formerly the Kleine Gemeinde From Its Roots to the Present Day." Master of Divinity Thesis, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California, May, 1977.
Dyck, Henry. "Jacob John Siemens and the Co-operative Movement in Southern Manitoba: 1929-1955." Master of Arts Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1982.
Reimer, Darlene. "Blumenort a Community Study." Unpublished Research Paper, University of Manitoba, November 15, 1980.
Rempel, David G. "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of Their Settlement and Economic Development From 1789 to 1914." Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1933.
Toews, Marg. "The Settlement Process in Provencher: 1881-1911." Unpublished Research Paper, University of Manitoba, 1980.
Toews, Peter. "Sammlung Von Briefen und Schriftliche Nachrichten zur Historie der Kleinen Gemeinde der Mennoniten an der Molotschna." Transliterated by Peter A. Plett and Cornelius L. Toews. Courtesy of Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.
Unger, Peter F. "Denkschrift: 1878-1929." Transliterated by Peter A. Plett. Copy at EMC Archives, Steinbach.
Warkentin, John. "The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba: A study in Historial Geography." Ph.D. Dissertation, York University, Toronto, 1960.

Wilson, Keith. "The Development of Education in Manitoba." Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1967.

Periodicals and Newspapers

Christlicher Familienfreund. 1935-1982. Published bi-weekly by the Evangelical Conference. Copy in possession of EMC Archives, Steinbach.

Die Steinbach Post. 1913-1921. Published weekly by Jacob S. Friesen. Copy in possession of Mrs. Klaas Friesen, Steinbach.

The Carillon. 1947-1982. Published weekly by Derksen Printers, Steinbach. Microfilm copy at the Legislative Library,

Family Histories

Friesen, Abram P., ed. The Von Riesen-Friesen Genealogy: 1756-1966. Steinbach, 1971.

Friesen, C. W., ed. The Peter Penner Genealogy: 1816. Steinbach, 1973.

Giesbrecht, William, ed. The Reunion and History of the G. K. Giesbrecht Family. Flagstaff, Arizona, 1961.

Goosen, Victor, ed. Cornelius Toews Genealogy: 1737-1800. Rosenort, Manitoba, 1981.

Isaac, Peter. A Family Book From 1694 to 1916 and Personal Experiences. Rosenort, Manitoba: Prairie View Press, 1980.

Klassen, Gertrude, ed. The Family Book of David and Aganetha Klassen: 1813-1900. Rosenort, Manitoba: Lark Printing Ltd., 1974.

Loewen, Solomon L. The Descendants of Isaak Loewen. Hillsboro, Kansas, 1961.

Martens, Peter, et. al. The Koop Family Register: 1801-1975. Steinbach: Martens Printing, 1975.

Penner, Klaas C., ed. Ein Familien Buch. Belize City, C.A., 1972.

Plett, Delbert F. Plett Picture Book. Steinbach, Delbert F. Plett Farms, 1982.

Reimer, David P., ed. Familienregister der Nachkommen Von Grosseltern Kornelius und Sarah Plett. Giroux, 1953.

Reimer, Heinrich R., Family History. Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, n.d.

Reimer, John C., ed. Familienregister der Nachkommen von Klaas und Helena Reimer. Winnipeg: Regehr Printing, 1958.

Reimer, Margaret Fast. Familienregister von Witwe Peter P. Reimer. Steinbach, 1965.

Thielman, Gerhard J., ed. Bericht von dem Pletten-Tag zu Giroux, Manitoba. Steinbach: Steinbach Post, 1945.

Toews, John B. Memoirs 1961. Rosenort, Manitoba: Prairie View Press, 1978.

Unger, Jacob R. Silberhochzeit. Steinbach, 1957.

Wiebe, Edwin and Edwin Penner. Jacob T. Wiebe Family Book. Rosenort, Manitoba: Lark Printing, 1976.

Wiebe, Frank P., ed. Genealogy of Jacob Barkman: 1825-1975. Steinbach, 1975.

Wiebe, Frank P., ed. Jacob Wiebe: 1799-1856. Mount Lehman, B.C., 1966.

Minutes, Reports and Bylaws

Blumenhof-Blumenort High School. School Yearbook. Published annually by the school. Copies in possession of Gerry B. Doerksen, R.R. #1, Steinbach.

Blumenhof Dorfsgemeinde. "Account and Minute Book, 1874-1889." Handwritten copy. Transliterated sections by Bernard P. Doerksen. Original copy in possession of Jacob J. Penner, Steinbach.

Blumenort Church. "Brudershaft Protokoll/Brotherhood Minutes, 1948-1982." Typewritten copy on file in the Blumenort Collection, EMC Archives, Steinbach.

Blumenort Church Colonization Board. "Minutes, 1957." Handwritten copy in possession of Dave P. Loewen, R.R. #1, Steinbach.

Blumenort Co-op Cheese Factory. "Board Minutes and Factory Account Books, 1932-1953." Handwritten copy in possession of Henry F. Reimer, R.R. #1, Steinbach.

Blumenort Dorfsgemeinde. "Account and Minute Book, 1881-1909, Village Constitution, Correspondance with R. M. of Hanover." Transliterated sections by Abe R. Reimer. Handwritten copies on file in the Blumenort Collection, EMC Archives, Steinbach.

Blumenort Evangelical Mennonite Church. Church Constitution. Blumenort Evangelical Mennonite Church, 1980.

Blumenort Evangelical Mennonite Church. Church Yearbook. Annually, 1966-1982.

Blumenort School. "Pupil Attendance Registers." 1967-1982. Original copies on file at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg.

Evangelical Mennonite Conference. Yearbook. 1957-1982. Published annually by the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Steinbach.

Granny's Poultry Co-operative. Annual Report, 1981. Granny's Poultry Co-operative, Blumenort, Manitoba.

Kleine Gemeinde Brudershaft. "Brotherhood minutes: 1930-1946." Handwritten copy in possession of Prairie Rose Evangelical Mennonite Church, Landmark, Manitoba.

Kleine Gemeinde Hilfsverein. "Financial Records, 1945, 1946." Handwritten copy in possession of A. D. Penner, Steinbach.

Kleine Gemeinde. "Rechnung Buch (Account Book) 1847-1882." Transliterated sections by David P. Thiessen. Handwritten copy on file in Blumenort Collection, EMC Archives, Steinbach.

Kleine Gemeinde Waisenamt. "Records of dealings with estates, 1913." Handwritten copy in possession of A. D. Penner, Steinbach.

Mennonitschen Brandverordnung. "Feuerregeln der Gegenseitigen Mennonitschen Brandverordnung." Altona, Manitoba, 1919.

Molotschna Mennoniten Gemeinde. "Teilungs Verordnung der Molotschna Mennoniten Gemeinde in Manitoba." Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1902.

Plett & Company. "Financial Records, 1948-1954." Typewritten copies in possession of Mrs. Gertrude Wiebe, Steinbach.

Government Manuscripts and Publications

Canada, Government of, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. "An Historical Reference Guide to the Stone Fort Treaty: 1871." By Ronald C. Maguire, 1980.

Hanover, R. M. of. Steinbach, Manitoba. Council Minutes: 1881-1920. Translated notes by Lydia Penner.

Hanover, R. M. of. Steinbach, Manitoba. Tax Assessment Rolls: 1881-1906.

Legislative Library, 200 Vaughan Street, Winnipeg. Legislative Papers, Prairie Agricultural Census, 1916, 1946, 1976.

Manitoba, Government of, Department of the Attorney General. Land Titles Office, Winnipeg. Land transaction abstracts: 7-6E.

Manitoba, Government of, Department of Mines and Natural Resources. Maps and Surveys Branch, 989 Century, Winnipeg. Surveyors Field Notebook and Homestead Patent Applications.

Manitoba Telephone System, 1313 Border Street, Winnipeg. Telephone directories 1910-1930.

Ste. Anne, R. M. of. Ste. Anne, Manitoba. Tax Assessment Rolls.

Primary Sources (Personal)

Barkman, John G. "Dee Malkstock." An unpublished poem. Tape-recorded copy in possession of Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort.

Doerksen, Gerhard D. "Die Auswanderungs Reise von Ruszland nach Amerika im Jahre 1875." Copy in possession of Peter P. Doerksen, Blumenort.

_____. Personal diary: 1910-1914. Original in possession of Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.

Friesen, Abram M. Personal diary: 1884-1896. Copy in possession of Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.

Friesen, Abraham R. Personal diary: 1860-1884. Original in possession of Harry Friesen, Winnipeg. Copy at EMC Archives, Steinbach.

Friesen, Cornelius P. Sermon preface, 1882. Copy in possession of Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.

Friesen, Elder Abraham. Church petitionary letter to Johann Cornies. May 14, 1842 and October 24, 1843. John E. Friesen Collection, EMC Archives, Steinbach.

Friesen, Mrs. Martin K. Personal account book. Copy in possession of Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.

Friesen, Peter B. Personal account book, 1890-1919. Original in possession of Albert Friesen, Kleefeld, Manitoba.

Kroeker, Jacob. Personal chronicle. Handwritten copy in possession of Peter K. Plett, Blumenort.

Loewen, Peter W. Personal diary, 1874. Copy at EMC Archives, Steinbach.

_____. Personal letter to Johann Harms, 1895. Transliterated by and copy in possession of Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.

Penner, Mrs. Isaac. "In Memory of Heinrich Wiebe." An unpublished poem. Translated by Betty Plett. Original in possession of George R. Wiebe, Greenland, Manitoba.

Plett, Cornelius. Sermon, 1900. Original in possession of Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort.
Plett, Cornelius L. "Denkschrift." Translated by and in the possession of Bernard P. Doerksen, Blumenort.
_____. Personal diary, 1895. Transliterated copy by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.
Plett, Cornelius R. Personal diary, 1920-1948. Original in possession of Mrs. Willy Dueck, Vidir, Manitoba.
Plett, David L. Personal writing, n.d. Original in possession of Peter K. Plett, Blumenort.
Plett, Heinrich E. Personal letter to Cornelius L. Plett, 1925. Copy in possession of Delbert F. Plett.
Plett, Peter A. "Daut Blumenort." Unpublished poem.
Reimer, Abram F. Personal diary: 1886-1888. Transliterated by Mrs. P. J. Loewen. Original at EMC Archives, Steinbach.
Reimer, Abraham R. Personal account book. Original at EMC Archives, Steinbach.
Reimer, Abram R. Personal letter to Elder Jacob Kroeker, 1891. Original at EMC Archives, Steinbach.
Reimer, Heinrich F. Sr. Personal letter to Heinrich and Abraham Reimer. January 21, 1875. John E. Friesen Collection, EMC Archives, Steinbach.
Reimer, Klaas D. Personal diary, 1923.
Reimer, Peter P. Sermon, 1926. Original in possession of Peter P. D. Reimer, Steinbach.
Reimer, Peter R. Sermon, 1899. Original in possession of Henry R. Reimer, Riverton, Manitoba.
Toews, Peter. Letter to Blumenort village people, 1890. Original in possession of Albert Friesen, Kleefeld, Manitoba.
Toews, Mrs. Peter B. Birth list, 1893-1932. Original list in possession of Henry P. Giesbrecht, Ste. Anne, Manitoba.
Wiebe, Heinrich. Personal letter to Klaas Wiebe. December 10, 1876. Original in possession of George R. Wiebe, Greenland, Manitoba.
Wiebe, Peter P. Personal letter to Peter Toews. August, 1874. Copy in possession of Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach.

Interviews and Correspondences

Barkman, John G., Steinbach, Manitoba, August 1980.
Barkman, John J. R., Blumenort, Manitoba, December 1981 and February 1982.
Bergman, Henry L., Blumenort, Manitoba, April 1982.
Bergmann, Abe L., Blumenort, Manitoba, April 1982.
Borne, George, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Brandt, Alvin, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Brandt, Bernie, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Brandt, Bob, Blumenort, Manitoba, March 1982.
Brandt, Mrs. John U., Blumenort, Manitoba, August 1980.
Brandt, Leonard, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Braun, Henry T., Steinbach, Manitoba, January 1982.
Braun, Leo, Blumenort, Manitoba, March 1982.
Doerksen, Ben P., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, November 1981 and January 1982.
Doerksen, Gerry B., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, February 1982.

Doerksen, Henry P., R.R. #1, Steinbach,Manitoba, August 1981 and November 1981.
Doerksen, Orville, Steinbach, Manitoba, March 1982.
Driedger, Jake, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Dueck, Ben B., Steinbach,Manitoba, January 1982.
Dueck, John R., Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Dueck, Norman, Blumenort, Manitoba, April 1982.
Fast, Cornie, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Friesen, Alfred P., Winnipeg, Manitoba, December 1981.
Friesen, Dietrich P., Landmark, Manitoba, March 1982.
Friesen, Jacob W., Steinbach, Manitoba, July 1980.
Friesen, Peter, Blumenort, Manitoba, April 1982.
Friesen, Victor, Steinbach,Manitoba, January 1982.
Giesbrecht, Henry P., Ste. Anne, Manitoba, November 1982.
Hiebert, Jake, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Janzen, Cornie, Blumenort, Manitoba, December 1981.
Janzen, Mrs. Gertrude, Blumenort, Manitoba, December 1981.
Janzen, John N., Blumenort, Manitoba, November 1981.
Klassen, Abe U., Blumenort,Manitoba, January 1982.
Klassen, Jac U., Steinbach, Manitoba, December 1980 and November 1981.
Klassen, John, Blumenort, Manitoba, November 1982.
Koop, George S., Belize, C.A., December 1980.
Kroeker, Mrs. Peter D., Steinbach, Manitoba, September 1981.
Loewen, Dave P., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, December 1981 and February 1982.
Loewen, Mrs. Gertrude, R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, January 1982.
Loewen, John P., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, December 1981 and January 1982.
Loewen, Ken, Blumenort,Manitoba, January 1982.
Loewen, Menno D., Belize, C.A., December 1980.
Loewen, Peter J., Blumenort, Manitoba, December 1980 and November 1981.
Loewen, Peter P., Belize, C.A., December 1980.
Loewen, Mrs. Sara, Blumenort, Manitoba, December 1981.
Penner, Abe G., Blumenort, Manitoba, 1979 and February 1982.
Penner, Abram K., Blumenort, Manitoba, August 1980 and February 1982.
Penner, Elden, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Penner, Jacob C., Belize, C.A., December 1980.
Penner, Jake, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Penner, John D., Winnipeg,Manitoba, September 1981.
Penner, John L., Steinbach, Manitoba, August 1980.
Penner, Klaas C., Belize, C.A., August 1980.
Penner, Leo, Blumenort,Manitoba, March 1982.
Penner, Leonard, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Penner, Margaret C., Belize, C.A., December 1980.
Penner, Melvin, Blumenort, Manitoba, February 1982.
Plett, Ben R., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1979.
Plett, Betty, Blumenort, Manitoba, April 1982.
Plett, Delbert F., Steinbach, Manitoba, January 1981, January 1982, April 1982.
Plett, Mrs. Elizabeth, Blumenort, Manitoba, August 1980 and August 1981.

Plett, Peter A.,Landmark, Manitoba, August 1980 and March 1982.
Plett, Peter K., Blumenort, Manitoba, August 1981 and November 1981.
Plett, Mrs. Suzanna, Landmark, Manitoba, August 1980.
Reimer, Aaron D., Blumenort, Manitoba, March 1982.
Reimer, Ben A., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, December 1981 and April 1982.
Reimer, Ben F., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, March 1982.
Reimer, Ben L., Steinbach, Manitoba, August 1980 and January 1982.
Reimer, Dave J., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, December 1981 and January 1982.
Reimer, George K., Steinbach, Manitoba, February 1982.
Reimer, Henry B., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, December 1981.
Reimer, Henry F., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, August 1980 and March 1982.
Reimer, John C., Steinbach, Manitoba, July 1980 and February 1982.
Reimer, John K., Blumenort, Manitoba, April 1982.
Reimer, Klaas D., Belize, C.A., December 1980.
Reimer, Mrs. Margaret, Blumenort, Manitoba, February 1982.
Reimer, Margaret, Steinbach, Manitoba, April 1982.
Reimer, Mrs. Maria, Steinbach, Manitoba, August 1980.
Reimer, Peter J. B., Rosenort, Manitoba, January 1978 and June 1980.
Reimer, Peter K., Steinbach, Manitoba, January 1982 and March 1982.
Reimer, Peter P. D., Steinbach, Manitoba, July 1980.
Schinkel, Lena, Blumenort, Manitoba, February 1981.
Siemens, Rodney, Steinbach, Manitoba, March 1982.
Struthers, Doug, Steinbach, Manitoba, April 1982.
Thiessen, David P., Blumenort, Manitoba, December 1982.
Thiessen, John, Blumenort, Manitoba, January 1982.
Toews, Ed A., Steinbach, Manitoba, March 1982.
Toews, Frank P., Steinbach, Manitoba, August 1981.
Unger, Abe P., Landmark, Manitoba, August 1980, August 1981, December 1982.
Unger, Cornelius P., R.R. #1, Steinbach, Manitoba, 1979.
Unger, John R., Steinbach, Manitoba, August 1980.
Wiebe, Frank K., Steinbach, Manitoba, July 1980 and March 1982.
Wiebe, George R., Greenland, Manitoba, July 1980.
Wiebe, Jim, Blumenort, Manitoba, April 1982.