

*Steinbach, Manitoba: A Community  
in Search of Place Through the  
Recovery of its Formative Creeks*

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University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
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*A Practicum Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Landscape Architecture*





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**Steinbach, Manitoba:**

**A Community in Search of Place**

**Through the Recovery of its Formative Creeks**

**BY**

**Ronald Mark Dick**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree  
of  
Master of Landscape Architecture**

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*Dedicated to the memory of my father, John Dick.*

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## 1.0 Introduction

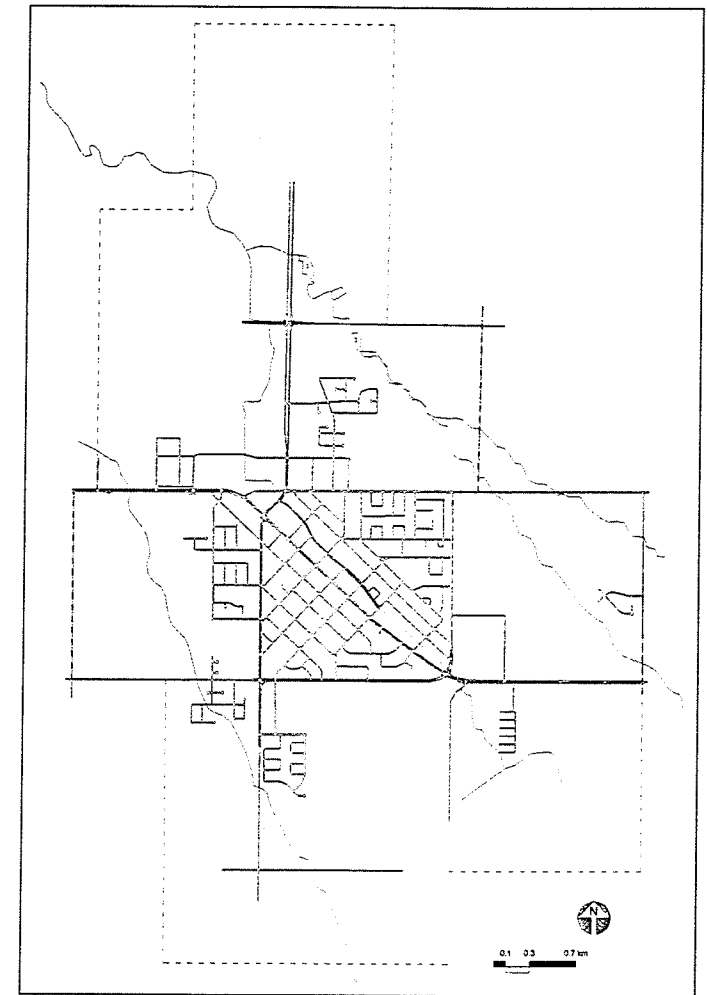
Settlement on the prairies in the late nineteenth century led to a significant population growth in Canada, as a great number of European immigrants transplanted their cultures to a new land. The selection of a suitable location for settlement was undoubtedly a critical consideration for these settlers, as they strove to make the most of a short growing season, and to combat the cold, harsh winters. As the immigrants faced the challenges associated with their new frontier, they relied heavily upon the land for subsistence, and often settled alongside river or stream corridors, which ensured an adequate supply of water and offered some protection from the prairie elements. The city of Steinbach, Manitoba, located approximately 60 km south-east of Winnipeg, is one illustration of this form of early settlement.

Steinbach was established as a farming village in 1874 by a group of 18 Russian Mennonite families who settled on the eastern edge of the *East Reserve* - a land block set aside for the Mennonites by the Canadian government. It was here that these families were able to maintain their highly-praised agricultural practices within their traditional farm village settlement pattern, and were given military abstention, language freedom and provision to exercise the deep religious convictions which were a part of their heritage. As a result, the

village was able to foster a strong cultural identity.

A unique feature of present-day Steinbach settlement, which distinguishes it (and several other Mennonite villages) as an anomaly on the Canadian prairies, is its orientation. When the village was first established, the Mennonite immigrants pooled the individual quarter-section farmsteads they had been given by the federal government, and aligned long, narrow strips of land perpendicular to a short branch of a creek which diagonally bisected the prairie section. Rather than addressing the cardinal directions as the prairie square-mile grid dictated, these properties were thus oriented at an approximate 45-degree skew. What is of particular significance is that these early homesteaders settled in a direct response to the natural landscape, rather than in relation to a human-imposed grid pattern which artificially subdivided the land. The central creek was one of three parallel creeks, all located within the village district, which together constituted Steinbach's unique natural landscape.

Steinbach has greatly prospered and flourished over the past 125 years. Of the many new homes and streets built (within the original square mile section), the majority of these have continued to be aligned in the same orientation - either parallel or perpendicular to the central creek. As Steinbach has grown, however, the historic role and cultural-social-ecological-educational sig-



Steinbach, Manitoba as it appears today. Drawing by author

nificance of its creeks has been largely ignored or severed altogether. Portions of the creeks are in imminent danger of being lost. The central creek, which runs through Steinbach's core (Section 35-6-6E), for example, has been diverted upstream of the city since it is no longer used for agricultural purposes within Steinbach, and has been deemed a spring flooding hazard. As a result, the remaining creekbed is simply a means of channeling runoff accumulated within the city itself. The great reduction in flow has left the creek bed dry for the majority of the summer months, and has additionally resulted in the culverting and infill of significant portions of the original stream channel. As author Michael Hough maintains, "The advancing city has often replaced complex natural environments of woods, streams and fields, with biologically sterile man-made landscapes that are neither socially useful nor visually enriching" (Hough, 1984, 2). In its present state, the central creek simply exists as a dying historical remnant which has been lost and forgotten in the urban matrix. It is an unsightly ditch - biologically sterile and destined to be sunk underground.

### 1.1 The Challenge

The recognition and protection of its area creeks is paramount to a full understanding of Steinbach's unique sense of place. As Steinbach's physical size and popu-

lation continue to grow, the expansion promises to place direct and increasing pressures upon the three stream corridors. In particular, on-going commercial growth within the central core seriously threatens the remaining segments of the central creek. As Hough argues and society demonstrates, "little attention has been paid to understanding the natural processes that have contributed to the physical form of the city and which in turn have been altered by it" (Hough, 1984, 2). What is of utmost significance is that once lost, the creeks may never again be recovered. Such a loss would further demonstrate the severance of humankind's cultural connections to the land, and delicate ties to the spirit of place would be broken. As argued in the following study, it must be recognized that a meaningful future necessitates the integration of human and natural landscapes.

### 1.2 Objectives

The primary objective of the study is to document and preserve the integrity of the Steinbach creeks as physical and symbolic expressions within the context of the city of Steinbach. As such, a significant area of focus will be an examination of the relationship and interplay between natural and human landscapes (i.e. the creeks and street village pattern) as they contribute to the creation of a sense of place.

The secondary objective involves an exploration of the stream corridors as a means for promoting greater connectivity within the city limits, and the identification of significant nodes adjacent to the creeks, which provide the opportunity for an expanded greenspace. Additionally, emphasis will be placed on the recovery of a natural stream process at work within this urban setting, as a means of providing a connection between an earlier way of life and a sustainable future. It is anticipated that by providing a greater presence to the creeks, a clearer understanding of Steinbach's on-going history, culture, and unique settlement pattern may be provided.

### 1.3 Methodology

The process for the completion of this study has included:

- a review of literature pertaining to Mennonite culture, settlement patterns, creek restoration and the meaning of place;
- an examination of historical information relating to the Steinbach creeks and their larger context (documentation, photographs, mapping and personal interviews with members of the community);
- an exploration and analysis of the three Steinbach creeks through reconnaissance sur-

veys, ground and aerial photographs, sketches and available mapping;

- the synthesis of the preceding information in a meaningful design expression which responds to Steinbach's unique sense of place.

The final product outlines a proposed trail and greenspace network associated with the three creeks, along which significant nodes, or communal gathering points, have been identified. One of these nodes, along Steinbach's central creek, is specifically addressed in graphic form as a primary opportunity to celebrate Steinbach's cultural landscape.

## 2.0 An Examination of *Place*

Before proceeding with a specific exploration of the City of Steinbach and its formative creeks, it is perhaps appropriate to ponder the meaning of *place* and the impact it has upon its citizens. What is place and why is it important? What is the process that transforms an ordinary setting into place, and what are the fundamental characteristics which give meaning to place? What happens when the sense of place has been lost, overlooked or inadvertently altered? How can one recover a perceived loss of place or improve upon the existing characteristics of place in order to provide a more meaningful existence for the residents of that place? The following examination addresses these and other concerns in an attempt to contribute to the understanding of place as an underlying theme within this study.

Whether or not we are consciously aware, each of us inhabits or moves within an environment, a locality, a space. Regardless of size or physical characteristics, a space provides the context within which we work, study, travel, play or simply go about a daily routine. As we begin to interact with, address and acknowledge the space on a deeper level, it becomes something more than simply a physical locality. It is gradually transformed into something which is a part of us, something which we define, and by which we, in turn, are defined.

It is through this process, as space acquires definition and meaning, that it is transformed into place (Tuan, 1977).

For each of us, place is a profoundly meaningful construct, which directly contributes to our essential needs for rootedness, purpose and ultimate well-being. Edward Relph expresses that “to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place” (Relph, 1976, 1). Kent Ryden acknowledges that “attachment to place is as natural and necessary a part of existence as eating or breathing, a force which motivates and sustains life. It gives the world structure and meaning; it makes it a comforting home” (Ryden, 1993, 265). As these authors (and many others) maintain, place is of fundamental significance to our human lives. It is a valued environment within which its inhabitants are able to find meaning and purpose.

In his book, *Place and Placelessness*, Edward Relph provides this description of the notion of place:

Places are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world. They are defined less by unique locations, landscape, and communities than by the focusing of experiences and intentions onto particular settings. Places are not abstractions or concepts,



Lake Louise in Banff National Park, Alberta, Canada. While tourists of all ages and cultural backgrounds are mesmerized by the beauty of this spectacular view, their feelings are short-lived. The scene simply represents a celebration of the natural landscape - only one component of place. *Photo by author*

but are directly experienced phenomena of the lived-world and hence are full with meanings, with real objects, and with ongoing activities. They are important sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centres of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties. Indeed our relationships with places are just as necessary, varied, and sometimes perhaps just as unpleasant, as our relationships with other people (Relph, 1976, 141).

From this definition, place can be understood as a valued environment composed of two fundamental parts. The first element is the **natural landscape** - a landscape uninfluenced by human contact. Although few, if any, of our natural surroundings can be truly considered pristine, as human hands and influence have pervaded virtually every corner of the globe, nevertheless, in a theoretical sense, the natural landscape is the primary component in the understanding of place. While the natural order is, by definition, unknown and un-experienced space, it has embedded within it intrinsic properties which, once experienced, provide direction to the realization of place. Each natural landscape is associated with its own unique geographic conditions (geomorphology, climate, vegetation and other charac-

teristics) which distinguishes it from other areas. Together, these characteristics contribute to an enriched, heightened experience of this environment. The intrinsic properties embedded within this natural landscape often evoke the same response from different people of varying ages and cultural backgrounds. For example, tourists from across the globe are often struck by similar reactions when confronted by the awesome beauty of Lake Louise in Canada's Banff National Park, the unbounded spectacle of the Grand Canyon or the vast emptiness of the Sahara Desert. However, while the experience may be filled with awe and wonder, it is still just a momentary, fleeting glimpse which soon falls into the background of our memories. Place, in this sense, is understood as a purely physical landscape, and its significance is short-term. There is little interaction between the landscape and the observer. It is an experience foremost of the eyes and only secondarily by other senses of sound and smell. The natural landscape provides the framework for place but cannot, in and of itself, provide meaning to place. The intrinsic properties of the natural landscape, which provide direction to the realization of place, must be acted upon.

The second element in examining place is focused entirely upon the **human-made environment**, and the various activities associated with being human. Such is the experience found within many of today's modern

cities of the Western world. Here, in its extreme form, the danger exists that the environment can readily become artificial and contrived. Life can operate within a vacuum. The predominance of uniform skyscrapers designed independently of climatic conditions, for example, makes it difficult to distinguish Los Angeles from New York. It can become an egocentric approach to place-making. It is often an attempt to make cities appear familiar and visitors to feel at home, but in the process making no place feel like home. The multitudes of theme parks and tourist resorts are an example *par excellence* of this superficial and escapist approach to place-making (although in these situations, this effort is quite intentional). The attempt to create place rather than allowing it to be shaped in recognition of the existing natural conditions, results in a superficial, generic construction of place with contrived meaning. Rather than allowing people to bring their experiences and focus them onto a particular setting in an interactive fashion, a pre-determined meaning is thrust upon them in this human-made environment. The result is that the participant can never become more than a visitor in this environment, regardless of how often he/she participates within it. The essential notion of rootedness to place, of belonging - the factors which we associate with being "at home" - can never be fully realized in this environment.

Place is only fully achieved through the combination of the previous two elements to create a composite layer called a **cultural landscape** - a synthesis of the natural physical environment and the human condition. Christian Norberg-Schulz describes a cultural landscape as "an environment where man has found his meaningful place within the totality" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, 40). It represents moving beyond simply viewing a landscape to living within it and discovering what it is about (i.e. the transformation of space to place). It encompasses an understanding of the natural landscape of a particular setting and the meaning derived from everyday human activities and experiences within that setting. As Yi-Fu Tuan maintains,

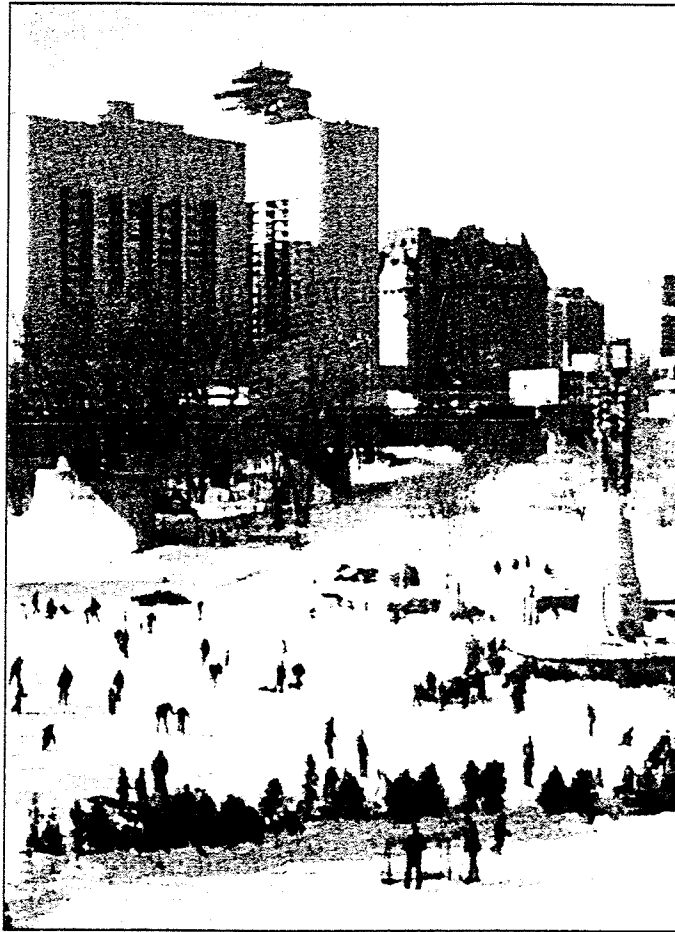
... the 'feel' of a place takes longer to acquire [than abstract knowledge about a place, or the visual quality of an environment]. It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. It is a unique blend of sights, sounds, and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms such as times of sunrise and sunset, of work and play. The feel of a place is registered in one's muscles and bones (Tuan, 1977, 184).

Particularly significant is the notion that place is



A generic cityscape, characterized by uniform skyscrapers designed independently of unique site and climatic conditions, typifies the attempt to "make place" in a human landscape, rather than allowing place to be revealed.  
Photo by author





The Forks, located at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, is an excellent example of a rich and celebrated cultural landscape - a synthesis of the natural physical environment and the human condition. *Photo by Dave Reede in Going Places*

embedded in the familiar, seemingly mundane activities of regular people engaged in acts of repeated ritual. Neither a unique natural location nor the composition of human physical elements is enough to generate this sense of place independently. The natural and human landscapes must co-exist in a harmonious union in order for place to be fully realized. Kent C. Ryden suggests that "Place is created when experience charges landscape with meaning" (Ryden, 1993, 221).

The habitual human customs and resultant experiences that give meaning to place naturally occur over a significant period of months and years. Time, therefore, is intrinsic to the idea of place. "Any contemplation of place, then, is temporally complex, looking simultaneously at the formative past, the impending future, and the ephemeral present which separates the two; a meditation on place is necessarily a meditation on time" (Ryden, 1993, 256). History, in particular, is an essential factor in this understanding of place. The accumulation of stories and experiences developed over time in a certain location, provides meaning to place for the holder of those stories. When combined with additional personal histories from several others attached to that same landscape or setting, a greater diversity and heightened sense of place is achieved. One could not even begin to speak of a sense of place without the specific historical accounts of its long-time resi-

dents. "The process of living through time, looking around, and listening to others makes local residents aware of the things that happened there before they came along, even if those things are not prominently commemorated in the landscape" (Ryden, 1993, 64). Yi-Fu Tuan describes place as "time made visible, or place as memorial to times past" in which time is "motion or flow and place as a pause in the temporal current" (Tuan, 1977, 179). Place, in this sense, encapsulates all of the past experiences and events associated with a particular locale and depicts them as a significant moment in the present - as a pause in the movement of time. The history of place is additionally significant in this sense because it not only provides a basis for the understanding of present place, but ultimately gives meaning and purpose to the future of place. Just as it is difficult for someone to plan a future without an understanding of his/her past, it is impossible to give meaningful future direction to place without an understanding of the factors (events, experiences, circumstances) which underlie the historical formation of that particular landscape.

The act of living in a particular physical setting or place is also intuitively linked to the notion of community. Whether community refers to home, region or even nation, it nevertheless implies a belonging to something larger - a significant source of identity. As Edward Relph maintains, "An authentic sense of place is above

all that of being inside and belonging to your place both as an individual and as a member of a community, and to know this without reflecting upon it" (Relph, 1976, 65-66). Through the act of inhabiting a specific landscape over time and developing a communal history within its confines, a meaningful sense of place is cultivated. "The relationship between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other, and in which the landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements" (Relph, 1976, 34). This reciprocal relationship acknowledges that an authentic sense of place cannot exist apart from the notion of community and vice versa. Furthermore, "A sense of place implies that a community has an accurate reading of its past and present and some idea regarding its future. It is an indication that a small town understands its uniqueness" (Barker, 1979, 164). Without this unique sense of place which sets an area apart from neighbouring localities, the idea of community is nothing more than a collection of buildings, towns or cities inhabited by isolated individuals who lack an identity.

In the examination of place, various key components must be recognized to ensure that a community has captured its unique identity or sense of place. Firstly, according to Christian Norberg-Schulz, "A study of

man-made place... ought to have a *natural* basis: it should take the relationship to the natural environment as its point of departure" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, 50). Through topography, geomorphology, vegetative cover, presence/absence of water and numerous other indicators, the natural landscape provides the blueprint wherein humanity can dwell. In particular, "If man-made places are at all related to their environment, there ought to exist a meaningful correspondence between natural conditions and *settlement morphology*" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, 171). The careful positioning and patterning of human settlement as dictated by nature, are critical steps in the recognition and understanding of place. By responding favourably to these indicators, the identity of place is realized, and the opportunity for the creation of a cultural landscape is provided.

Secondly, in its intrinsic relationship with time (and history in particular), place must be understood as more than simply a collection of historic elements - i.e. buildings, artifacts, stories, etc. Place is continually changing and evolving as new histories are created with each passing moment. "To respect the *genius loci* [spirit of place] does not mean to copy old models. It means to determine the identity of the place and to interpret it in ever new ways. Only then we may talk about a *living tradition* which makes change meaningful by relating

it to a set of locally founded parameters" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979, 182). In recovering a lost sense of place, Relph echoes Norberg-Schulz and further suggests that "The possibilities for maintaining and reviving man's [sic] sense of place do not lie in the preservation of old places - that would be museumisation; nor can they lie in a selfconscious return to the traditional ways of placemaking - that would require the regaining of a lost state of innocence. Instead, placelessness must be transcended" (Relph, 1976, 145). Relph suggests planning variety into the secular city as a means of transcending placelessness, but acknowledges that "It is not possible to design rootedness nor to guarantee that things will be right in places, but it is perhaps possible to provide conditions that will allow roots and care for places to develop" (Relph, 1976, 146). Amidst an understanding of the flexible, adaptive nature of place over time, the sense of place of a given locality must nevertheless continue to remain anchored in its founding truths or principles.

A third significant component of place is the recognition that it must have multiple layers of meaning within its construct. This ensures that an understanding of the sense of place of a given locale is accessible to a wide range of potential participants. In examining the sense of place in Mississippi small towns, James F. Barker acknowledges that the meaning of place must

be simple enough so that visitors and younger residents can appreciate place on a level that is consistent with their experience of that place. At the same time, the sense of place must be complex in its multi-layered form so that long-term residents can continue to generate meaning and purpose from place for years to come without becoming bored or dissatisfied with their surroundings (Barker, 1979). The challenge lies in recognizing the balance whereby human influence does not force the creation of place in a trite meaningless fashion, but rather assumes a subservient, directive role in allowing place to be revealed.

The meaning of place is as varied as the experiences of the inhabitants of place. It is at once simple and complex. It is a real part of our everyday existence, yet triggers our memories with images of the past and charges our imaginations with visions of the future. The realization of place involves a careful synthesis of the human element and a natural environment, thereby resulting in a cultural landscape. A successful synthesis recognizes the symbiotic relationship which exists between the human spirit and natural conditions. Humanity, after all, shares an important role in the natural system of creation. The human act of place-making simply identifies and builds upon the natural indicators or "blueprint" which nature has already provided. Thus, in its truest form, place-making is not an intervention

upon the land, but rather, a recognition of the spirit of place.

As a suitable culmination to this discussion, J. B. Jackson provides these concluding thoughts from his book, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time*:

So one way of defining such localities would be to say that they are cherished because they are embedded in the everyday world around us and easily accessible, but at the same time are distinct from that world. A visit to one of them is a small but significant event. We are refreshed and elated each time we are there. I cannot really define such localities any more precisely. The experience varies in intensity; it can be private and solitary, or convivial and social. The place can be a natural setting or a crowded street or even a public occasion. What moves us is our change of mood, the brief but vivid event. And what automatically ensues, it seems to me, is a sense of fellowship with those who share the experience, and the instinctive desire to return, to establish a custom of repeated ritual (Jackson, 1994, 158).

### 3.0 The Human Landscape

An examination of *place* has led to the suggestion that it is composed of two primary components - human and natural landscapes. Only through their balanced interaction does place achieve meaning. In order to obtain an understanding of Steinbach, Manitoba as place, it is therefore paramount to examine each of these components in greater detail. It must be acknowledged from the outset that exploring human and natural landscapes independently is an impossibility, since human activity must occur within a locality or context; conversely, the examination of a natural landscape is invariably subject to human contact and interpretation. Nevertheless, in order to provide an organizational framework for this study, the relevant human and natural landscapes will be first addressed separately as much as possible. A following chapter will then undertake to explore how the interplay between these two components has unfolded in the city of Steinbach.

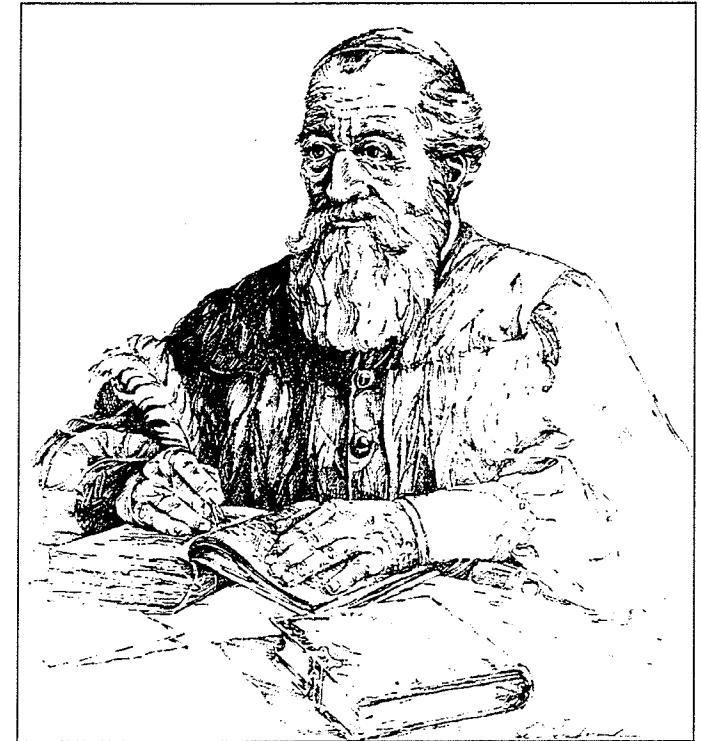
The historical account outlined below specifically examines the Mennonite human landscape – the founding pioneers of Steinbach, Manitoba. As such, it provides a brief and rather compressed synopsis of Mennonite origins, and an exploration of Mennonite faith and social structures, which have impacted their

unique settlement formations over the centuries.

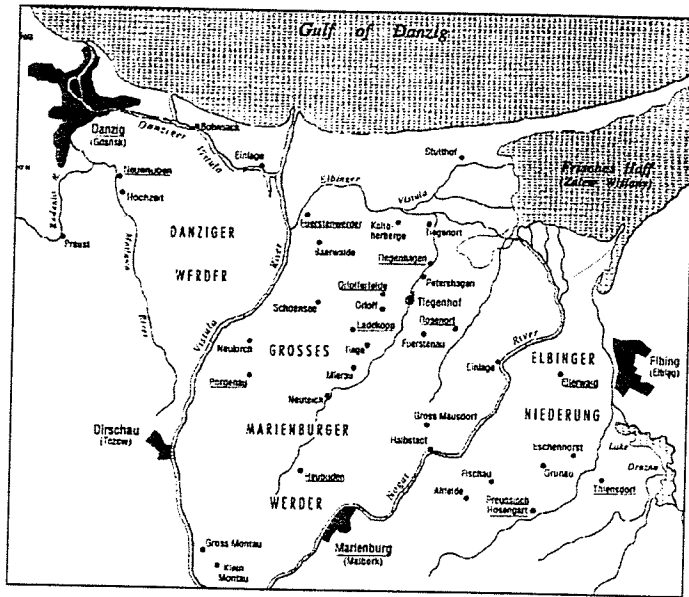
#### 3.1 Mennonite Origins

Today's Mennonites are a diverse group of people whose shared history stems from the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation in Switzerland, where the Anabaptist church reform movement first appeared. In addition to its harsh criticism of war (especially as fought in the name of the Church), objections to the sacraments of the Catholic mass and reaction against the existing union of church and state, Anabaptism arose in its rejection of the uniform baptism of infants within this church-state political system. Contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church, Anabaptists advocated the baptism of adult believers only, which initially meant the "re-baptism" of many, hence the name "Anabaptism". The movement quickly spread throughout northern Europe despite widespread persecution, and, under the leadership of a former Catholic priest, Menno Simons (c. 1496-1561), a following of "Menists" or "Mennonists" (later called "Mennonites") emerged in Holland in 1536.

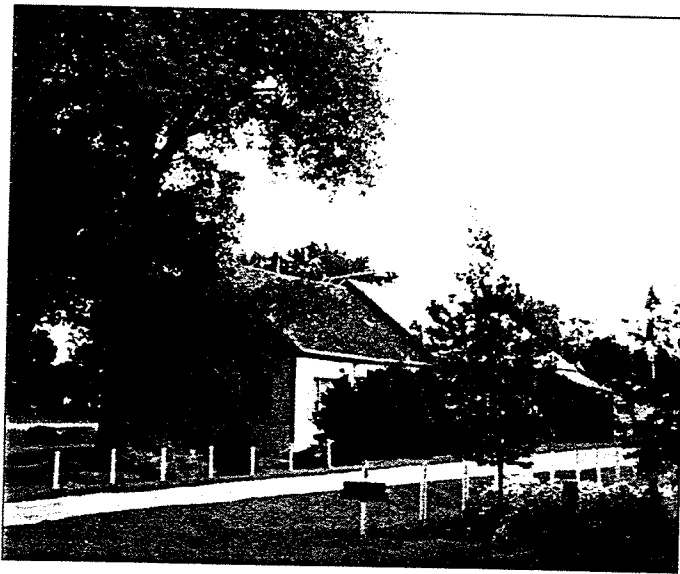
In adherence to their Anabaptist convictions, Mennonites were particularly noted for their belief in the ultimate authority of the Scriptures, adult baptism, the separation of church and state and a doctrine of paci-



Menno Simons (c. 1496-1561), a capable leader and adamant Anabaptist follower, was credited with the founding of the Mennonites (who bear his name) in Holland in 1536. Sketch by Lee Toews Sundmark, inspired by a painting by Alexander Harder



Mennonite settlement in the Vistula Delta, Northern Poland. Map by Schroeder and Huebert in Mennonite Historical Atlas



An existing Mennonite house-barn, still in use today as a hobby farm, in Neubergthal, Manitoba. Photo by author

fism (non-resistance). Since these ideologies threatened to undermine the power of the larger Church, many early Anabaptists (including Mennonites, who were viewed as “radicals” within this movement) were condemned as heretics, hunted, jailed, tortured and, in many cases, killed for their faith.

### 3.2 Historical Mennonite Settlement Patterns

As the religious persecution in the Netherlands intensified, many Mennonites fled to the Danzig (present-day Gdansk) region of Northern Poland - a low-lying area subject to frequent flooding - where they were promised religious freedom. Amidst famine, severe swamp fever and continued persecution, the Mennonites persevered to become very successful farmers in a formerly uninhabitable landscape. Arkadiusz Rybak, Director of the Agriculture Experimental Station in Stare Pole, Poland, maintains that the immigrating Mennonites “rescued the marshlands of the Vistula and Nogat Delta, for, despite all efforts of the administration and government of that time, no other group of settlers from western Europe was prepared to settle these lowlands” (Rybak, 1992, 216). Rybak continues his assessment by stating:

This task of draining more marshland, as well as regaining lands that had once

been settled, required great skill and knowledge. Increasing immigration of Mennonites from the Netherlands had a very beneficial impact on the agricultural development of the Danzig and Elbing lowlands (Werder), the Tiegenhof “Ökonomie,” as well as the large and small Marienburg lowlands (Werder), for the Mennonites brought with them advanced hydrological skills (Rybak, 1992, 217).

Many of the Mennonites settled in villages built along the dikes of canals or streams. Here, their individual farmyards commonly consisted of one large dwelling in which the hay shelter, animal barn and house were all under one roof. This so-called “Dutch house” (later called a Mennonite house-barn) was to be an enduring housing form, which was later commonplace in both Russia and North America. The morphology of the farm village, as described by John Warkentin below, would also prove to be an enduring prototype for centuries to come:

On the Nogat-Vistula Delta the lands had been wet, and all areas had been well supplied with trees, meadows, and water. Rural settlement there had been in *Marschufendörfer* [author’s italics], each farmer lived on his own rectangular block of land, and the various plots and houses

of each settlement fronted on the main road. Farms stretched side by side in long narrow strips or *Gelange* [author's italics], each supposedly containing everything needed for farming, meadowland by the stream, beyond which lay the arable, grazing and forest land (Warkentin, 1960, 528).

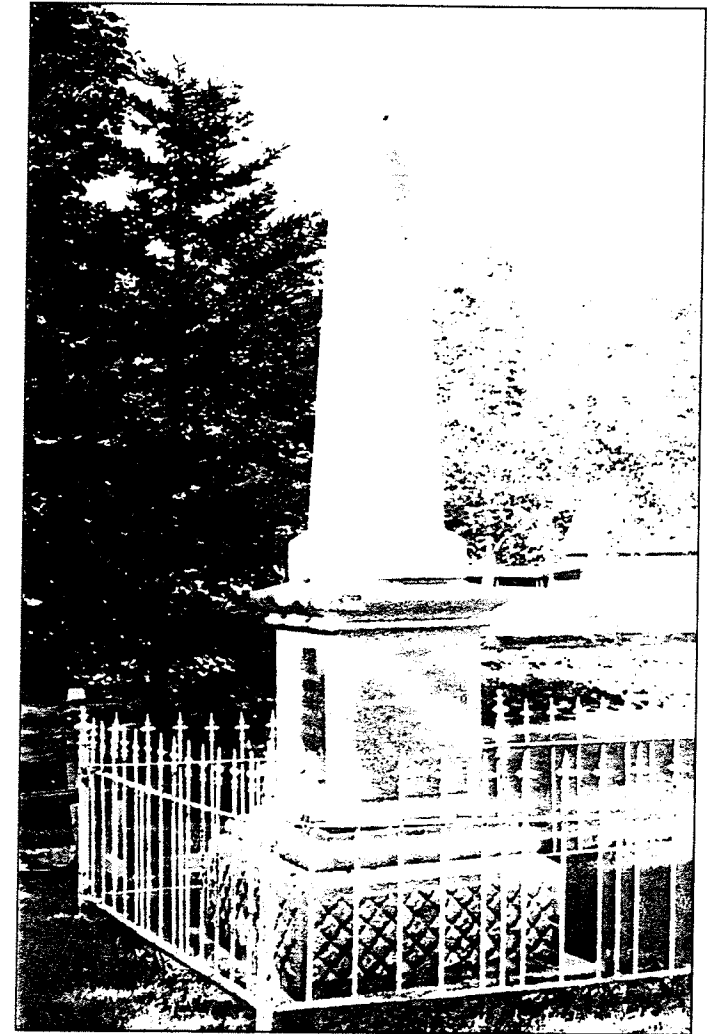
This type of village settlement has also been referred to as the *Holländerdorf* (Ens, 1994). For these rural Mennonites, the Anabaptist ideology of separation of church and state was taken one step further to include physical separation from larger society as well. The Mennonites inhabited this region of Poland for over 200 years.

In 1772, a political change took place as Northern Poland was annexed by Prussia. Tensions rose when restrictions were placed on Mennonite religious freedom, culminating in a threat to end exemption from military service in 1786. Fortunately for the Prussian Mennonites, this threat coincided with earlier manifestos issued in 1762-63 by Catherine 'The Great' "inviting Germans and other Europeans to settle on lands vacated by the Turks in Southern Russia" (Dyck, 1981, 164). The Czarina, anxious to populate this newly acquired piece of land, had heard about the industrious and ambitious Mennonite farmers, and sent them a special emissary in 1786 to invite them to settle in New

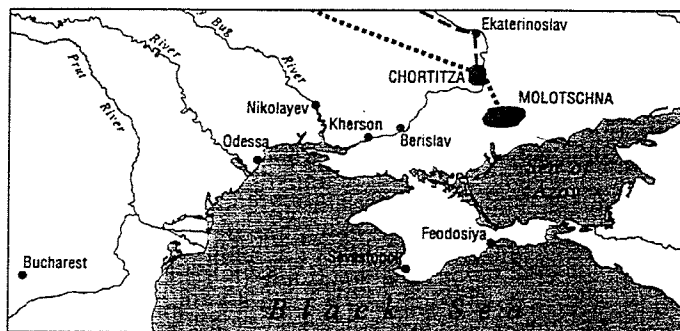
Russia, as Southern Russia was called at this time (present-day Ukraine).

Following a one-year survey of these lands by Mennonite representatives Jacob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch, favorable negotiations resulted in a Mennonite charter of privileges. This charter guaranteed exemption from military service for all time and religious/political/educational freedom in pursuing a Mennonite way of life. On this basis, many Mennonites eagerly accepted the invitation and, beginning in 1788, thousands migrated to this new land where they established two major colonies - Chortitza in 1789, and the larger Molotschna Colony in 1804.

At first, the Mennonites settled "in accordance with the land law of March 1764, which provided that the allotments be assigned in one contiguous plot, with the recipient to live on his separate 'farm'" (Rempel, 1973, 297). However, as James Urry acknowledges, "The lack of an adequate survey, the threat of attack by Cossacks, and thefts by roaming bandits forced the Mennonites to abandon the idea of separate household settlements on individual plots of land and to establish compact villages instead" (Urry, 1989, 55). As a result, the Mennonites adapted their earlier *Holländerdorf* to the steppes of Southern Russia and developed a more compact form of settlement called *Straßendörfer* ("street villages"), in which homes were built on one or both



This monument was erected in 1890 in honour of the work of Jacob Hoepfner, one of the Mennonite delegates chosen to inspect the land and negotiate terms for settlement in Southern Russia. Originally situated in the colony of Chortitza, the monument survived the tumultuous Russian Revolution (note the bullet holes), and was eventually brought to Canada. It currently resides in the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba. Photo by author



Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies in New Russia. Map by William Schroeder in Mennonite Historical Atlas

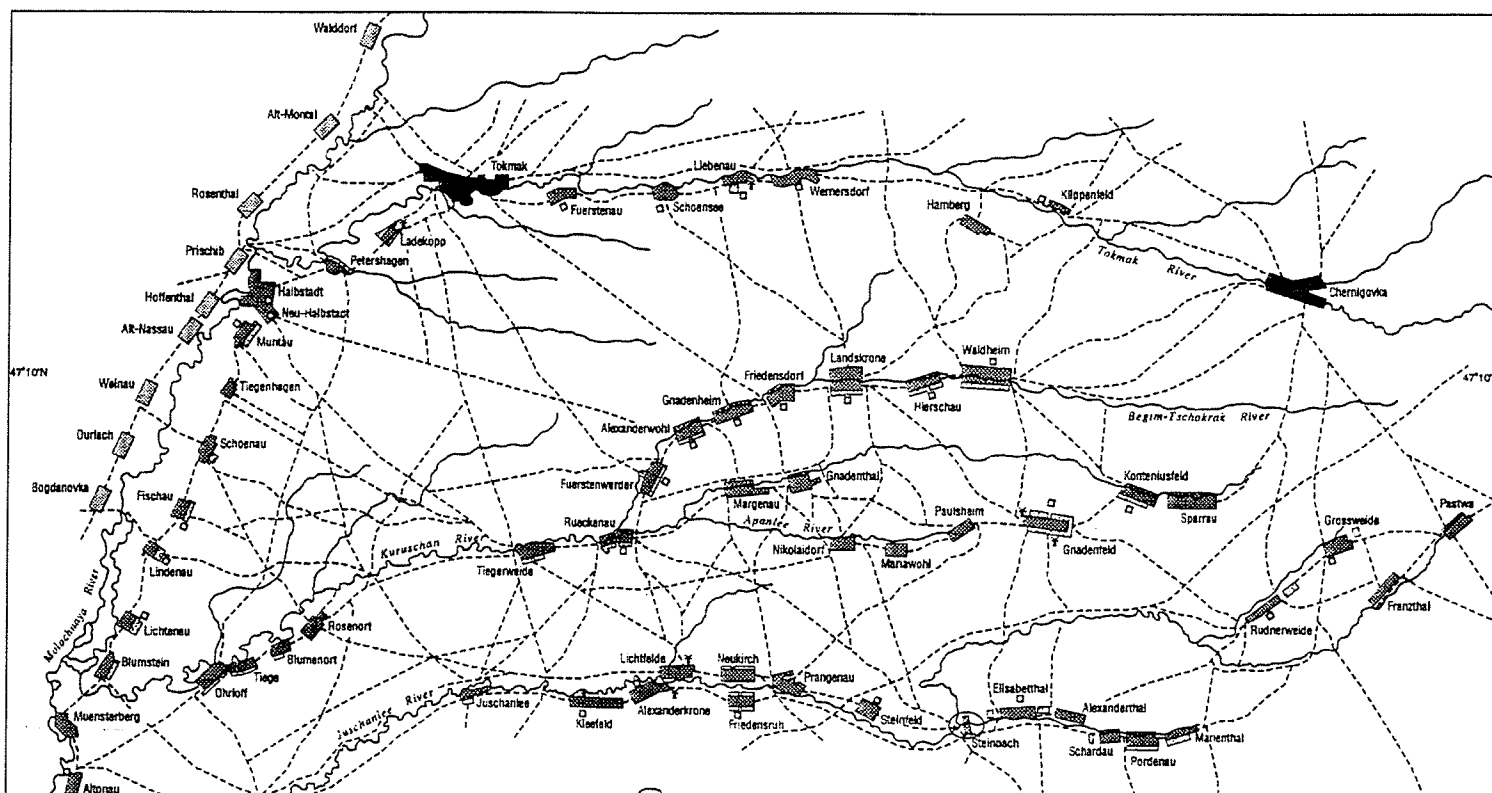
sides of a central street, thereby making its residents next-door neighbors.

The location of the many villages and orientation of their central streets was most often determined by small rivers (tributaries of either the Dnieper River in the Chortitza Colony or the Molochna River in the Molotschna Colony), which snaked across the Russian steppes. "All these rivers, small and unimportant though

they were, had created large valleys in which the villages were located" (Goerz, 1993, 17). Individual land holdings of 65 *dessiatini* (176 acres) were pooled into one large block (*Gewannflur*) and then subdivided into arable strips of land (*Gewanne*) "so that all shared more or less equally in the good land and the poorer parcels, in land close to the village and that farther away" (Ens, 1994, 35).

After a period of adjustment and agricultural experimentation under the influence of prominent leaders such as Johann Cornies (named life-time president of the Agricultural Union by the Tsar), the Mennonites farmed very successfully in this manner and many landowners prospered greatly as a result. As Frank Epp maintains, "This homogeneous and self-sufficient system was so conducive to the separatist development of sectarian community that one sociologist [E. K. Francis] referred to it as the 'Mennonite commonwealth'" (Epp, 1974, 71-72). A vivid physical portrait of these flourishing Mennonite colonies in the heart of South Russia is provided in the following account:

The land in New Russia rises and falls gently; it extends, almost flat and without a break to the horizon. Deep gullies and broad valleys holding small slow rivers relieve the monotony of the steppe, their existence suggesting the



The Molotschna Colony as it appeared in 1865. The map clearly depicts how the various small rivers directly influenced the siting and orientation of the many villages. (Note the private estate of Steinbach in the southeastern corner of the Colony along the Juschanlee River). Map by William Schroeder in Mennonite Historical Atlas



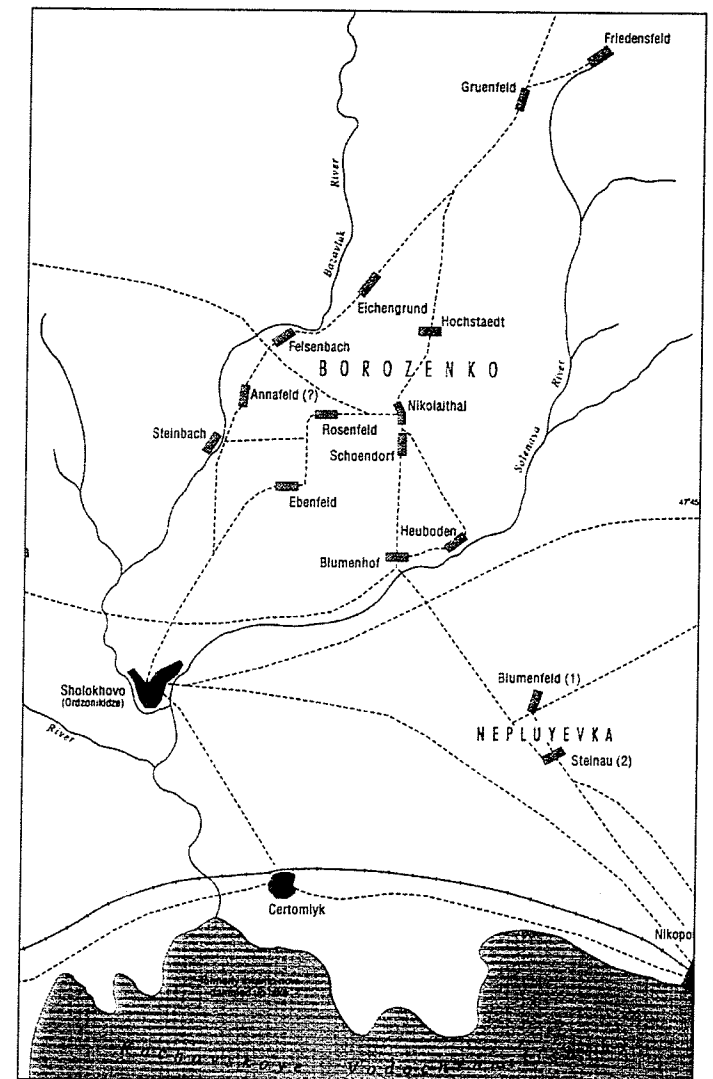
presence of the Dnieper River and the Black Sea which they feed. The earth is rich black chernozem, but dry, receiving little more than 35 centimeters of precipitation from rain and snow each year. The horizon is barren except for the domesticated trees that surround and shelter orderly villages. The rivers dictate the contour of the roads. The steppe everywhere bears the mark of man. It is divided into long strips of wheat and rye and barley, and into huge pastures offering sheep and cattle their nourishment (Loewen, *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874*, 1993, 83).

Russia soon began to develop shipping ports along the Black Sea. These provided export markets for surplus products from the Mennonite Colonies, and a strong agriculturally-based economy flourished across Imperialist Russia as a result. Along with the great wealth and economic success experienced by many of the Russian Mennonites, many of the more conservative groups became concerned with what they understood to be an increasing secularism that threatened their traditional Mennonite values. Their perception of a gradual shift in focus from isolated, self-sustaining Mennonite villages to capitalist centers readily adopting the philosophies of a 'worldly society' was only one of their con-

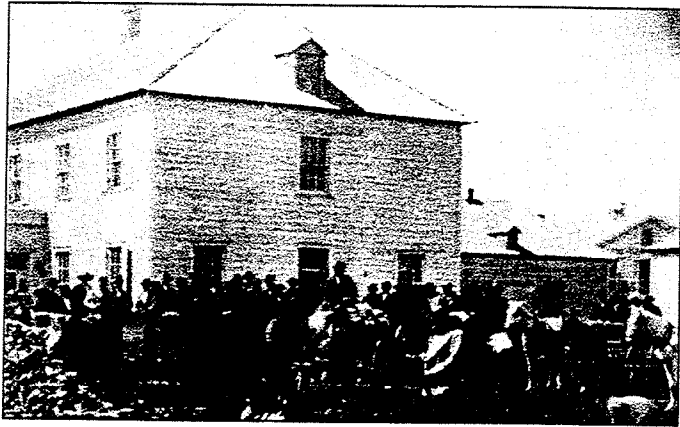
cerns. A large increase in the Mennonite population had also resulted in land shortages within the Colonies.

This problem was partially alleviated when a number of Russian estate owners were forced to sell their large estates, due to a labor shortage, and a number of daughter colonies surrounding the larger Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies were established as a result. For example, the colony of Borosenko, located 80 miles west of the Molotschna, was founded in 1865 by 120 *Kleine Gemeinde* families to overcome the "adverse political, economic, and religious implications" associated with landlessness (Loewen, *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874*, 1993, 87). Members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* (literally "small congregation", formed in 1812 under the leadership of Klaas Reimer) were the future founders of Steinbach, Manitoba.

However, the problem was further complicated by the emergence of a class distinction between wealthy landowners and a poorer landless group within the Mennonite communities. Additionally, in 1871, the special status granted all foreign colonists (of which the Mennonites had also been beneficiaries) was abolished by the Russian government in an attempt to assimilate the culturally diverse colonies into a unified Russia. A significant part of these political reforms involved the replacement of the Mennonite *Gewannflur*



Borosenko Colony. Map by William Schroeder in Mennonite Historical Atlas



The delegation of 12 Mennonite leaders from Russia is met in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo from Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition 1874-1982, courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Center

by new Russian municipal and judicial districts called *volosts*. As a result, “all records would be kept in the Russian language, all land titles held by individuals (not by colonies), the open field system abolished wherever two-thirds of the farmers wished it, and suffrage would be granted all residents of the volost, without regard to landownership, church membership, or race” (Loewen, 1993, 62). Additionally, it was now required that Russian be taught in all schools, and later, during the 1890’s, all instruction was to be only in the Russian language. Finally, following Russia’s humiliation by the British in the Crimean War (1854-56), a mandatory military service law was passed by the Russian government in 1874, which threatened to undermine the identity of all but the most liberally-minded Mennonites. Although an alternative service provision was made for Mennonites to work in government forestry camps, for many, the political reforms were understood as a direct threat to the Mennonite way of life. “What Russian Mennonites had taken for granted for seventy years was now being challenged by forces outside their control. At stake was not only exemption from military service, but also their rights and policies with regard to education, the German language and control of their colonial affairs” (Loewen, 1989, 128). Once again, talk of emigration came to the forefront for the *Kleine Gemeinde* and other conservative Mennonite groups.

In 1873, a delegation of twelve leaders, who represented the various Mennonite congregations, was selected and sent to North America to negotiate terms for settlement, following an invitation from both the Canadian and American governments. At this time, Canada and the United States were eagerly searching for foreign agriculturists to settle their frontier lands, as Russia had done almost 100 years earlier. In Canada, the delegates were promised a blanket military exemption, educational, political, and religious freedom in their language of choice, and an 8-township parcel of land in southeastern Manitoba (the *East Reserve*) reserved by the Dominion Government of Canada exclusively for Mennonite settlement at no expense. (The Mennonites commonly referred to these “privileges” as their *Privilegium* - see Appendix A). While eight of the more liberal Mennonite delegates chose the United States, the remaining four delegates (Heinrich Wiebe and Jacob Peters representing the *Bergthalers*, and Cornelius Toews and David Klassen representing the *Kleine Gemeinde*) chose to settle in Canada. Despite a milder climate, more fertile lands and closer proximity to commercial centers for export purposes in the United States, the *Bergthal* and *Kleine Gemeinde* delegates preferred Canada because of its block settlement opportunities and definitive stance on exemption from military service, neither of which could be accommodated in the

United States.

Following a favorable report by the excursion team to their family and friends in Russia, entire Mennonite villages within the Colonies sold their properties (often at greatly reduced prices), packed whatever belongings they could take with them, and began the long trek to a new continent. While many decided to remain in Russia and resented the fact that others were leaving at the first sign of conflict (Loewen, 1989), 18,000 immigrants eventually migrated to North America at this time. Of this total, 8,000 Mennonites, including 110 *Kleine Gemeinde* families, settled directly in Manitoba beginning in 1874. As Royden Loewen maintains, "Continuity was their goal. The communities they founded in the East Reserve... were meant to be reproductions of their village communities in Borosenko and the Molotschna" (Loewen, 1993, 75). Despite the fact that the sectional square-mile prairie grid had already been surveyed within the *East Reserve* two years prior to the arrival of the Mennonites, the new colonists largely ignored the grid and its accompanying individual homestead landholding system in favor of the block settlement patterns and village systems established earlier in Southern Russia.

As the first Mennonite pioneers planted their roots in the soils of the *East Reserve*, "Their place names, village and field systems, leadership hierarchy, denomi-

national identity, architecture, language, and mode of production were replicated in the new land" (Loewen, 1993, 70). The village of Steinbach, Manitoba was an early example of this transplanted culture.

## 4.0 The Natural Landscape

A review of the human landscape has led to an understanding of who Mennonites are, and has provided a brief insight into the historical developments, which have shaped them and their settlement patterns prior to the emigration by many from Russia. For those Mennonites who decided to make Manitoba their new home (such as the *Kleine Gemeinde* - the focus group of this study), they were entering a province of vast open prairie, which had only joined Confederation four years earlier. It was truly a pioneer frontier which greeted them as they established their homes and villages in this sparsely-settled land. The climate was harsher than they had experienced on the steppes of South Russia, and the growing season was considerably shorter. Winters were long and cold in Manitoba, while mosquitoes by the thousands tested the perseverance of those venturing outside on humid summer evenings. Nevertheless, the Mennonites worked hard to meet the challenges associated with this natural landscape.

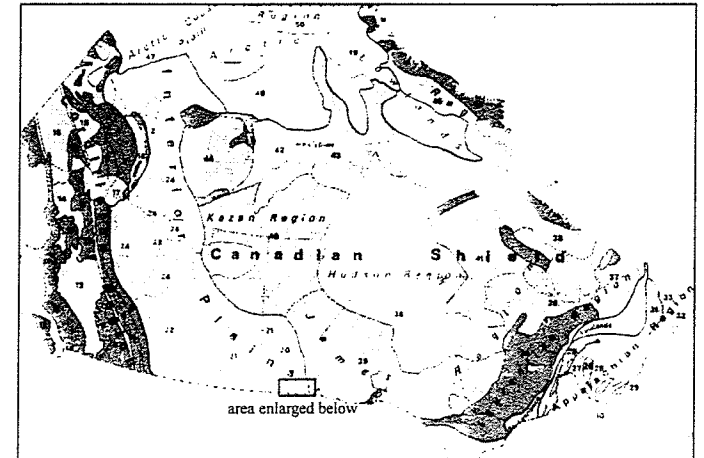
The following account examines the region of southeastern Manitoba from the perspective of its physical/geographical history, and the impact which this natural landscape has had in shaping Manitoba's human settlement. This then provides the context for the Mennonite

8-township land parcel called the *East Reserve* of 1874, and the village of Steinbach, more specifically.

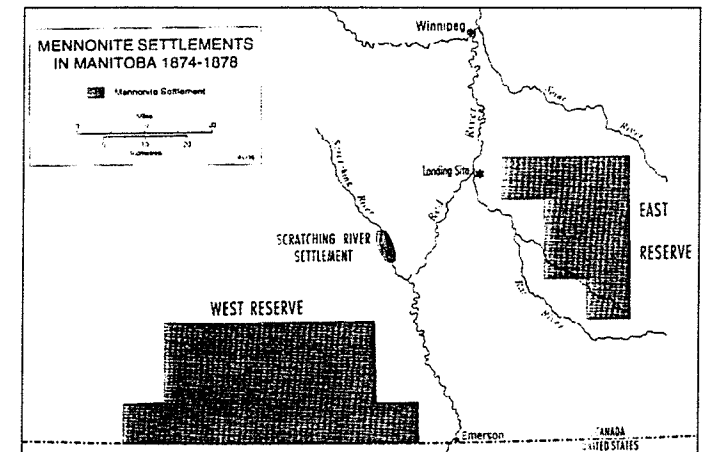
### 4.1 Southeastern Manitoba Regional Context

#### Physical/Geographical History

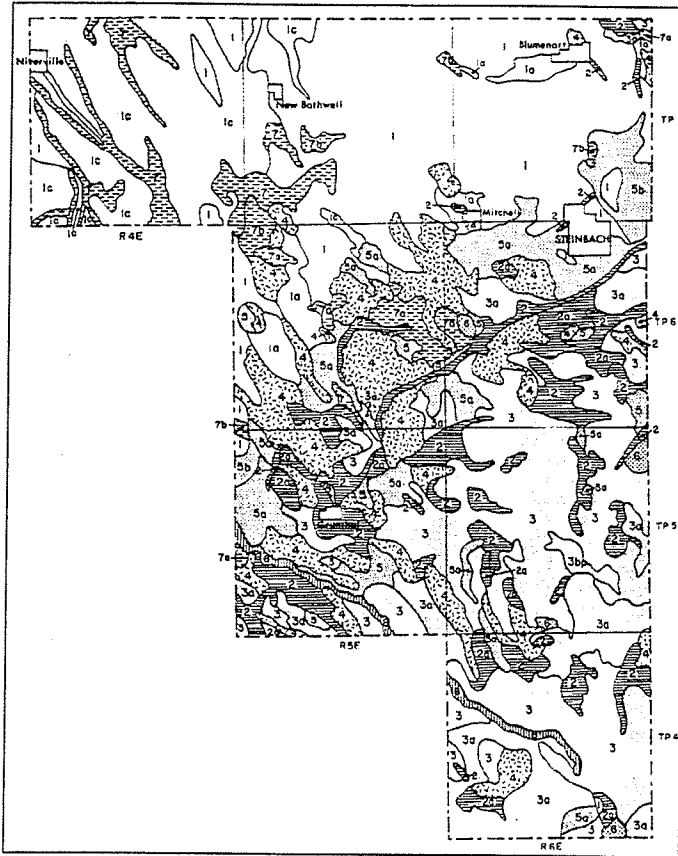
Situated at the longitudinal centre of Canada, the region of southeastern Manitoba is located within the western fringe of the transitional zone, which separates two of Canada's predominant physiographic regions - the Great Western Plains and the Canadian Shield. Characterized by a significant variation in soil types and vegetative cover, the geography of the region is the product of the late Wisconsinan continental ice sheet, which played a major role in shaping the landscape of central North America. In particular, a large inland glacier, known as the Red River Lobe, once scoured a significant portion of Manitoba leaving in its wake a diverse and dramatic landscape. When temperatures warmed and the glacier finally receded approximately 12,000 years ago, the resultant glacial Lake Agassiz covered much of Southern Manitoba. It eventually drained northward about 7,500 years ago leaving behind Lake Winnipeg, Lake Winnipegosis, Lake Manitoba and a host of smaller lakes in low-lying areas (Teller and Clayton, 1983). As a result of the natural processes of depo-



Southeastern Manitoba is located at the longitudinal centre of Canada, within the transition zone separating two of the country's most expansive physiographic regions - the Great Plains to the west and the Canadian Shield to the east. Map from The National Atlas of Canada



Upon arriving in Canada, the Russian Mennonites settled in villages within either the *East Reserve* (1874) or *West Reserve* (1875). These reserves were large tracts of land held by the Dominion Government of Canada for the exclusive settlement by Mennonites. The name of each reserve was simply a reflection of its location relative to the Red River. Map by W. Schroeder in Mennonite Historical Atlas



Soils map of the *East Reserve* (present-day Rural Municipality of Hanover). Note the prominent gravel ridge (graphically displayed by horizontal banding), an historically-significant trail linking Steinbach and the Mennonite town of Grunthal to the southwest. Map from *Soils of the Rural Municipality of Hanover*

sition and sedimentation associated with this huge inland glacial lake, today's Red River Basin (located along the western edge of the southeastern Manitoba region) is one of the flattest places on earth.

Centrally-located within southeastern Manitoba, Steinbach and the surrounding area is generally quite level at an elevation of 260m (850 feet) ASL, and extends in a gradual downward slope from southeast to northwest. Fine-grated lake sediment, clay, silt and sand deposited by Lake Agassiz can be found ranging in depth from 4.6 to 7.9m (15 to 26 feet) over bedrock within the town itself. East and southeast of Steinbach, the geology of the region changes dramatically. Here, an abrupt rise in elevation to 320m (1050 feet) ASL denotes the Southeastern Lake Terrace - a prominent beach ridge deposited by Lake Agassiz and revealed following its final recession. Glacial till and glacial-fluvial deposits are evident in this region accompanied by swamp and surface pond conditions. The resultant soils are a mixture of sand and gravels with peaty and meadow-like soils in low-lying areas. Throughout southeastern Manitoba, numerous gravel ridges, deposited by glacial activity and historically used as transportation corridors, snake across the landscape adding periodic undulations to an otherwise flat topography. Several roads in the region have been built directly upon significant portions of these gravel ridges, which pro-

vide a naturally elevated transportation platform as well as suitable construction fill.

The soil types in southeastern Manitoba are varied indicative of the region's location on the interface between the lacustrine (lake-deposited) soils of the Red River Valley and the soils derived from a parent material of glacial till. The loamy lacustrine deposits west of Steinbach are associated with the dominant soil series of Glenella, Red River and Osborne Clays. Each of these soil series is similarly developed on moderate to strong calcareous (lime-containing) clayey, lacustrine deposits. They therefore drain poorly, have slow to moderate surface runoff and permeability, and are further characterized by a high water table. Southeast of Steinbach, Pelan, Poppleton and Nourse Soils are the dominant glacial till deposits. All of these soil series consist of imperfectly drained soils with slow to moderate runoff and moderate to moderately rapid permeability. These soils are developed on coarse loamy or coarse textured (sandy) deltaic, lacustrine deposits overlying stony (sometimes loamy), extremely calcareous glacial till (Hopkins et al., 1993).

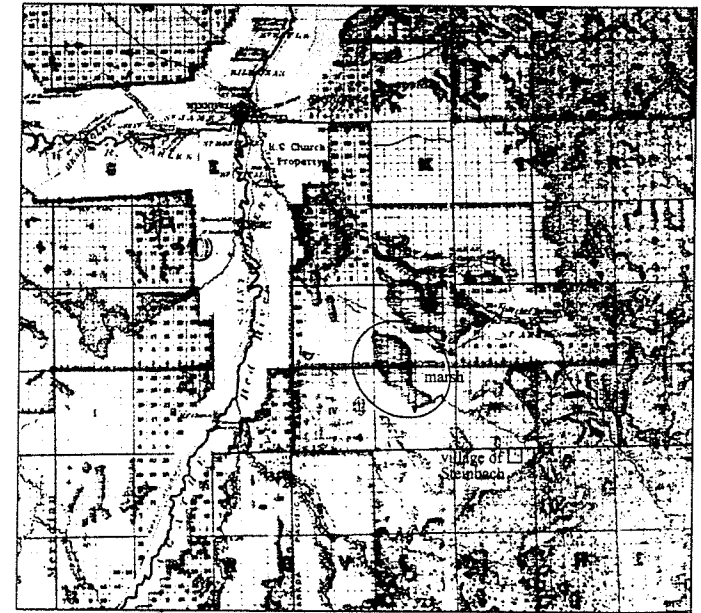
Associated with the distinctive variation in soil types is a diversity of landcover in the southeastern Manitoba region. The lacustrine deposits to the west are richer soils with significantly higher agricultural potential. Here, the landscape has witnessed extensive

cultivation in the last century, as natural bluestem and wild rye prairie grasses have been replaced by introduced hybrid species of grain and oil crops. Interspersed pockets of aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) and willow (*Salix* sp.) dot the prairie landscape. The glacial till deposits to the east are marked by an easily identifiable treeline east of Steinbach where the prairie gives way to Precambrian rock formations and the Boreal Forest. It is in this transitional zone that the agricultural potential of the soils is very limited, and a mixed upland forest of aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) and coniferous species such as spruce (*Picea glauca*), pine (*Pinus banksiana*) and tamarack (*Larix laricina*) can be found.

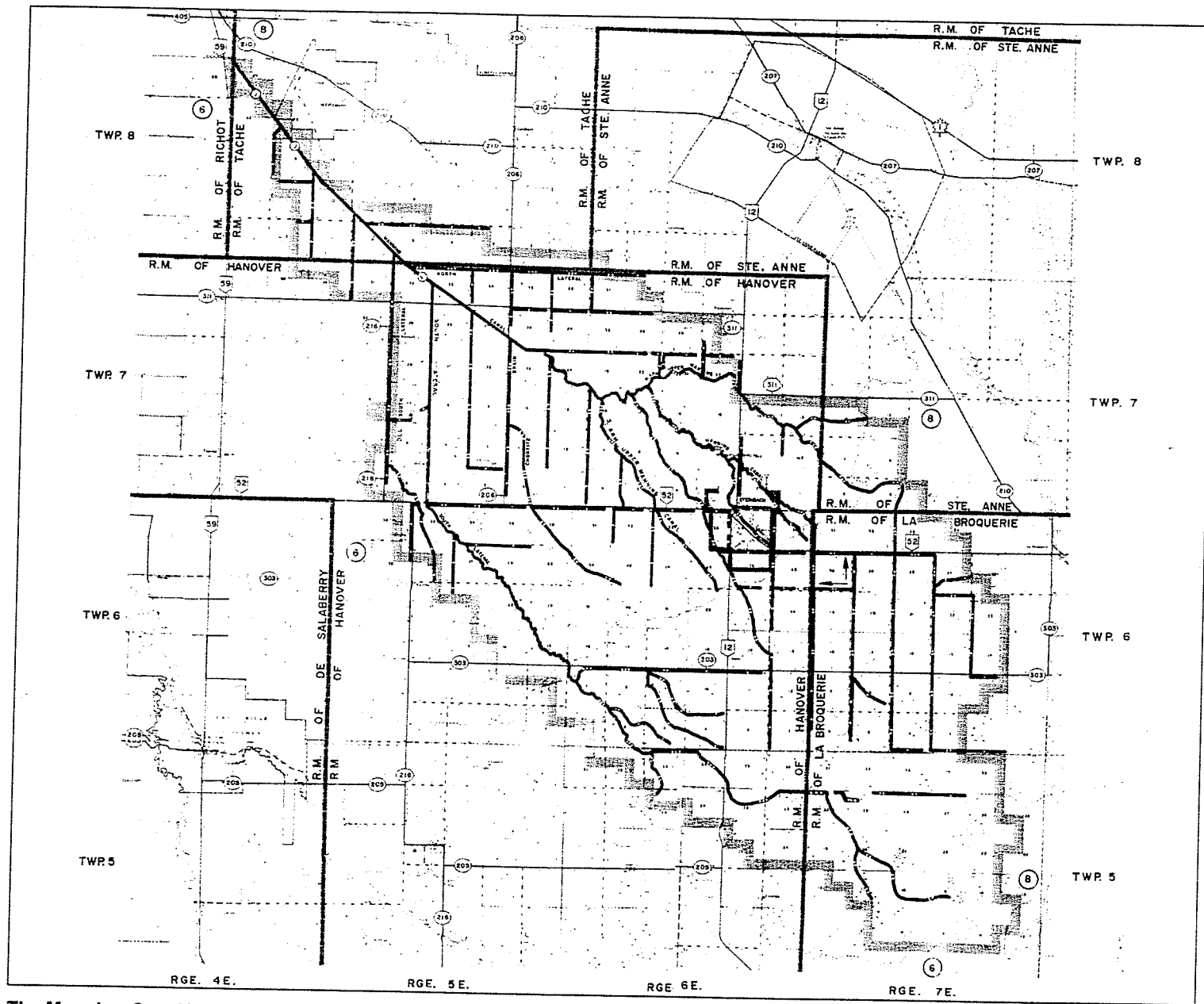
The floods of 1997, 1979, 1950 (1861, 1852, 1826) and earlier are a testimony to the broad, flat topography of the Red River Floodplain, which encompasses many miles with only a minimal change in elevation. As a contributor to this larger system, the southeastern Manitoba region contains seven main watersheds: Roseau River (upper and lower), Rat River (upper and lower), Marsh River, Tourond Creek and the St. Adolphe Coulee, Manning Canal, Lower Seine River and the Seine River Diversion. Each flows in a northwesterly direction before emptying into the Red River south of the city of Winnipeg. These watersheds are typically made up of a combined system of broad, meandering

natural streams, and sharply contrasting narrow, engineered ditches, which flow in a more rectilinear geometric pattern.

Steinbach's drainage requirements are served by three 2nd Order branches of the Manning Canal, an example of a combined natural and human-engineered drainage system. This watershed encompasses an area of 490km<sup>2</sup> (189 square miles) within the Rural Municipalities of La Broquerie, Hanover, Ste. Anne, Tache and Richot. The main branches were built over a period of several decades (beginning in the early 1900s) to serve the needs of area farmers whose farmland was poorly drained. In an attempt to drain marshes and swampy lands, construction of smaller branches of this drainage basin had already begun shortly after the arrival of the Mennonites in 1874. As a topographic map from 1874 denotes, a large swamp existed in Townships 7 and 8 of Range 5E (northwest of Steinbach). The main branch of the Manning Canal was later constructed through the centre of this swamp. As Abe Warkentin outlines, financial expenditures from 1882 indicate that securing adequate drainage was the primary challenge in the early years for farmers. Warkentin further notes that by 1956, "Forty-one miles of constructed drainage ditches drained the run-off from [the Rural Municipality of] Hanover's lands and other waters that followed the natural contours of the land. In addition, many road-side



This map from 1874 best approximates the topographical features that the Mennonites would have encountered, as they established the village of Steinbach in the fall of that same year. The map clearly denotes a large swamp, northwest of Steinbach, through which the central branch of the Manning Canal was later constructed. Also note the distinct boundary between prairie and woodland immediately south and east of the new village. Map from Historical Atlas of Manitoba



The Manning Canal Watershed, encompassing 490.15 km<sup>2</sup> (189.25 sq. miles), as registered in 1974. Map Courtesy of the Province of Manitoba Department of Mines, Resources and Environmental Management: Water Resources Branch

ditches had been designed to assist in farm land drainage” (Warkentin, 1971, 67). While the main branch of the Manning Canal is a provincial waterway, the various sub-branches fall within the jurisdiction of the Rural Municipalities, such as Hanover. Before emptying into the Red River south of Winnipeg, the Manning Canal watershed drains into the Seine River Diversion south of present-day Ile des Chênes.

### History of Human Settlement

The southeastern Manitoba region has been inhabited by nomadic groups of First Nations Peoples since the final recession of Lake Agassiz some time after 7500B.P. These tribes were most likely descendants of Asian hunters, who had crossed the Bering Land Bridge, and included the ancestors of the Cree, Ojibway and Assiniboine Indians, who later occupied the region of the Red River Valley (and with whom the Mennonites later came into regular contact). Following the migratory routes of bison and other large mammals upon which they depended for sustenance, these tribes found a home in the North American interior. While summer activities took place upon the open prairie in many cases, the Parkland region and the densely treed Boreal Forest of the Canadian Shield provided shelter for many of the First Nations Peoples during the cold winter months.

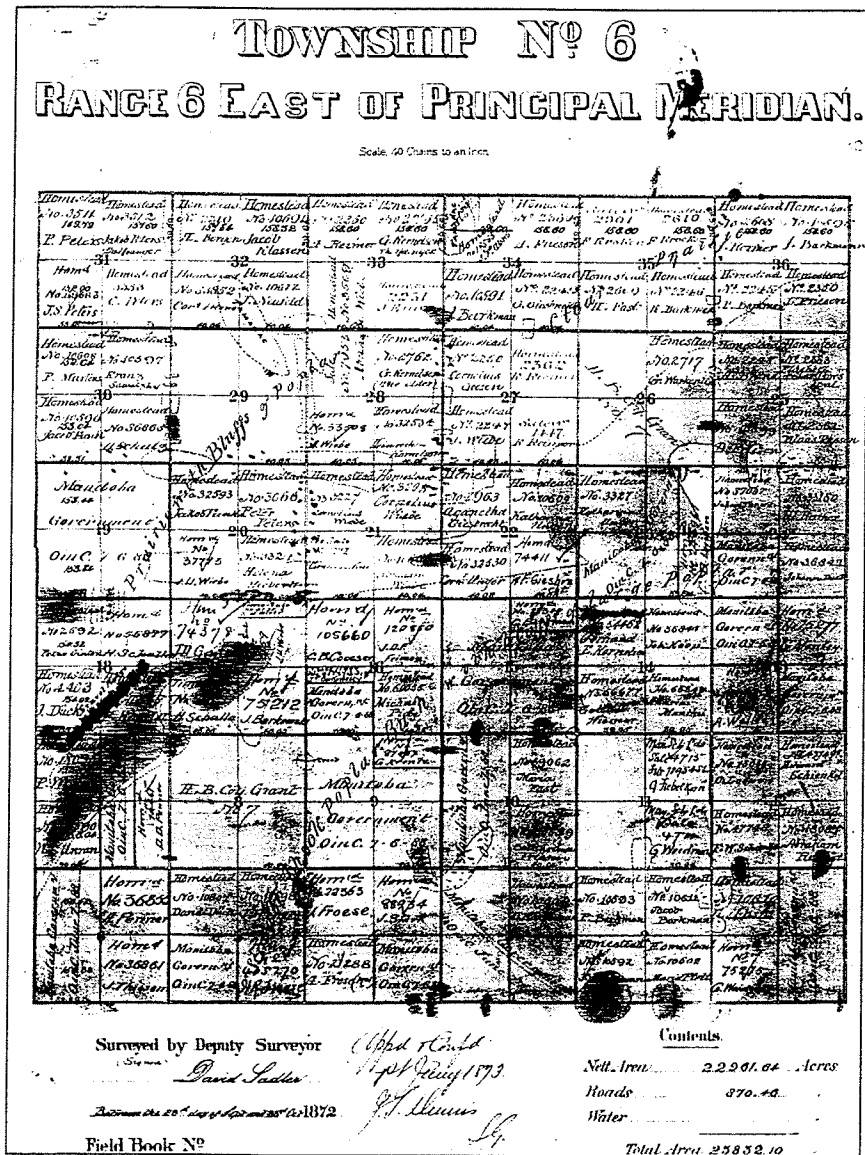
European contact with the province took place near the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century when explorers, such as the Englishman Henry Kelsey, first travelled across Manitoba's northern frontier and penetrated the interior plains. In 1670, the Hudson's Bay Company was granted an exclusive monopoly of Rupert's Land (all lands draining into Hudson Bay) in the lucrative fur trade. This marked the onset of inland exploration west of the Great Lakes and south of Hudson Bay. Meanwhile, French exploration was pioneered by La Vérendrye in his historic pursuits west of Lake Superior from 1731-1750. The majority of the exploration at this time came as the result of competition between the British and French to find the elusive Northwest Passage to the western sea. As a result, most of the early explorations were focused solely upon waterways and marine mapping of rivers and lakes.

Inland exploration gradually evolved with the need for fur-trading posts closer to the seasonal gathering grounds of First Nations Peoples – the primary trading partners of the European explorers. In 1810, the North West Company built Fort Gibraltar at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers (the future site of Winnipeg), later to be replaced by the Hudson's Bay Company's Upper Fort Garry. In 1811, a 300,439 km<sup>2</sup> (116,009 square mile) parcel of land within the Red River Valley was granted by the Hudson's Bay Com-

pany to the Earl of Selkirk for an agricultural settlement. This substantial parcel was known as the Assiniboia Grant. Land division for the purposes of settlement was accomplished beginning in 1813 with the use of the river lot system - a technique of land surveying adapted from the French long-lot surveys along the St. Lawrence Lowlands in Lower Canada. Lots were generally 229 m (750 feet) wide by 3.2 km (2 miles) long and were strung out perpendicular to the rivers. By 1870, a population of 12,000 settlers was concentrated along the lower Red and Assiniboine Rivers within the parishes comprising the Red River Settlement (Welsted, Everitt and Stadel, 1996; Warkentin and Ruggles, 1970).

Following Manitoba's acceptance into the Dominion of Canada in 1870, the federal government began a program of active recruitment of foreign agriculturists to inhabit the frontier lands. At this time, Manitoba's boundaries encompassed an area of only 259 km<sup>2</sup> (100 square miles) and it was the only province west of Ontario. (Manitoba's present boundaries were established in 1912). Those regions beyond the previously-surveyed river-lots were now surveyed utilizing a different technique. Adapted from a similar system used in the United States, the Dominion Government began to superimpose a one-square-mile sectional grid across the prairie landscape oriented in the cardinal directions,





Township 6 Range 6 East, located in the northeast corner of the *East Reserve*, was surveyed by David Sadler in the fall of 1872. The central core of the village of Steinbach was established in Section 35 in 1874. Note the surveyor's landcover annotations, and the names of homesteaders added later. Map from the Provincial Archives of Manitoba

regardless of natural features such as river valleys and land formations. This, together with the Homestead Act which provided one quarter section of land to each pioneer family, set the framework for continued agricultural settlement in Manitoba. Many Europeans accepted the invitation to come to a new land of opportunity, and joined others such as the French and Métis (those of combined French and Aboriginal descent) homesteaders who were already well-established. Agricultural settlements soon began to spring up across the prairies. One of the earliest settlements of this period took place from 1869-1874 when small groups of Scottish settlers (many having lived in southern Ontario for a short time) settled in the area directly north of present-day Steinbach. They named the area "Clearsprings" for the abundance of clean, clear water springs, and came to be known, themselves, as the Clearsprings Settlers.

The years 1874-75 marked the establishment of the *East* and *West Reserves* in Manitoba by the Dominion Government and the mass migration of large groups of

Russian Mennonite farmers, for whom the Reserves had been exclusively reserved. At this time, the notion of Reserve on the Canadian prairies was a reference to "a contiguous tract of land set aside by the Dominion Government for a certain number of years for the exclusive occupation by a homogeneous group of settlers, to be divided according to their own plans" (Francis, 1955, 61). The *East Reserve*, which currently coincides with the Rural Municipality of Hanover, was comprised of 8 townships in southeastern Manitoba. It had been hastily surveyed in 1872 in anticipation of the Mennonite migration, and illustrated the standardized square-mile grid survey system. David Sadler, Deputy Surveyor for the Dominion Government of Canada, provides this summary description of Township 6 Range 6E (the *East Reserve* township in which Steinbach was later settled) in his field notes dated September 28 to October 23, 1872:

Township 6 Range 6E is nearly altogether covered with bush.

At one time it has been thickly wooded with large poplar and tamarac. Bluffs that have escaped the fire still remain, the timber in which is of sufficient size for building purposes.

The chief portion of the township however is covered with Small thick poplar and willow second growth.

The Surface of the Township is Rolling.

The land is of poor [agricultural] quality. The sections bordering on the base are low and swampy. The extreme western tier are unfit for settlement being covered with large boulders.

The Soil in general is light and is mixed with Sand and Gravel. The Sections most desirable for Settlement are 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 being chiefly prairie; the Soil good; and free from Stone.

To the South and west of these Sections there are large Bluffs of building timber and excellent hay land.

Unlike natural conditions of the *West Reserve* (established one year later), highly variable soil types in the *East Reserve* coupled with extensive swamplands and significant vegetative cover made farming extremely challenging for early settlers. The vast majority of the *East Reserve* simply did not lend itself as readily to the agricultural practices formerly adopted by the Mennonites in Russia. What gradually evolved in the region, after many painstaking years of trying to replicate a Russian agrarian model, was an early form of mixed farming.

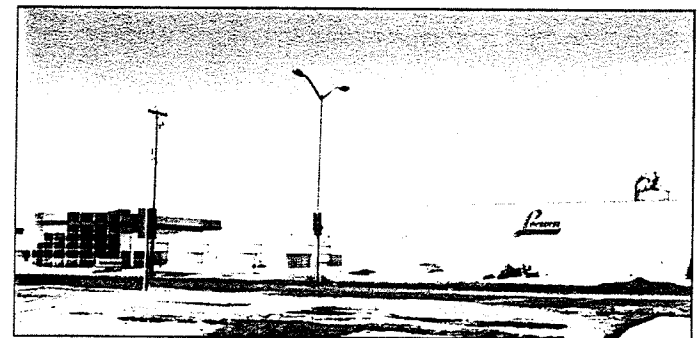
When the Reserves were later opened for general settlement by other cultural groups in 1898, small groups

of German Lutherans and Ukrainian settlers soon settled south of Steinbach. Despite their insular village structure and belief system, the Mennonite families, who established Steinbach and nearby villages, maintained positive economic relations with their neighbours of non-Mennonite descent, and were greatly helped by the generosity of the French, Métis and Clearsprings Settlers during their formative years in Canada.

Now, more than a century later, the region of south-eastern Manitoba remains sparsely settled with Steinbach, the largest community in the province east of the Red River, acting as the regional centre for approximately 50,000 people. The multicultural flavour of the region is maintained by a host of smaller surrounding communities whose inhabitants are predominantly of French, Mennonite, Ukrainian and German Lutheran descent. The primary economic activity which sustains the area continues to be agriculture and related spin-off industries. Light industry, manufacturing and a broad range of retail services also contribute significantly to the region.



Located 5 miles north of Steinbach in Blumenort, Manitoba, Penner Farm Services specializes in the hog, dairy and poultry industries, within a thriving agricultural sector. *Photo by author*



Loewen Windows, a major employer in Steinbach, is a large window manufacturer with an international reputation. *Photo by author*

## 5.0 Experiencing a New Land

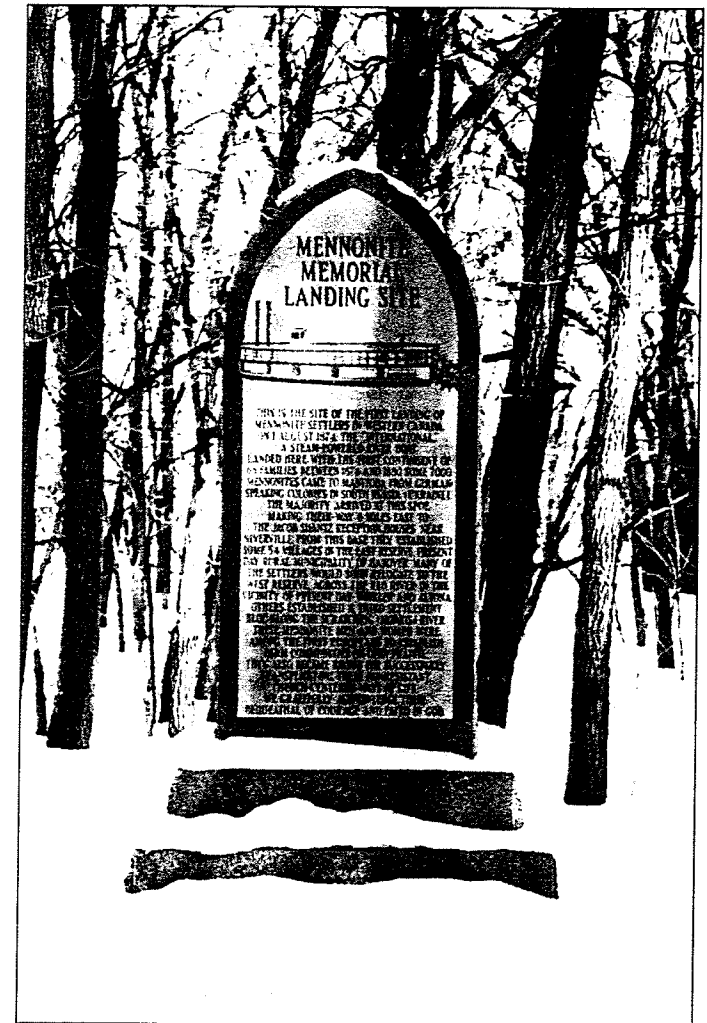
The previous two chapters have presented a history of the Mennonite people, and a description of the Canadian prairie which they entered at the end of the 19th century. A re-telling of their past has not only provided a clearer picture of who Mennonites are, but has also demonstrated the relationship which existed between the Mennonite human landscape and the natural landscapes which these people inhabited. Accompanying each change in locality, the unique physical characteristics of each natural environment provided new challenges and opportunities for the pioneers of the day. In response to these physical changes, the human landscape - a way of life embodying traditions, values and customs which made (and continues to make) the Mennonites a distinctive people - was suitably adapted to reflect the change in setting. As these pioneers were up-rooted from their Russian villages and entered the *East Reserve* of southeastern Manitoba, they were once again challenged to plant their distinctive roots in new soil.

This chapter provides a history of Steinbach settlement - an examination of a people shaping the land and the land shaping a people. As such, it recounts firsthand impressions of this region of the *East Reserve*, and the everyday life experiences of some of the found-

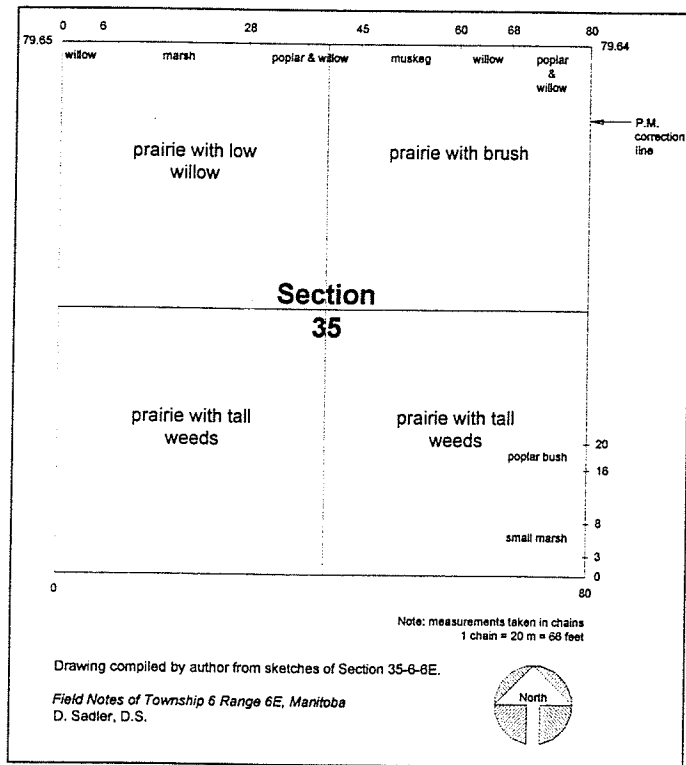
ing Mennonite pioneers within it. Over time, these experiences (and particularly the re-telling of these experiences) reflected a particular interpretation of the natural surroundings - of a Mennonite farming village strung out along three small creeks in the Canadian prairie. Through the act of experiencing this physical landscape, the pioneers sought purpose and meaning as place was revealed.

### 5.1 A Village Emerges

The village of Steinbach, Manitoba was founded in the fall of 1874 as a small party of *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites determined a suitable location to settle. This group of 18 families comprised 80 pioneers, almost half of whom had formerly lived in Steinbach, Borosenko, a daughter colony of the larger Molotschna colony in Imperialist Russia (see Appendix B for a brief chronology of "Steinbach" settlements). Following an arduous seven week journey by steamship, train, riverboat, oxcart and foot, these weary travelers landed at the confluence of the Rat and Red Rivers, about 35km south of Winnipeg on September 13, 1874. After disembarking from the *S. S. International* riverboat on the east side of the Red River, the Mennonites traveled an additional 8 km by foot to immigration sheds. These temporary shelters had been hastily built in anticipa-



A monument, located at the junction of the Rat and Red Rivers 35 km south of Winnipeg, commemorates the site of the first landing of Mennonite settlers in western Canada in 1874. Photo by author



**Section 35 Township 6 Range 6E, the future core of the Steinbach settlement.**

tion of the arrival of the first group of Mennonites two months earlier, near the present-day town of Niverville. From here, scouting groups made regular trips within the *East Reserve* to evaluate the land and determine suitable locations for village settlements. The small agricultural village of Steinbach was founded in the northeast corner of the *East Reserve* on September 23, 1874.

The particular group of *Kleine Gemeinde* who chose the Steinbach location were among the last of the 1874 immigrants to arrive in Manitoba. The process of finding an optimal village location often took several weeks, but with the added incentive of a cold winter quickly approaching, the new immigrants did not have the luxury of a significant period of time. Foremost on their minds were simple concerns of survival - gathering food and building a shelter for their families and livestock. Additionally, since much of the land had already been claimed or reserved by others for family and friends, the Steinbach *Kleine Gemeinde* settlers were left with the only tract of land which was large enough to support all of them (Plett, 1996). This region was the northeast quadrant of township 6, range 6E, which was on the eastern edge of the *East Reserve*, farthest from the landing site and commercial centre of Winnipeg. The area was further squeezed in between the Clearsprings settlers to the north (immigrants of

Scottish origin who had settled from 1869-1874), and sandy, rocky soil to the south which offered little agricultural potential. The township had been hastily surveyed between September 28 and October 23, 1872, and had been registered with the Dominion Lands Office on January 1, 1873. In the interests of securing shelter in late fall, the Mennonites looked no further, and quickly established the village of Steinbach, with section 35 as its centre.

According to the original maps and survey notes, section 35 was largely clear prairie with bluffs of aspen and willow found throughout, particularly in the southeast quadrant. This suggestion of "clear prairie" in the survey notes appears to disclaim the impressions held by various Steinbach residents, such as Gerhard G. Kornelsen, a Steinbach school teacher. The following is an excerpt from a series of articles about Steinbach settlement published by Kornelsen in the spring of 1916:

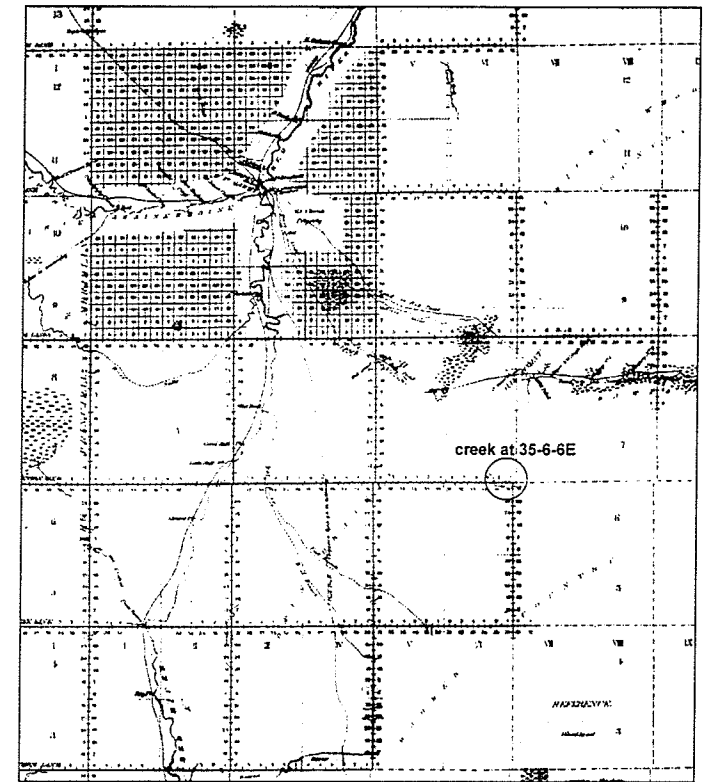
In the other settlements (villages) the pioneers had chosen sites with both wooded and prairie areas, and consequently the choice spots had been claimed by the earlier arrivals. Even the Blumenorters [five miles north of Steinbach] had been able to secure quite a bit of prairie land, but only bush and more bush, was evident where the Steinbachers were to settle. Though we

cannot describe this area as a large forest, yet it was more or less covered with both small and large poplar trees of which, however, many were dead. This left a fairly desolate picture to the observer. It seemed, however, that no other piece of land was available that was suitable for a village plan settlement. It was granted that there were quarter sections available that would have been more suitable for farmers using the modern system of farm ownership, but few of these immigrants had the will to settle by themselves in this wilderness (Plett, 1990, 255).

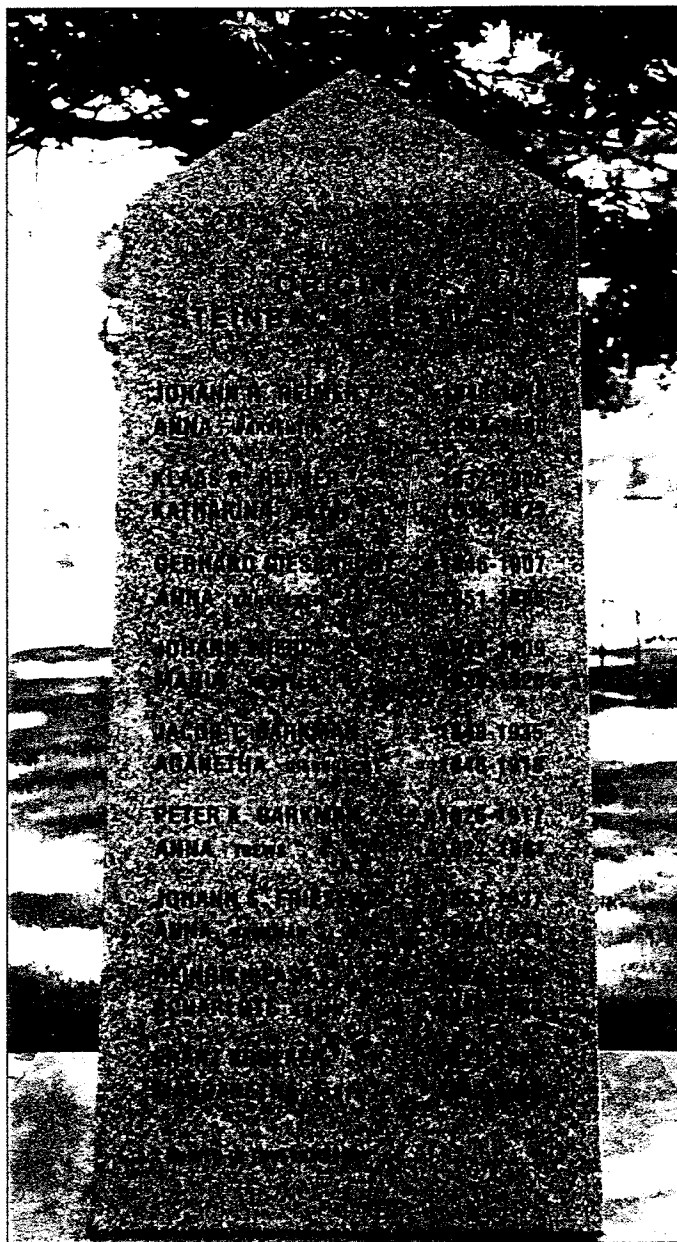
The apparent contradiction between this account and the survey notes, with respect to landcover, is perhaps explained by the fact that the Mennonites had just emigrated from the treeless steppes of southern Russia, and were therefore unaccustomed to the presence of even small clumps of trees. Having traveled from the western edge of the Reserve to the eastern border, they would have also witnessed a steady increase in tree coverage as they ventured closer to the Canadian Shield. Additionally, since the method of surveying was primarily concerned with the accuracy of the section lines, a detailed survey of landscape features was only noted along the perimeter of the sections. This was the location from which a general reconnaissance survey of the sec-

tion interiors was then made. Assuming this survey technique was also used in this instance, the accuracy of the sparse topographic and land coverage field notes pertaining to the pre-settlement interior of section 35 could be challenged. The field notes taken by David Sadler, Deputy Surveyor with the Dominion Government of Canada, do, however, provide some useful information where the northern and eastern section boundary lines traversed the landscape. Within Section 35, he notes the presence of a small marsh in the southeast corner of the southeast quadrant, and a slightly larger marsh in the northwest corner of the northwest quadrant. Here, significant stands of poplar and willow are identified on either side. Assuming this to be the central founding creek upon which Steinbach was settled, it appears that a healthy riparian corridor existed at this time. An even earlier indicator of the creek's presence is found on a map of southeastern Manitoba showing the land surveys completed by 1871. While this map is primarily concerned with the 4-township grid (later subdivided into sections and eventually quarter-sections), it identifies the location, although inaccurately, of a small creek diagonally bisecting Section 35 of Township 6, Range 6E.

This small creek, paralleled on either side by two additional creeks, formed the backbone of settlement for the early Steinbach immigrants. (It is significant to



A map of southeastern Manitoba outlining the surveys completed by 1871. Note the identification (although inaccurately drawn) of a creek flowing through 35-6-6E. Map from *Historical Atlas of Manitoba*



A memorial, found in Steinbach's Pioneer Cemetery, identifies the founding pioneers. Photo by author

note that the name "Stein-bach" is a German word meaning "stoney brook". While this name was clearly brought with the settlers from Russia - 39 of them had earlier lived in Steinbach, Borosenko - it does not negate the presence of the "stein Bach" in Manitoba. The presence of the creeks and the historical connection together made this name selection that much more appropriate). As mentioned earlier, rather than conform to the sectional grid which was systematically laid across the prairies in its cardinal orientation, many Mennonite settlers within the *East* and *West Reserves* sought 'natural' indicators such as elevated gravel ridges and creek beds to establish their farmsteads. This same strategy was also employed in Steinbach.

Although "the particular land area was not sufficiently uniform in quality to lend itself to a uniform distribution of population centres," the Mennonites of the *East Reserve* nevertheless chose to replicate the village system previously adopted in Russia (Epp, 1974, 212). Steinbach's original village pattern can therefore be simply understood as a cultural geography transplanted and adapted from the fundamentally similar steppes of the Ukraine to a new physical landscape. In addition to the French river-lots and the Dominion Government's sectional grid with quarter-section homesteads, the Mennonites now contributed a third form of settlement typology - the "street village" or *Straßendorf* system. By

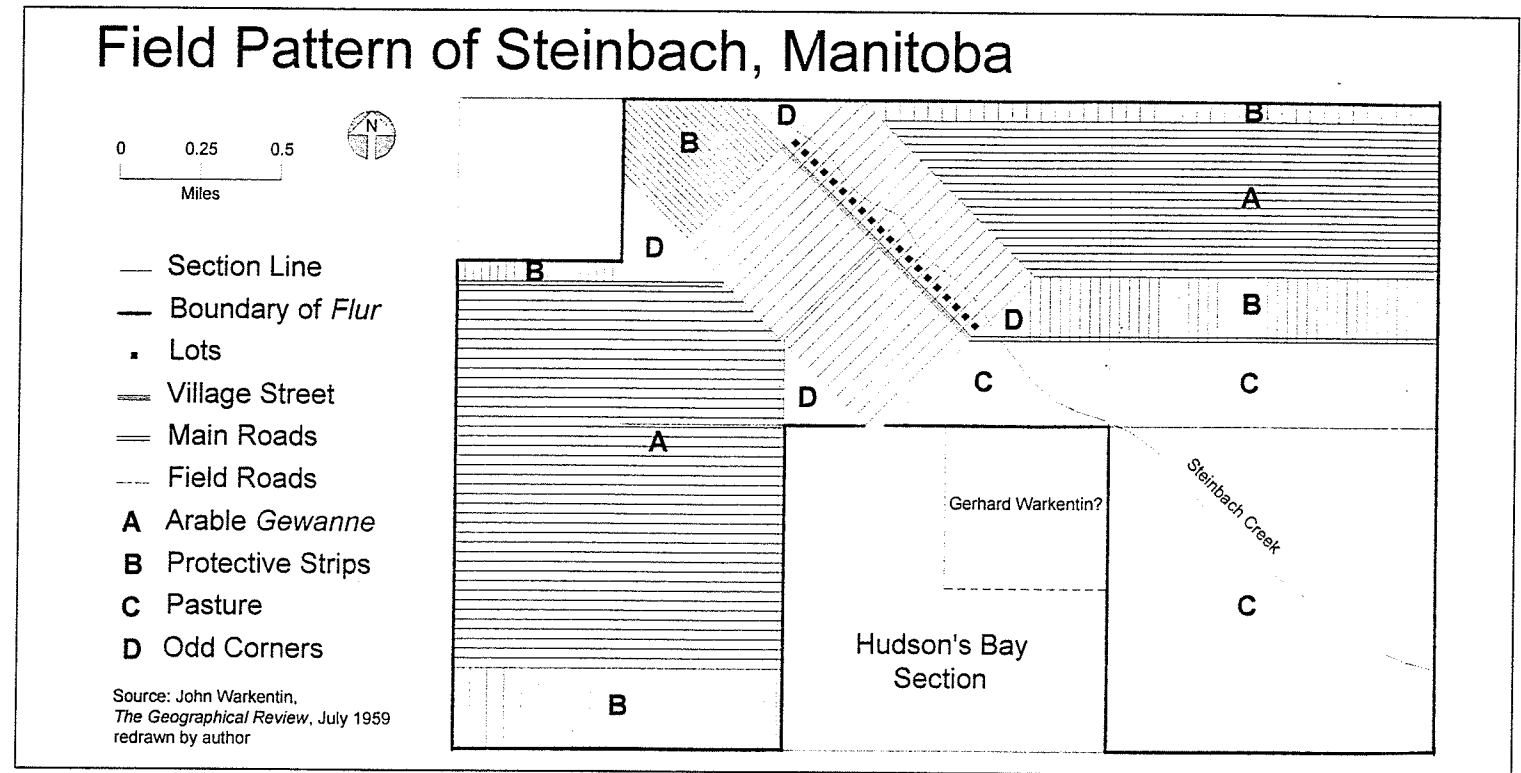
aligning themselves with the creeks in this unique settlement pattern, the Steinbach settlers sought an equitable distribution of good and marginal lands, open prairie and adequate tree coverage for fuel, and equal access to the creeks for daily water needs. The central creek, in particular, was directly responsible for the town's orientation, and, together with the *Straßendorf* system, significantly impacted Steinbach's morphology.

In laying out their village, the Steinbach Mennonites began by collectively signing a village agreement among themselves, and establishing a village district made up of their individually registered quarter-section homesteads. As the Reserve status from the Dominion Government had granted, the Mennonites were exempted from only settling on even-numbered sections (a requirement for individual homesteaders, since odd-numbered sections were reserved for railway grants), and were allowed to settle in block settlements. The resultant adjacency of their individual holdings greatly facilitated the establishment of the village district. In determining the boundaries of this village district, "the Mennonite pioneers had to do some careful surveying and figuring so as to fit the precise number of prospective villagers to the available surrounding area, measured in terms of quarter-sections to be taken up by each of them" (Francis, 1955, 65). As the accompanying map illustrates, the Steinbach village district encom-



passed five sections (or the equivalent of 20 quarter-sections) of land. This represented one quarter-section granted to each of the 18 families, with an additional two quarter-sections purchased by two of the wealthier families. The 160-acre (65-hectare) parcels given to each family unit compared favorably with the 175-acre (71-hectare) plots which had been allotted for each family in Russia. (As in every other township, 3/4 of Section 26 was granted to the Hudson's Bay Company, by the Dominion Government, as a form of compensation for ceding Rupert's Land. The remaining quarter-section was registered to Gerhard Warkentin, one of Steinbach's founding members. However, when the Steinbach village district boundary was established, this quarter-section was not included, for a reason unknown to the author. The total village land area appearing on many maps is therefore only 19 quarter-sections).

After the pioneers pooled their lands, a central avenue (Main Street) 99 feet (30 m) in width and more than one mile (1.6 km) long was aligned parallel to the central creek in a southeast/northwest orientation, thus diagonally bisecting the grid at about 45 degrees. Perpendicular to the east side of Main Street, twenty 5 and 6-acre (2 and 2.5-hectare) farmyards called *Fiastäden* ("the place of the hearth") were then established so that the creek flowed through each farmyard. The lots, approximately 220 feet (67m) wide and 1000 feet (305m)

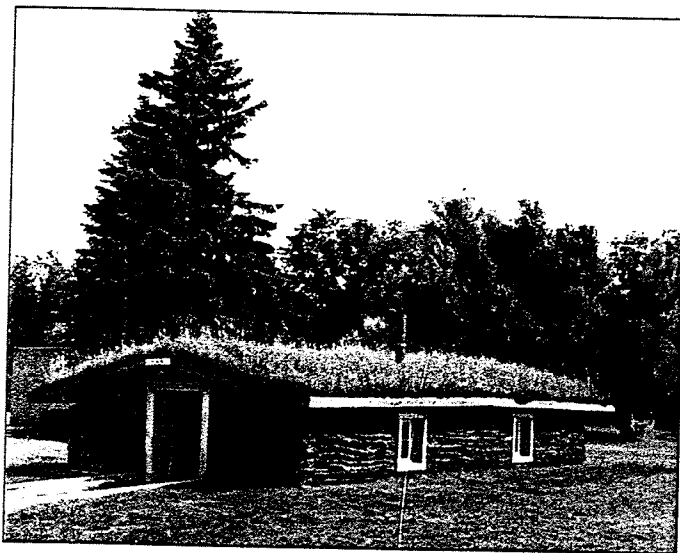


The village district of Steinbach utilizing its European *Straßendorf* ("street village") settlement pattern.

deep, were divided up according to numbers randomly drawn by the settlers, who then traded among themselves to live alongside relatives and preserve their "kinship enclaves" (Loewen, 1993). (It is interesting to note that 12 of the original 18 pioneer families represented only three extended families. These three 'clans' were reflected in the patterning of three distinctive zones of the Steinbach village settlement (Loewen, 1993)). Two of the wealthier Mennonite families (Klaas R. and Katharina Reimer and Franz and Margaretha Kroeker)



Steinbach's Main Street as it appeared in the years immediately following original settlement. Photo from Steinbach: Is there any place like it?



A semlin, hastily constructed from layers of sod, was the first shelter for most of the Steinbach Mennonites during their first winter in Manitoba. Small as it was, the semlin sheltered not only the family, but the livestock as well. This replica is found at the Steinbach Heritage Museum.  
Photo by author

occupied double lots thereby bringing the total to 20 farmyards. The lots on the west side of Main Street mirrored those on the east side, with the exception that they were considerably longer, encompassing ten acres in area. These long, narrow strips of farmland were owned by the same settlers whose farmyards were found directly across the central Main Street. The remaining arable land surrounding the village site was organized into different fields called *Koagels*, each of which was subdivided into individual strips. In addition to their farmyards, farmers were allotted one strip in each *Koagel* thereby ensuring an equitable distribution in the quality of land and its proximity to the household. Flowing through these narrow strips of land, two additional creeks provided water and facilitated drainage of the fields. Woodland and a common pasture surrounded the arable land.

As winter quickly approached, the Steinbach pioneers had little time to establish the elaborate housing forms found in their villages and estates left behind in Southern Russia. Instead, they built small, simple homes which were literally carved into the prairie soil. Klaas W. Reimer, a 13-year-old boy in 1874, later recalled these personal memories of the first fall and winter spent in Steinbach:

First we dug a hole in the ground 3 feet deep, 30 feet long and 14 feet wide.

We piled the sods in layers 3 feet high and set two small windows on the ground. Then we drove into the bush in order to get wood for the rafters... The roof of the house was covered with reeds. Fifteen feet of the building was lined with boards and the other fifteen feet had only a roof of reeds. This end was to be designated for the cattle. Then we also made some hay, but it was all frozen. One evening we were surprised by a prairie fire. For protection against the fire we quickly plowed a strip of land, in the course of which we had to turn over the sods with our hands, almost working ourselves to death in the process. However, our "Serrei" [semlin] was saved.

Now winter had arrived. So we moved into the ark with our cattle and began to feed them. It became evident, however, that this hay had no nutritional value; the cattle could not eat it. Fortunately we were able to buy some hay and save the cattle from starving to death. However, we did not have enough hay, and because of the scarcity of feed, the cattle also suffered more from the cold. Finally we took our tent canvas and covered the cattle with it. Also we began to give two slices of bread daily to each ox and cow. Thus we fortunately got through the winter

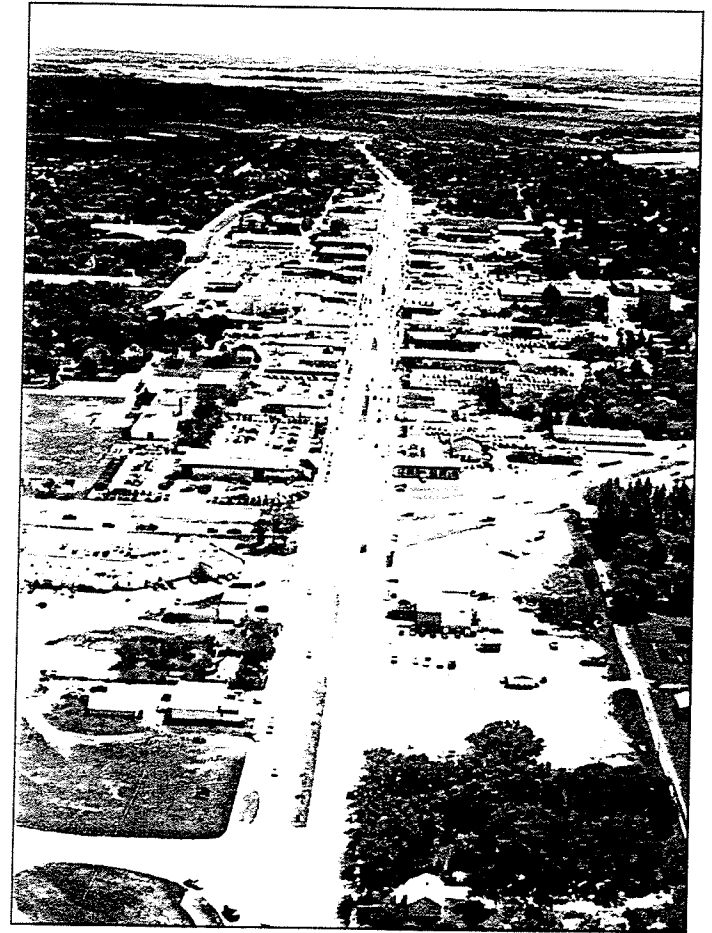


and got the cattle through as well. The latter had, however, been affected so badly by the frost that some oxen lost their tails, others their horns. Some animal's legs were so badly frozen - right up to the knees - that they had to be butchered (Plett, 1990, 128).

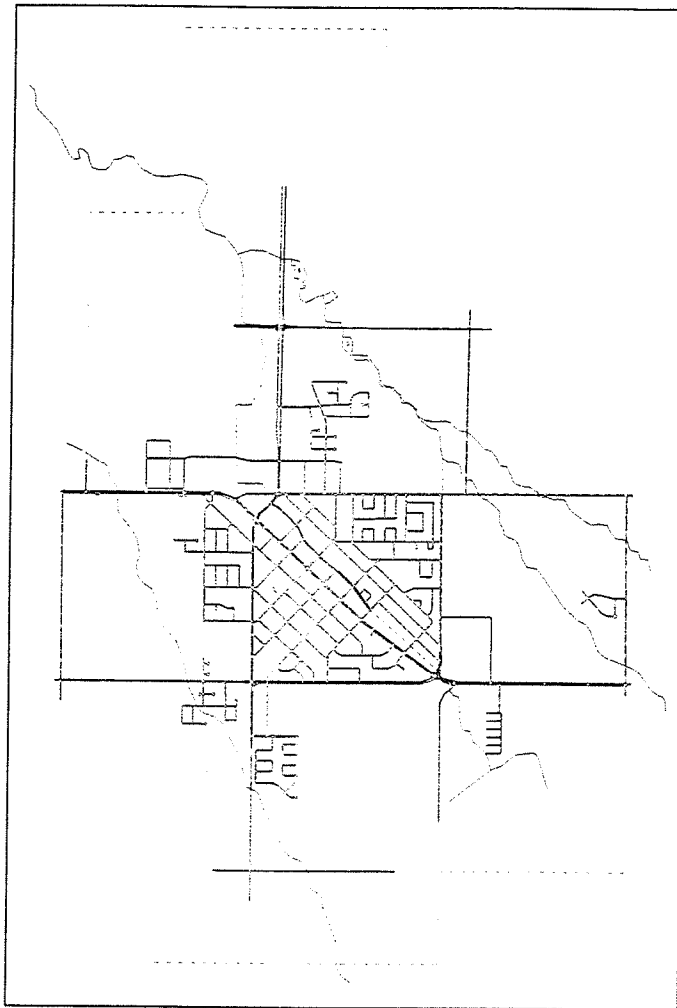
Following a first difficult winter which was both longer and colder than that to which they had been previously accustomed, the ambitious Mennonite pioneers constructed more permanent shelters of wood, and began cultivating the arable fields surrounding their new homes for the first time. The *Straßendorf* layout secured the close proximity of helpful neighbours, which greatly facilitated the difficult work of getting established. The creeks provided an adequate water supply for the cattle and reasonable drainage for the village district, while the nearby woodlots provided ample building material. After a number of years, however, an expanding population began to outgrow the boundaries of the village district. As a result of the often large Mennonite families, surplus lands were soon taken up by the succeeding generation of farmers, and land subdivision was no longer feasible. Additionally, advances in farming techniques and the development of larger farming equipment made the long narrow *Koagel* impractical. The considerable distances

between the various strips owned by the same farmer and the resultant time lost in travel were also problematic. "As the population rose around the turn of the century, families were often forced to make a choice - either concede their second generation to the towns or establish them on lands outside the village boundaries. The latter was much less a break with established ways than the former" (Loewen, 1993, 144). The Anabaptist ideal of separation from the world had been secured in isolated agricultural villages in Prussia and Russia, and continued to be idealized in the North American context. In addition, the *Kleine Gemeinde* brethren were further instructed to "keep to the most humble state, that of the farmer, [which] is the most conducive in maintaining the genuine simplicity of Christ" (Loewen, 1993, 57). Rather than compromise their faith, the *Kleine Gemeinde* pioneers of Steinbach jointly agreed to dissolve the open field system, as many other Mennonite villages had already done, and to move to individually-registered quarter-sections, thereby securing new sources of farmland and safeguarding an agrarian way of life for future generations.

In 1910, the open field system in Steinbach was officially abolished as the need for more land arose. "In September 1910, the village council hired surveyors from Winnipeg to map the village, register its side streets



A bird's-eye-view of Steinbach as it exists today, looking southeast along its Main Street. Several short segments of the central founding creek are visible near the top left corner of the picture. Photo by author



Steinbach's layout as it appears today.

and town lots, and provide the owners with legal title to those lots" (Loewen, 1993, 211). A unique feature about Steinbach's new survey was that it began with the already-existing settlement morphology. Rather than eliminating the original lot formation, the integrity of the street village was maintained by simply subdividing existing properties. According to Delbert Plett, local historian and editor of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Newsletter, *Preservings*, "Steinbach was the only major community in the *East Reserve* founded in 1874 which remained in its original location. Other communities such as Blumenort, Grunthal and Kleefeld, relocated after 1910 when the Strassendorf communal system of land holding was dissolved" (Plett, *Preservings*, December 1996, 2). Evidence of the original street village pattern in Steinbach remains clearly evident today as the majority of streets and avenues are aligned either parallel or perpendicular to the southeast/northwest orientation of Main Street (and the founding creeks). Newer subdivisions, however, in the northeast and southeast corners of Section 35, as well as streets and homes built outside of the section, have been oriented to the sectional grid.

## 5.2 Steinbach and Its "Spirit of Place"

During the village's formative years, the Mennonite

pioneers of Steinbach, like many other European immigrants, were an agrarian people with a fundamental connection to the land. Daily life events were intrinsically linked to the natural landscape, as weather and seasonal cycles guided the patterns of experience. Spring brought new life to the farmyard and was a time for seeding the arable land. Summer involved nurturing the fields and gardens to produce the rich crops harvested during the fall. Winter provided an opportunity to venture into the frozen woodlots by sleigh and bring back timber for the following year's building projects. This was the annual rhythm of life for these pioneers. In a typical journal entry from 1895, Klaas R. Reimer, a leading merchant and prominent pioneer businessman in Steinbach, outlines the interdependence of humanity and nature in this context:

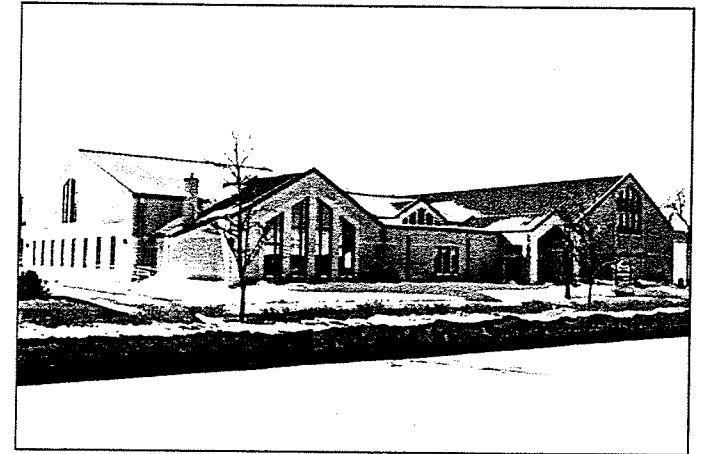
May 4. Planted the earliest potatoes. 1 pound costs one dollar, they are supposed to be ready for eating in 33 days. Had the brown mare bred by Kornelius Fast's stallion. Planted 1000 cabbage plants. The plum trees are blooming. Finished planting all the potatoes. May 9. Our son David was born, all well and chipper. May 10. Frost ice as thick as a pane of glass. May 11. Frost again one quarter inch thick. The seeding is finished (Plett, 1990, 125).

The natural landscape wasn't simply the context within which these events took place, but rather a direct contributor to the formation of these events. The unique climate, soil conditions and physical features guided the activities which occurred there. The flat prairie grassland, dense clumps of poplar, slow, meandering streams and an endless horizon played a crucial and definitive role in developing the psyche of this pioneer community. Whether this was consciously realized or simply a part of the subconscious underpinning of the community is difficult to determine. One wonders, for example, what Heinrich Brandt or Anna Barkman experienced as they gazed across the prairie in search of their cattle huddled in a muddy swale of a creek. What stories could the Reimer children share of hard work in the summer sun, wildflower picnics on a Sunday afternoon or a refreshing dip in the nearby stream where the water formed a small pool? Although many of these questions will remain unanswered, the fact remains that the natural landscape played an integral role in the shaping of Steinbach's "spirit of place".

Through interaction with Steinbach's natural landscape, the human landscape has, of course, contributed invaluable to Steinbach's "spirit of place" as well. In his book, *Family, Church & Market*, Royden Loewen outlines three primary social structures which have both shaped and been shaped by the natural landscape, in

the creation of Steinbach's unique settlement morphology. Two of these, the family and church life, have already been alluded to earlier. The third, social structure, is what many have termed Steinbach's "entrepreneurial spirit". Each of these components of the human landscape is briefly outlined below.

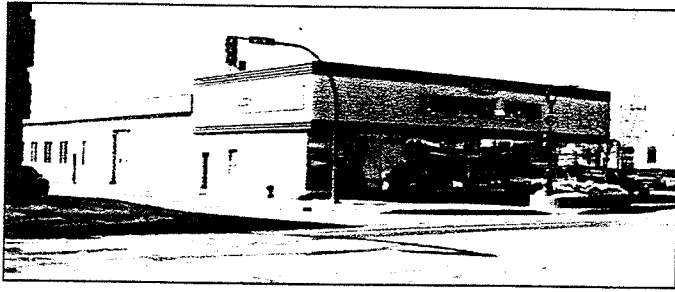
Prior to their mass migration, the Russian Mennonites had developed close-knit communities and strong kinship ties in which "the nuclear family, or domestic group, was the central organizing unit..." (Loewen, 1993, 3). Partially, this had been a defense mechanism from the threat of nomadic bandits, but additionally the *Kleine Gemeinde* and other Mennonite groups were able to preserve their cultural heritage and strong Anabaptist faith through this organization. Upon settling in Manitoba, the Steinbach *Kleine Gemeinde* additionally recognized the importance of the family farm as the means of production to secure a livelihood. Since the irregular soils of the *East Reserve* made large-scale crop farming very difficult, what naturally evolved was a form of subsistence agricultural in which the household was the primary unit of production (e.g. eggs, butter, milk). This served to add economic responsibility and importance to the family structure. As suggested above, the Mennonite family generational structure was also responsible for the "kinship enclaves" in Steinbach's *Straßendorf* settlement. Even today, the names of streets



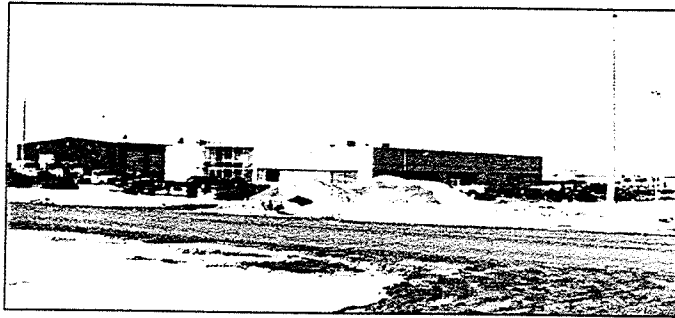
The Evangelical Mennonite Church, historically the *Kleine Gemeinde*, is located on Steinbach's Main Street. Photo by author



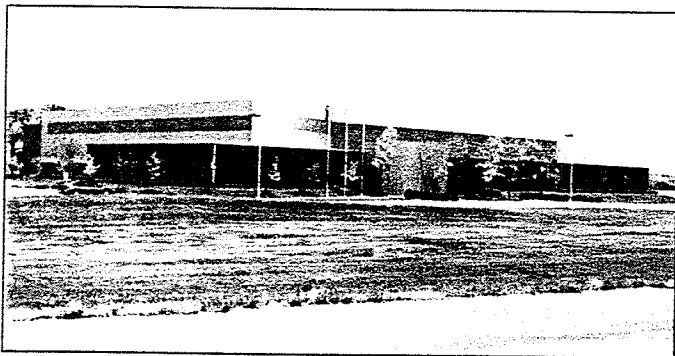
The Steinbach Mennonite Church located on Loewen Boulevard in Steinbach. Photo by author



Fairway Ford, the first Ford dealership in Western Canada in 1914, credits its founding to Steinbach pioneer, Jacob R. Friesen. Photo by author



Big Freight Systems Inc. is one of three international trucking companies to claim Steinbach as its birthplace. Photo by author



Biovail Corporation International, a pharmaceutical company, has made Steinbach its world manufacturing headquarters. Photo by author

and businesses continue to reflect the family names of Steinbach's founding pioneers (Reimer, Friesen, Brandt, Barkman, Giesbrecht, Kroeker...).

A second significant social structure underpinning the community of Steinbach was the Anabaptist faith embodied within the Mennonite church. As Loewen maintains, "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" (Loewen, 1983, 165). In particular, the life of simplicity as expressed in the tenets of the *Kleine Gemeinde* faith had a profound impact upon village morphology. The life of farming was understood to best exemplify the humility of Christ which, together with an emphasis on the community of believers, naturally encouraged the continuation of the previously-adopted farming village. Additionally, the *Kleine Gemeinde* were strongly opposed to a railway spur line from the neighbouring French village of Giroux "as there is danger in it for us and our children in that we might become like the world in business and lifestyle" (Loewen, 1993,

161). An acceptance of the railroad would have had profound, far-reaching implications for the future settlement pattern of Steinbach.

During the early years of settlement, the life of simplicity also delegated sports as extraneous to human development for members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* community. Work - hard work - was understood to be the best and only form of exercise necessary. Gerald Wright reports that "as recently as 1937 the largest and most influential church in Steinbach - the *Kleine Gemeinde* - passed an official resolution condemning participation in sports activities as unbecoming the character of a Christian" (Wright, 1991, 151). The impact of this condemnation upon organized sports was the severe lack of adequate parks and playing fields for both children and adults in early Steinbach life.

Today, church life continues to play a significant role in the lives of Steinbachers as evidenced by the more than two dozen churches in Steinbach. However, this abundance of churches - many of which are not Mennonite - has had a moderating influence upon many of the early, rigid church policies. For example, active promotion of and participation in sports is strongly encouraged by most parishioners, and is evidenced by the great number of sporting facilities which have been built since the 1950s.

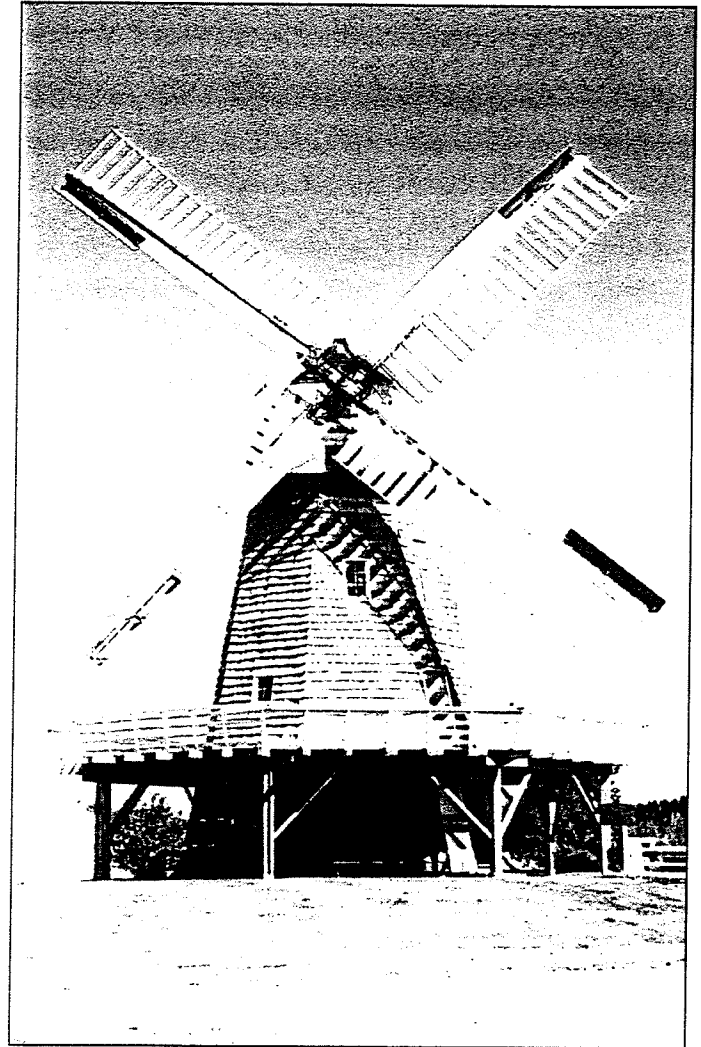
The third social structure which has profoundly

shaped Steinbach is its “entrepreneurial spirit”. Early in Steinbach’s settlement history, several of its inhabitants sought a supplemental income, were unable to acquire suitable agricultural lands, and/or chose to pursue an alternative livelihood to farming. For any variety of reasons (including the influence of direct contact with Winnipeg businesses where supplies were purchased), a number of small-scale businesses began to emerge along Steinbach’s Main Street. “By the 1890s the west side of Steinbach’s central street was rapidly being filled with the rented houses of young Mennonite families and German Lutheran immigrants who worked as wage earners and craftsmen” (Loewen, 1993, 159). In 1877, the first general store sold Winnipeg merchandise on consignment. A flour mill, cheese factory, wood and steelworks, sawmills, and a farm implement dealership soon followed. Initially frowned upon by the *Kleine Gemeinde* leadership, these businesses were soon understood as necessities. Among the most controversial enterprises, was the establishment of the first Ford dealership in Western Canada in 1914 by Jacob R. Friesen. (Steinbach is now self-proclaimed as “the Automobile City” with its 10 dealerships). In lieu of a railroad, ambitious entrepreneurs began hauling surplus agricultural products (especially milk, cheese and butter) by horse teams and later by truck. Steinbach now boasts the formation of three international trucking com-

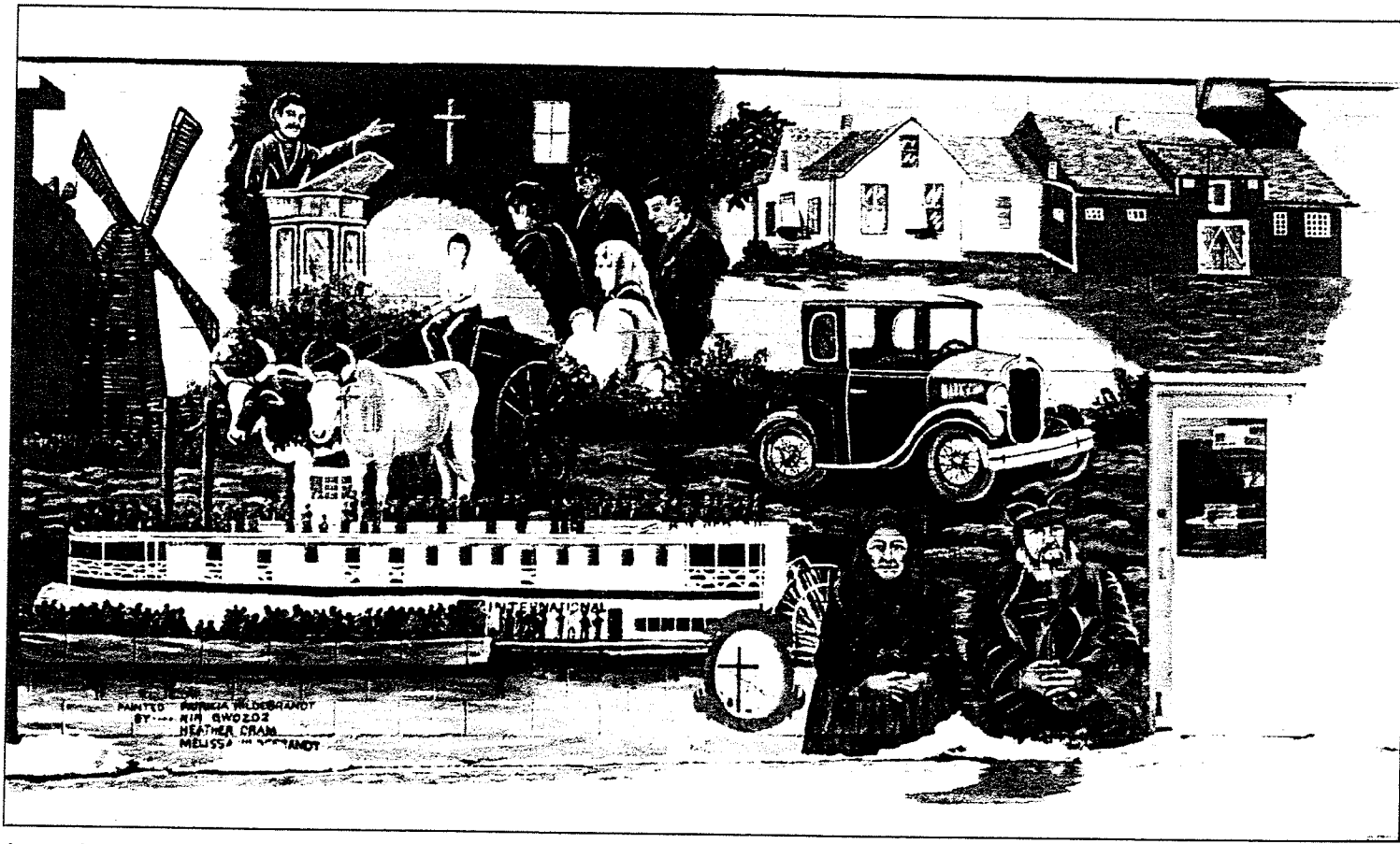
panies - Reimer Express Lines (originally headquartered in Steinbach), Penner International Inc. and Big Freight Systems Inc. (formerly, South East Transport Systems). As E.K. Francis maintains, “When the demand for a major regional trade center finally made itself felt because of an increasing population and greater economic prosperity, Steinbach had already established itself as the unchallenged commercial capital not only for the whole municipality but for a rather extensive hinterland south and east of it” (Francis, 1955, 157).

The preceding social structures have demonstrated a vibrant, flourishing human landscape from which the entrepreneurial spirit, in particular, continues to thrive to this day. Through the vigilant efforts of local authors and historians, much is known about the Mennonite *Kleine Gemeinde* - the Steinbach pioneers. Extensive work has been done to locate lost pioneer diaries, and research far-reaching family genealogies. The Mennonite Heritage Village Museum, a popular tourist attraction, demonstrates the diligent work of many volunteers to preserve historic buildings and artifacts, in an attempt to remember the founding pioneers and educate their succeeding generations. All of this work is to be commended.

By the same token, however, little effort has been made to understand and celebrate the natural landscape within which this human landscape has flourished. As



A near replica of the windmill built in 1877 by Steinbach pioneer and millright, Peter K. Barkman. Despite a recent fire, which destroyed this working model, the windmill has become such an important symbol in Steinbach's identity that plans are currently well advanced for its reconstruction. Photo by author, at Steinbach's Heritage Village Museum



A mural, located at Steinbach Hatchery & Feed Ltd along Steinbach's Main Street, illustrates the historic preservation of Steinbach's vibrant human landscape. Photo by author

an equal contributor to *place*, the unique natural landscape of Steinbach with its founding creeks provides distinctive characteristics which cannot be replicated elsewhere. As Anne Spirn maintains, "A city's natural environment and its urban form, taken together, comprise a record of the interaction between natural processes and human purpose over time. Together they contribute to each city's unique identity" (Spirn, 1984, 12). Conscious attempts must therefore be made to reconnect Steinbach and its residents (not in a simply historical sense) with a natural landscape which has played such a vital role in the city's formation and early settlement. Only through the synthesis of the human and natural landscapes can a rich, cultural landscape fully achieve its "spirit of place" in Steinbach.

## 6.0 Exploring Steinbach's Creeks

As Steinbach has sprung from a small agricultural village into a thriving commercial city and regional trade centre, it has been demonstrated that the growth of the human landscape and its associated activities has clearly overshadowed the significance of Steinbach's natural landscape. Large-scale economic expansion has been focused upon the construction of new homes, roads, commercial and industrial buildings. This growth is a vital part of maintaining a healthy, vibrant community, but constitutes, in itself, only a portion of a community's quality of life and its "spirit of place." While the human landscape has effectively flourished, the cultural landscape, in true recognition of *place*, demands the natural landscape as its context. The natural landscape which has given shape to Steinbach's human endeavours and built environment has been lost in this process.

It is at this point that our attention is drawn to Steinbach's formative creeks. Even though they presently exist as manipulated fragments of what they once were, the creeks are nevertheless the only significant surviving remnants of pre-1910 life in Steinbach's natural landscape. As outlined above, the creeks, together with the *Straßendorf* layout, demonstrate a unique cultural adaptation by the Steinbach pioneers of the late

19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This recounting of history is not to suggest a revival of Steinbach's agrarian roots and original village form. Such a purpose could not be repeated, nor should it be. Rather, this rich history provides the building blocks, rationale and the impetus to explore new and expanded uses for the historically significant creeks. The opportunity arises for the creeks to once again become the vehicle with which to provide a deeper, more meaningful connection to place. The challenge now lies in recognizing the changing imagery associated with this unique landscape and allowing for its on-going transformation.

The following account begins with a discussion of several distinct images associated with a generic creek environment. The acknowledgement is made that there are many different ways to interpret the simple flow of a stream, as its characteristics change significantly from one bend to the next. It is important to outline these images in order to explore the tremendous diversity of potential opportunities which exist in Steinbach's creeks, all of which add richness to the experience.

### 6.1 Pleasures of a Prairie Stream

*The prairie stretches forth endlessly from horizon to horizon where its various shades of yellows, greens and browns give way to an azure*







*blue sky. The air is warm and dry - typical of a prairie summer. Ground squirrels bask in the hot sun, ever mindful of the shadow of a passing hawk or the patient stalking of a hungry fox. High above, gulls soar effortlessly across a cloudless sky, while a gentle breeze stirs the colourful sea of wildflowers below. A few small bluffs of poplar, with leaves trembling in the warm wind, provide vertical relief to an otherwise horizontal plane. The only other interruption in this broad expanse of tall-grass prairie is a green ribbon of willow trees revealing a small creek lazily winding its way back and forth across the landscape. At one point, the creek broadens and ponds slightly creating a small marsh wetland. Within the abundance of aquatic life, a red-winged blackbird perches precariously on a bulrush; a pair of mallard ducks float across the open water serenaded by a mixed chorus of crickets and frogs. Farther along, the creek, filled to capacity following a recent cloudburst, narrows again and the water moves forth with a new sense of urgency. It is the carrier of much-needed nutrients to other organisms farther downstream. The trees and shrubs, flanking the creek on either side, provide habitat for countless*

*varieties of wildlife species all of which are nourished by the flowing water. Again, the creek widens for a moment allowing the flow of water to slow momentarily, only to narrow once more causing a slight ripple in the surface. Always seeking the path of least resistance, the creek continues its meandering form in this alternating rhythm of ebb and flow - a dynamic life-giving force pulsing across the prairie landscape.*

- Poem by author

### **Creek as Historic Resource**

The scene painted by this text is perhaps a somewhat romanticized version of one which must have greeted the Mennonite (and other European) pioneers as they entered the Canadian prairies near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the final stage of their journey after a long trek from overseas, they no doubt paused in reflection (amidst the ever-present humming of mosquitoes) along numerous creeksides as their oxen drank and rested. Additionally, in the Steinbach settlement (not unlike other Mennonite villages), the creeks were later integral to the formation of the village, and to the functioning of an agrarian lifestyle.

As with other physical landscapes, a creek environment provides the natural setting for the creation of experience, and may later act as the trigger in loosening



ing the memory of experience. It may also be the embodiment of the memory of that experience. Unlike other settings, a creek is not static, nor does it have the ability to remain frozen in time. In its natural flow, it transcends time - encompassing past, present and future. Through its on-going interaction with human experience, this natural landscape creates new memories while continuing to embrace the historical context of that first meeting. The following story provides a vivid illustration of this process:

When Johann R. Reimer (1848-1918) settled in Steinbach he found an old oak tree on the banks of the Steinbach creek where it crossed his Wirtschaft. It was a full and beautiful tree even in 1874. Klaas J. B. Reimer has written that 'the old pioneers are all gone, but the old oak lives on [in 1965]. Its dark green leaves are so beautiful and each summer have provided a joy to humanity' (Plett, *Preservings*, December 1996, 43).

For these pioneers, the tree was more than a simple oak down by the creek. It held meaning - a natural product of experience. This experience had been shaped by the events and circumstances surrounding their lives over time. They recalled not only the moment when they first experienced the oak, but, more significantly, the events they had also experienced during the time

which had elapsed since then. To recount the experience involved the restructuring of the historical event through memory, as triggered by the tree itself. Even as memories were recalled, new experiences were being recorded.

### **Creek as Inspiration**

As the poem above illustrates, a natural creek can provide a most inspiring landscape. Throughout the ages, moving water - from a mere trickle to a raging torrent - has had a mesmerizing and alluring psychological impact upon the human observer. The distant gurgling of a small creek is an intoxicating sound. As it draws one nearer and captivates the senses, one becomes lost in its flow. It is music to the soul and gently calming to the spirit. As Anne Spirn, author of *The Granite Garden*, maintains, "Water is a source of life, power, comfort, and delight, a universal symbol of purification and renewal. Like a primordial magnet, water pulls at a primitive and deeply rooted part of human nature. More than any other single element... water has the greatest potential to forge an emotional link between man and nature..." (Spirn, 1984, 142).

Flowing water has provided the inspiration for countless poets and musicians over the centuries. It has also been the subject of many landscape paintings, and as-



Two brothers are captured by the lure of the creek in Steinbach's A.D. Penner Park. The educational benefits of such an outdoor classroom are tremendous. Photo by author

sumed a prominent contextual role in the plots of numerous literary works. In addition, flowing water has assumed a position of symbolic significance in many cultures, and has been utilized as a deeply meaningful religious metaphor - the *River of Life*, for example. Throughout this process, the creek (as an example of flowing water) has moved beyond simply being an element of aesthetic consideration. Its beauty is uncontested, however, through human interaction, an even greater potential has been realized - it has been imbued with meaning.

### Creek as Outdoor Classroom

The educational opportunities provided by a natural creek and the environment it sustains are unlimited, particularly when found in an urban context. Environmental education is something which happens not only in the classroom. As Michael Hough maintains, "Children learn about life and their environment less by the occasional visit to the nature centre or the museum than by constant and direct experience in their daily surroundings" (Hough, 1984, 107). In reflection of life as a child, the most memorable places were not the conventional programmed play areas provided by schoolyards and totlots, but rather the vacant lots, backlanes, and derelict wastelands where wild nature had been "allowed"

to regain its hold. It is this environment in which birds' nests and garter snakes are found, and ultimately where a childhood imagination is unleashed for the greatest adventures. "When children come along with an embryonic interest in natural history, they need free places for pottering, netting, catching, and watching" (Pyle, 1993, 148). As Robert Pyle further suggests, "Young naturalists need the 'trophy', hands-on stage before leap-frogging to mere looking. There need to be places that are not kid-proofed, where children can do damage and come back the following year to see the results" (Pyle, 1993, 148).

The memory of childhood spontaneity and discovery was once again reinforced for the author while researching this practicum, as he walked along a portion of the North Creek which flows through the Steinbach Fly-in Golf Course and A.D. Penner Park. Near the town's outdoor swimming pool, the creek is enhanced by an artesian well to create a large pond. At the northern shore, the pond narrows significantly as the creek resumes its form, and passes beneath a small foot / cycling bridge. It was here that the author encountered two young brothers, perhaps five and seven years of age, wading in the creek and poking around the rocks with long sticks, looking for crayfish and other aquatic life. They were completely oblivious to his presence until he spoke to them. Dressed simply in swimming

trunks, the boys confirmed his suspicions that they had originally come to the swimming pool, but had become sidetracked by the lure of the creek. They suggested that there was much more to do at the creek, and that it was a lot more fun playing here than in a box filled with water. The boys also hastily assured the author that their mother had said it was "OK" that they could be here! By giving the creeks (Central Creek, in particular) a greater presence within Steinbach itself, such a valuable learning experience could be a daily occurrence.

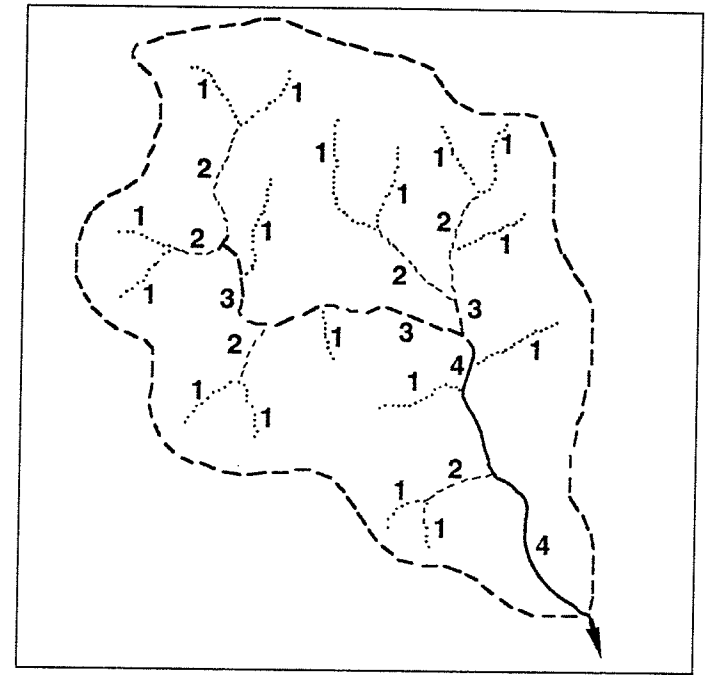
### Creek as Natural Process

The preceding discussions relating to creeks have taken place from a largely anthropocentric (or human-oriented) perspective. In this sense, the creek is understood in its relationship to the human observer/participant as an element of aesthetic beauty or as the measure of human activity upon the landscape. Another way of understanding a creek is from an ecological viewpoint in which it is recognized as a natural process, apart from human contact.

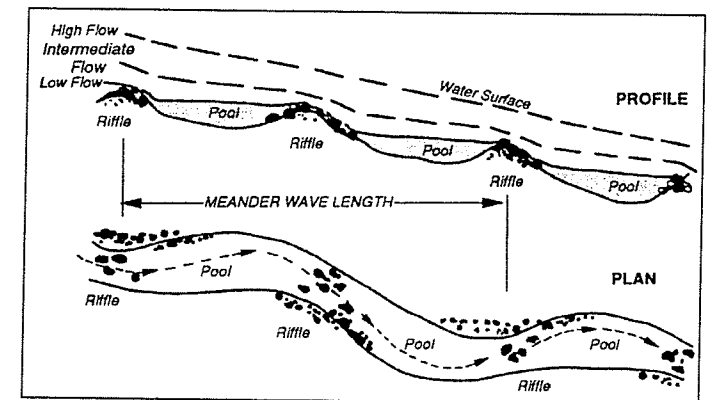
In his book, *The Thunder Tree: Lessons From an Urban Wildland*, Robert Pyle acknowledges that "What to one person is a poem and a living thing is, to another, a mere tube for transporting water and whatever effluent it can carry. The latter attitude found its form in the

thousands of streams that were sunk into underground storm drains as our cities grew, the former in the present practice of 'daylighting' such streams" (Pyle, 1993, 22-23). The 'poem' of which Pyle is speaking is the natural stream process which existed long before the creeks were sunk underground, and in need of daylighting.

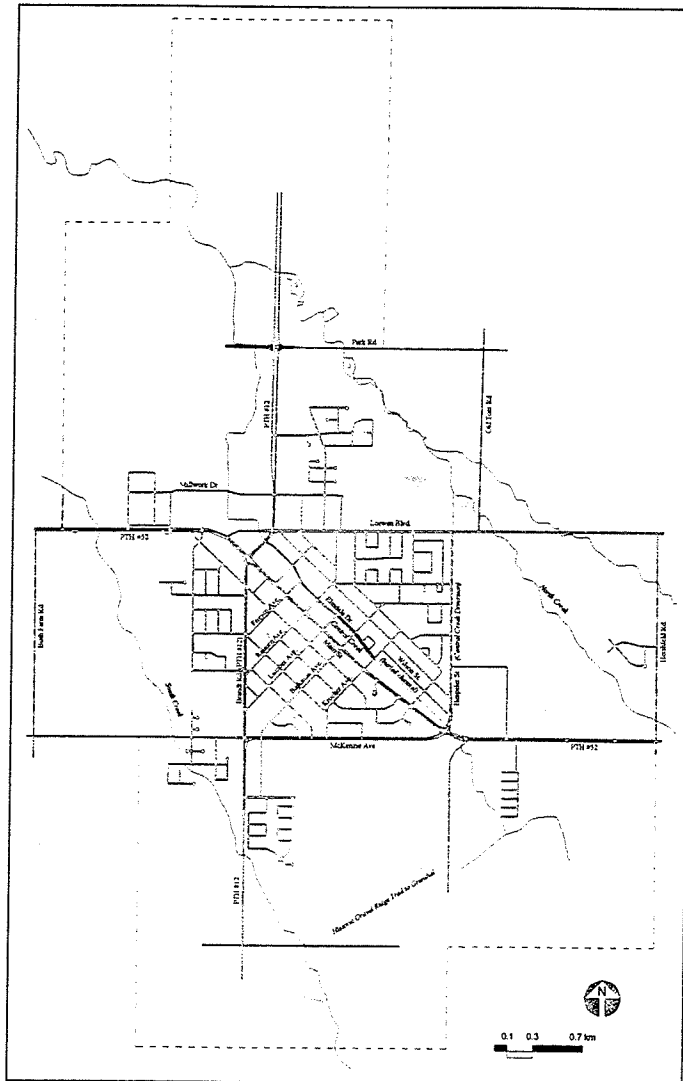
An examination of natural stream morphology is a fascinating study of the way in which water flows across the landscape. For example, in its natural patterning, a stream has an average branching habit of 3.5:1. That is, the primary reach of a river or stream is naturally composed of three or four secondary streams, each of which is made up of an additional three or four tertiary streams, and so on until the final tributaries (designated Order 1 stream segments) become negligibly small. Together, this complete system constitutes the watershed of that region. Additionally, along each reach, the creek channel maintains a particular geometry in its flow. Regardless of the slope of the landscape, a stream will complete a natural 'S' curve in its meandering at average intervals of twelve times its width. Steep runs are naturally characterized by gentle meanders and a narrow channel, while broad meandering streams occur on flat topographies. It is for this reason that rectilinear, channelized portions of a river or stream require continual maintenance to ensure a straight channel, as waterways do not naturally conform to this geometry.



Theoretical watershed illustrating a natural stream branching habit, and the ordering system for designating stream segments. Drawing from *Stream Analysis and Fish Habitat Design*



The natural meandering form of a stream accompanied by alternating pools and riffles. Drawing from *Stream Analysis and Fish Habitat Design*



Reference map for Central, North and South Creeks, within context of the city of Steinbach. Drawing by author

The mechanics of each completed ‘S’ curve consist of a pairing of pools and riffles, which provide a stepped profile rather than a uniform gradient in the stream’s slope. It is this natural stream process which provides the range in habitat conditions suitable for a great diversity of flora, macroinvertebrates, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals (Newbury and Gaboury, 1993).

However, this natural stream process is highly vulnerable to changes imposed by human hands. Creeks and streams have been channelized, their flow altered, and their banks stripped of vegetation. In a study of intermittent streams, which characterize the prairie region of the North American interior, researchers concluded that “Modification of intermittent streams by channelization, removal of riparian vegetation, grazing, construction of headwater impoundments, siltation, and domestic and industrial effluents is highly deleterious to these sensitive habitats and their biota and significantly degrades the quality of adjacent terrestrial habitats. Accordingly, these perturbations insidiously affect the quality of human life in the region” (Zale et al., 1989, 38). A creek must be understood as more than simply a collection of biological artifacts - a place where nature is “permitted” to exist seemingly unhindered. It is a living system, part of a much larger system. “In barest terms, a watercourse is defined by the discrete point of the beginning of flow, the clear confluence with

another body, and the nature of the basin that it drains in between. The moisture it carries gives a stream its character, but it is the movement of water over territory that makes it a place” (Pyle, 1993, 23).

Today, the tall-grass prairie has been replaced by agriculture - oil and cereal crops, and grazing cattle in marginal lands. Many of the poplar bluffs remain, particularly where homesteads have been located, and have been augmented with other non-native species to form a protective shelterbelt surrounding houses and various farm buildings. The meandering stream has all too often been replaced by a channelized ditch - straight and narrow in its mechanical flow, and conforming to political boundaries superimposed upon the landscape. Additionally, the creek has been stripped of its accompanying vegetation, which is seen as competition to area crops for moisture and nutrients. Without the protective vegetation, macroinvertebrates, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds and mammals are unable to find shelter and survive in this altered environment. Biodiversity has been replaced by a biologically sterile landscape.

With these images in mind, the reader is now taken on a journey along each of Steinbach’s three creeks as they appear today, in order to determine specific, existing site conditions. For the purposes of this study, these waterways, which have not been formally named, are

simply called the Central, North and South Creeks, in reference to their respective geographic relationship to the city of Steinbach. Originating in the sandy, peatmoss soils of the Aspen Parkland southeast of Steinbach, these three creeks constitute a primary source of a northwesterly-flowing drainage system.

While Central Creek bisects the one mile section which has become the City proper, North Creek meanders through the Steinbach Fly-in Golf Course north of the city and South Creek flows south of Steinbach (along the edge of the present landfill site). The central and northerly branches join approximately one mile north and 1/4 mile west of Steinbach before merging with the southerly branch approximately 3 miles north and 3 miles west of Steinbach. (As the use of imperial units is a more accurate reflection of the sectional grid system, they are used in this form of reference only). It must be noted that while portions of the North, South and Central Creeks appear to be 'natural' in their flows and patterning, extensive land drainage and ditch construction over the last number of decades have readily altered the flow of these and many other creeks throughout southeastern Manitoba.

## 6.2 Central Creek

The exact location of the source of the Central Creek

is not easy to determine. While its flow is discernible in aerial photographs of the interspersed wooded regions immediately southeast of Steinbach, the original creekbed becomes lost from view. A complicating factor is that the land is generally quite flat, which forces the water to pool and continually seek a different flow pattern. This lack of significant change in elevation prevents the natural formation of a deeply-incised stream channel which could be easily followed, thereby contributing to the uncertainty of its origin. Additionally, a natural gravel ridge, situated in a northeast-southwest orientation, cuts across Section 25, Township 6, Range 6E (25-6-6E) and bisects the source flow of Central Creek. (As has already been noted above, this gravel ridge is one segment of an extended ridge which was an historically significant transportation corridor between Steinbach and Grunthal for early Mennonites). Whether the source waters of Central Creek percolate through the gravel ridge or are diverted around this ridge from the northeast, it is difficult to determine. In any case, it can be assumed that the Central Creek, like the North and South Creeks, has its origin in the Rural Municipality of La Broquerie southeast of Steinbach - an area characterized by marshy swamps, peaty soils, and a high water table.

The Central Creek emerges on a treeless field in the northwest quadrant of Section 25-6-6E on the north side



Bulrushes and reeds denote a small pond along Central Creek near its origin at NW 25-6-6E. Photo by author



A dry creekbed winds its way through a thick underbrush of dogwood, willow and a predominant canopy of trembling aspen. Photo by author



A slight depression denotes a small pond - a swimming hole for Steinbach's early settlers. Photo by author



Frank Klassen walks along a winding path, which parallels the Central Creek. He suggests that this path may well have been one of the Winter roads used by early pioneers to obtain lumber and firewood. Photo by author

of the gravel ridge noted above. Significant ponding of the creek occurs at this point accompanied by a rich abundance of bulrushes, reeds and other aquatic vegetation. As it nears Steinbach at the southwest corner of Aspen Mobile Village (a trailer park), Central Creek enters an area of pristine Aspen Parkland. The property through which the creek flows, presently owned by retired councillor Frank B. Klassen, has not been exposed to any form of development and likely resembles quite strongly what the 1874 Steinbach immigrants would have encountered. As Abe Warkentin maintains, "The first Steinbach settlers chopped a road through the brush to build what is today Steinbach's Main Street in the fall of 1874" (Warkentin, 1971, 145). This is still an accurate depiction of Klassen's property today. The creek lazily winds its way through a thick underbrush of dogwood (*Cornus* sp.), willow (*Salix* sp.), and a predominant canopy of trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). Due to the flat terrain, the water pools in slight depressions to form small ponds, one of which, according to Klassen, was a prime swimming hole used by the early settlers. Klassen maintains that the creek flows intermittently - overflowing its banks in the spring melt, and often drying up completely by mid-July. If one looks carefully, the impressions made by horse-drawn sleds years ago is scarcely visible in a winding path which parallels the creek. This may well have

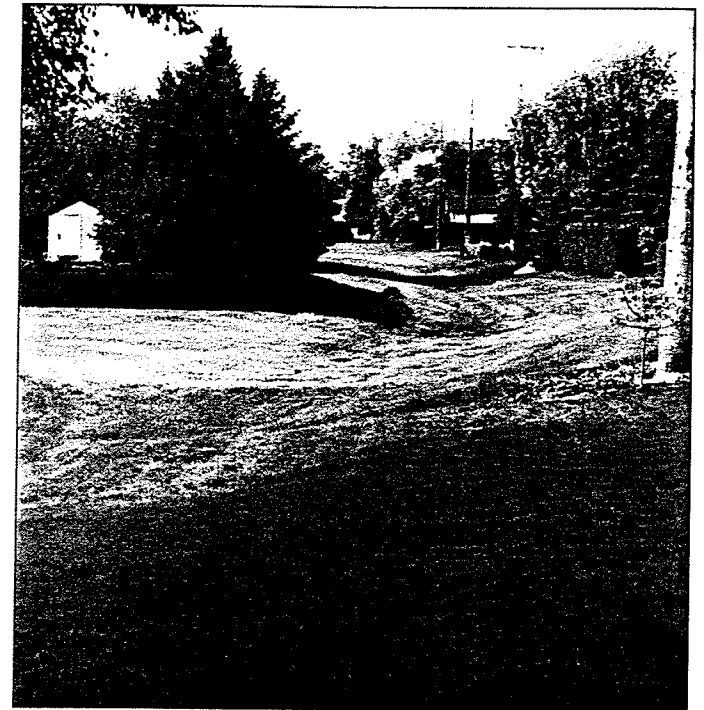
been the road taken by villagers to winter logging camps in the present-day Woodridge region. The movement of these sleds was such a significant disturbance to the soil and vegetation that the trail is still void of shrub and tree canopy layers even though it has not been used in a great number of years.

After emerging from the dense cover of brush, the creek winds its way through a small open meadow presently utilized by Klassen as a pasture for his horses. The creek bed is wider here and forms a significant pond each spring - a pond much enjoyed by the Klassen children 30 years ago. As the Central Creek is culverted beneath the highway at the junction of Hespeler Street, McKenzie Ave., and Main Street (PTH 52), its original path through the town is re-routed to the east side of Hespeler Street. What is left of the original Central Creek as it enters the town is a slight depression in a manicured right-of-way of grass between the backyards of homes on Main Street and Wilson Street. The periodic steel grates along this stretch note the catch basins and presence of the storm drain beneath which has replaced the Central Creek. As Anne Spirn maintains, "All but the largest creeks and streams of the pre-city landscape have vanished from a modern map. Covered and forgotten, old streams still flow through the city buried beneath the ground in large pipes, primary channels of a subterranean storm system. Their muf-

fled roar can still be heard beneath the street after a heavy rain..." (Spirm, 1984, 130). The right-of-way crosses Goossen Avenue at the north edge of a condominium development, continues between the opposing backyards of additional homes, and opens up at K.R. Barkman Park, named after a prominent mayor in Steinbach's history. A gentle swale coursing its way through the park is the only suggestion that a creek once flowed here.

The diversion and burying of the creek throughout this approximately 780m (2560') reach between Hespeler St. and Kroeker Ave. took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s as part of Steinbach's waterworks program in full use today. Two artesian wells, drawing from a large limestone aquifer located between 30m (98') and 70m (230') underground, were drilled near the junction of Main Street and Kroeker Avenue. Two underground 545,520L (120 000 gallon) concrete reservoirs, located along Main Street within K.R. Barkman Park, provide temporary storage for this water. The groundwater is then pumped along the right-of-way (identified above) in a large pipe (located beneath the storm drainage system) to a water conditioning facility and water tower, completed in 1974 and situated at the southeast corner of Steinbach (*Town of Steinbach Background Study*). The Central Creek was diverted and buried during this construction process.

As one crosses Kroeker Avenue, the creek "re-surfaces" for the first time, after more than one-third of its in-town journey has already been completed in an underground land drainage system. Adding to its volume any accumulated flow from "upstream", Central Creek at this point takes on the character of an intermittent urban ditch handling local run-off only, and remains dry between periodic rainstorms throughout the summer months. As John Warkentin acknowledges, "With the passage of years, the creek, along which the village was originally laid out, has ceased to flow; the ditches have robbed it of its water, and all that remains is a depression, alongside which a boulevard residential street [has been] constructed" (Warkentin, 1960, 385). Nevertheless, remnants of a natural stream are clearly visible in the accompanying vegetation such as the reeds which continually fight to exist despite a regular maintenance regime of mowing. The creek is restricted from its natural winding form by the presence of Elmdale Drive - a pair of residential streets which parallel the creek on each side. From this point throughout the rest of the town proper, the creek is restricted to a width of no more than 2m (6'-6"), and often does not exceed 1m (3'-3") unless discharging waters from a spring thaw or a severe rainstorm. Within the confines of Elmdale Drive, Central Creek gently drifts to the northwest for an additional three blocks while flowing through cul-

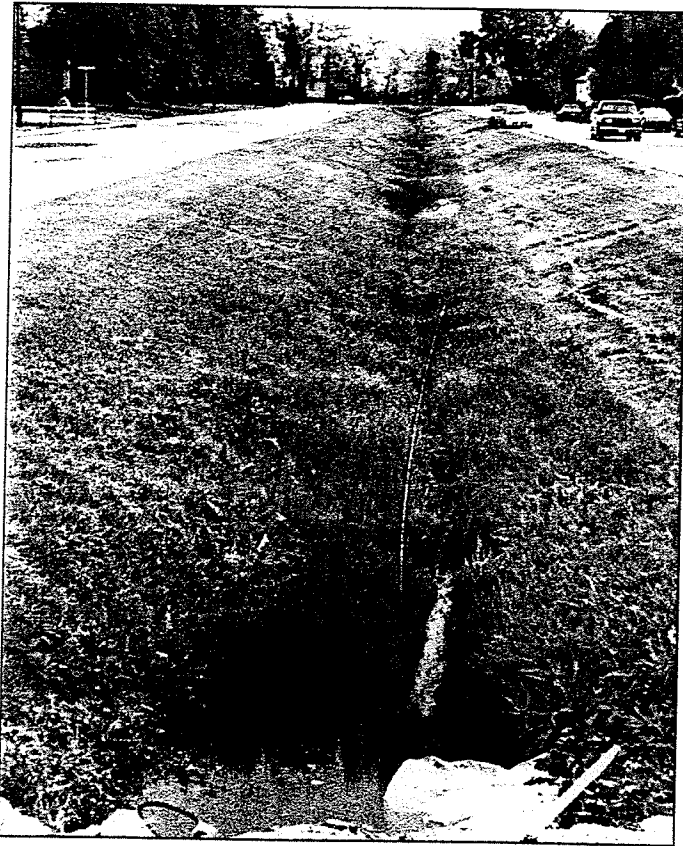


A slight swale, located in the right-of-way between Hespeler St. and K.R. Barkman Park, is the only indication that Central Creek once flowed here. *Photo by author*

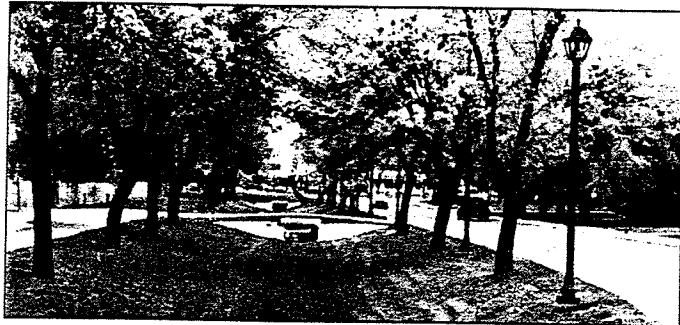


K.R. Barkman Park.





Central Creek at Elmdale Drive. *Photo by author*



Steinbach's recent townscaping project parallels the Central Creek past Elmdale Elementary School (on the left side of the picture). *Photo by author*

verts at each perpendicular street crossing.

At Reimer Avenue, the creek bends slightly as it winds its way past the Jake Epp Library and Ernie A. Friesen Park. At this point (and throughout the remaining blocks within the city proper), the creek flows through a recent townscaping project. Central Creek is only paralleled by the south side of Elmdale Drive here until it is forced underground beneath this same street in a long culvert, which exits on the north side of Elm Avenue. The creek is now on the south side of Elmdale Drive and flows unhindered until it reaches Brandt Road (PTH 12), at which point the water is culverted once more. Within Steinbach's quadrangle, or central section (35-6-6E), the natural creekbed drops just over 6.5m (21.5') in elevation over the course of its 2.25km (1.4 mile) flow.

On the west side of Brandt Road, Central Creek emerges briefly amidst an awkward assortment of drainage pipes, but is immediately culverted once more to accommodate a small parking area. The creek re-emerges and continues its northward flow flanked by small reedbeds between Victoria Plaza and Riverbend Realty. At its junction with Loewen Boulevard, Central Creek is again culverted until exiting on the north side, where it is allowed to return to its natural winding form and to continue its gentle flow for a short distance. A towering cluster of willows, the first signifi-

cant stand of natural vegetation encountered beside open water within the city, is found beside the creek along this brief stretch. At this point, the Central Creek abruptly changes to a westerly orientation, and is accompanied by significant reeds and bulrushes. At the southwest corner of the Penner International Ltd lot, the creek is channelled north, culverted beneath Millwork Drive, and continues in a northerly flow on the east side of the recently-decommissioned City of Steinbach lagoon system. Wastewater effluent from the lagoon used to be discharged into Central Creek at this point during the summer months. Since the creek did not provide a continuous flow throughout the year, on-site effluent storage was required during the winter. Beyond the lagoon system, Central Creek maintains a northerly flow parallel to and on the west side of PTH 12. At this point, it essentially functions as a buffer between agricultural land to the west and commercial properties adjacent to the highway. The creek is then culverted beneath Park Road and turns west for a short reach, before returning to a northward channelled flow at the southwest corner of the Clearspring Village shopping mall. Dense reeds and bulrushes accompany the creek along this stage of its flow. Directly west of the Brookdale Pontiac car dealership and south of the Friendly Family Farms lagoon system, the Central Creek merges with the North Creek. This combined,



sparsely vegetated watercourse gently meanders northwest through agricultural land beyond the City of Steinbach limits, until its junction with the North Arm of the Upper Manning Canal in Section 20-7-6E.

### 6.3 North Creek

Of the three creeks, the North Creek drains the greatest portion of land southeast of Steinbach, and is therefore most visible in maintaining the largest flow of water. The natural, historical flow of the North Creek is clearly evident in Sections 36-6-6E and 31-6-7E, but begins to dissolve within Section 30-7-6E, where channelized ditches have robbed it of its source water. Its origin has been significantly altered by this maze of drainages and ditches that were created and utilized by farmers and other property owners to drain their lands. At this point, the North Creek is made up of two branches which flow parallel to each other in a northwesterly direction. A disjointed riparian corridor, ranging from full vegetation to no vegetation, accompanies both portions of the North Creek through Section 36-6-6E. Through significant augmentation upstream, the northern branch of the North Creek is clearly the larger of the two branches. It is classified as a 3rd Order Drain in this segment, and is fed by channelized ditches from as far away as Section 5-6-7E.

Both branches flow beneath Loewen Blvd and Old Tom Road. At each of these road junctions, there is a tendency for both branches to pond slightly, accompanied by dense aquatic vegetation. Within the southeast quadrant of Section 2-7-6E (on the west side of Old Tom Road), the watercourse classification of the southerly branch changes from a 1st Order to a 2nd Order Drain as its flow is enhanced by the Central Creek diversion flowing on the east side of Hespeler Street. Within this same quadrant, the south and north branches of North Creek meet at the southeast corner of the Steinbach Fly-in Golf Course. The combined creek continues to wind in a northwesterly orientation through the first nine holes of the golf course, and is enhanced by artesian wells in several locations to broaden its flow and create ponds in strategic locations. Large portions of the creek and ponds are densely vegetated throughout this reach, and numerous cart bridges cross it, as the golf course exploits this natural water "hazard".

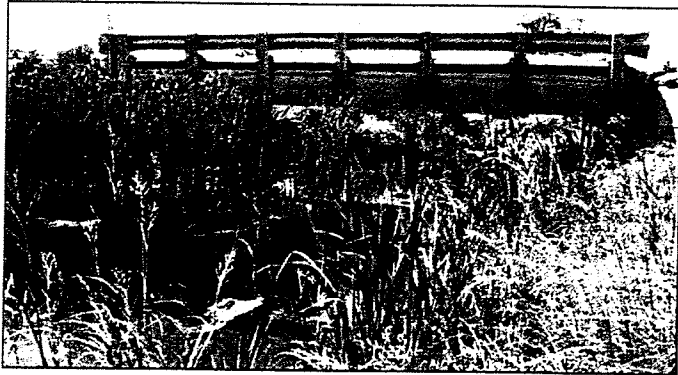
Continuing its northwesterly flow, the North Creek is again enhanced to create a large pond in the A.D. Penner recreational park. Dense natural vegetation is found here including a large marsh wetland environment, which provides habitat for numerous wildlife species. A small dam of assorted riprap is located at the north edge of this pond before the North Creek is culverted beneath Park Road. On the north side of this



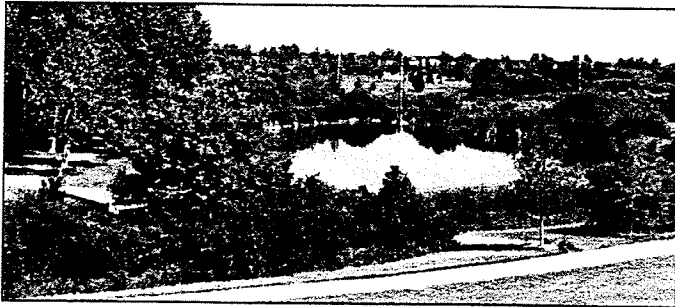
A towering stand of willows along Central Creek - the only significant natural vegetation encountered along the creek within Steinbach. *Photo by author*



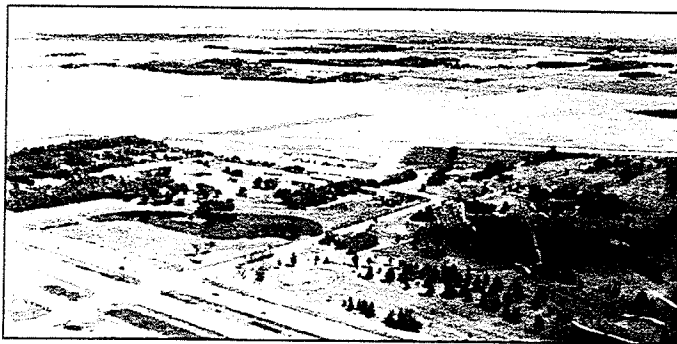
The junction of the Central and North Creeks, directly west of the Friendly Family Farms lagoon system. *Photo by author*



A small pond and bridge encountered along North Creek, one mile east of the city at Hershfeld Rd. *Photo by author*



A large pond, in the A.D. Penner recreational park, demonstrates the enhancement of North Creek through the use of an artesian well. *Photo by author*



Aerial photo of the North Creek, as it flows through the Steinbach Fly-in Golf Course and Heritage Village Museum. *Photo by author*

road, the creek continues its meandering through the second nine holes of the golf course, where it is again enlarged in several locations to create water traps for golfers. The North Creek is culverted beneath a driveway and enters the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum grounds. At this point, a small lake is created, assisted by a low concrete and riprap dam. Excess flow trickles over the dam where it is culverted beneath four lanes of Provincial Trunk Highway (PTH) 12. The North Creek re-emerges amidst very dense vegetation, including a dominant willow canopy, and maintains a westerly flow along the north side of the Brookdale Pontiac car dealership, before it is met by the Central Creek in the southeast quadrant of Section 10-7-6E.

#### 6.4 South Creek

The starting point of the South Creek, similar to the origins of the creeks discussed above, is difficult to determine. Historically, it acted as a drainage basin for surface ponds and swampy land southeast of Steinbach. Here a high water table, flat topography and peaty soil conditions underlain with clay resulted in significant standing water. As evident in aerial photographs of this region, dark-coloured bands, indicating low-lying areas and the possible presence of water, are still quite numerous. They are all oriented in a northwesterly di-

rection denoting the natural flow of water throughout the region. The South Creek's natural origin has been altered, however, to accommodate a ditch flowing directly north along a section line for 2-1/2 miles, beginning 5 miles south of Steinbach.

After crossing Provincial Road (PR) 303 at Section 14-6-6E, the channelized ditch begins to flow in a northwesterly direction, where it is accompanied by sporadic vegetation. It remains predominantly rectilinear in its flow pattern at this point. At Section 23-6-6E the natural flow of the South Creek becomes evident, as it meanders through a more densely treed region. Within the northwest quarter section, the vegetated creek skirts the west edge of the City of Steinbach Landfill, and continues its northwesterly flow. A natural stream form is clearly evident in the southwest quadrant of Section 26-6-6E. Here the riparian corridor contrasts sharply with cultivated fields on either side. As the South Creek approaches Steinbach, it is culverted to the west side of PTH 12 where its flow continues with a full riparian corridor for a brief stretch.

At this point, the South Creek makes its only direct physical contact with the City of Steinbach, and diagonally bisects the northeast quadrant of Section 27-6-6E. This is a recently-developed residential subdivision commonly referred to as "The Meadows". Here, the natural creek form is robbed of its vegetation and

emerges as a manicured, lawned swale through a small, residential park. Local residents indicate that this slight 1m (3'-3" foot) depression remains predominantly dry throughout the summer months, but is a favourite place for neighbourhood children to play following a rain-storm. After crossing Clover Crescent, the manicured swale is again replaced by natural vegetation. At its junction with McKenzie Road, the creek ponds slightly, allowing reeds and bulrushes to establish. Within Section 34-6-6E, the South Creek continues its rural flow in a northwesterly orientation through a cultivated field, and is accompanied by various aquatic vegetative species, but only sporadic canopy cover. The creek continues its gentle meandering around the west side of "Abe's Hill" - a recreational hill within L.A. Barkman Park created from excavation material when PTH 12 was built through Steinbach. The South Creek is culverted at its junction with PTH 52, bypasses Steinbach's industrial park to the west, and continues its northwesterly flow through farmland until its junction with the North Arm of the Upper Manning Canal watershed system in Section 17-7-6E. Throughout the last segment of its flow, the South Creek is largely barren of vegetation, except when passing in close proximity to houses and farm buildings, where the creek's natural vegetation remains untouched and is incorporated as part of a shelterbelt.

In outlining design opportunities along Steinbach's creeks, it is important to recognize the diverse characteristics which the three different creeks illustrate. Central Creek is clearly the most urban, as a result of its flow through the heart of Steinbach's commercial centre. It has become an element of formal streetscaping in its confined, engineered state, and appears to demand an orderliness or regular patterning in its treatment. By contrast, the South Creek demonstrates a certain wildness in its form (with the exception of a short stretch running through "The Meadows"). Of the three Steinbach creeks, it appears to have remained the most consistently "natural" over the years. While lacking a continuous riparian corridor, the abundance of reeds, cattails and aquatic life suggest an untamed quality. The North Creek also possesses some of these same untamed qualities, as it approaches Steinbach from the east and skirts around it to the north. Upon entering the golf course, however, its form changes abruptly. The gently rolling topography, carefully-placed vegetation and manicured lakes and ponds mimic the English pastoral tradition at this point. As the creek winds its way through this programmed landscape and the adjoining park, it strikes a balance between freedom of flow and intentional placement.



Looking north at Section 26-6-6E, the natural riparian corridor associated with South Creek contrasts sharply with cultivated fields surround it. *Photo by author*



A gentle swale denotes the South Creek as it flows through "The Meadows". *Photo by author*



The South Creek forms a significant pond along the west edge of L.A. Barkman Park. *Photo by author*

## 7.0 Recognition of *Place*

An exploration of Steinbach's three creeks has outlined the existing physical environment in which they are currently found. Many specific hurdles or challenges associated with the re-integration of these streams into Steinbach's built environment are readily apparent. Whether physical, social, psychological, political, or economic in nature, these challenges have been creatively addressed by many progressive communities attempting to recover a lost sense of place. Provided the vision is articulated and becomes the dream of the larger community, it can become a reality.

### 7.1 Historical Precedents

Numerous examples can now be found where the abundant contributions, which rivers and streams have made in fostering a unique cultural identity, are being recognized by the towns, cities and entire regions through which these waterways flow. Within these jurisdictions potential design opportunities have been identified as part of an overall stream re-integration program, and are given expressive form. The result is the celebration of natural landscape features which are accessible to large numbers of people. Among the precedents demonstrating the recognition of and apprecia-

tion for a riverine landscape are three projects briefly highlighted below. They have been chosen on the basis of similar scale, thematic parallels and/or overall applicability to a re-integration of the creeks in Steinbach, Manitoba.

#### **Little River - Windsor, Ontario**

The Little River is an urban stream which flows through Windsor, Ontario. Encompassing an area of 60 km<sup>2</sup> within Essex County, the Little River watershed has its headwaters near Old Castle, Ontario and flows northward eventually draining into the Detroit River. Primarily as a means of improving drainage and providing flood control, a significant portion of the original Little River watercourse was channelized several decades ago, additionally creating navigable waters for small boats. The newly channelized stream was separated from an oxbow of the old channel of the river by a dykeway. As a result, the oxbow essentially became a dumping ground for all forms of garbage - plastic bags, pop cans, old tires, washing machines, shopping carts and even vehicles.

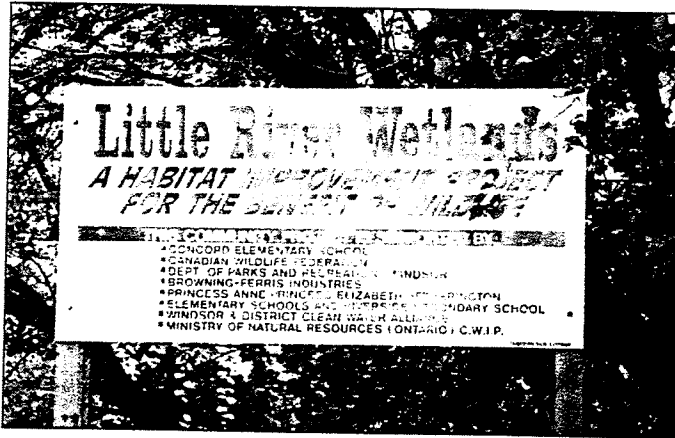
While strolling through the old channel region of the Little River, a local science teacher was troubled by this forgotten and horribly abused landscape, and developed a proposal to clean it up as part of a school



A recovered oxbow along the old channel of the Little River in Windsor, Ontario. *Photo by author*



Reconstruction of a portion of the Little River from surviving remnants. *Photo by author*



The Little River Enhancement Group demonstrates the importance of hands-on community involvement. *Photo by author*

project. In the summer of 1989, the Riverside Habitat 2000 Club (largely composed of local students) took up the challenge and conducted the first cleanup of the old channel. Interest in the project soon grew and in November 1990, the old channel area of the Little River was proclaimed a “greenway” by the city of Windsor.

As a means of focusing the energy and diversity of enhancement activity centred upon Little River, a non-profit umbrella group called the Little River Enhancement Group (Lil’Reg) was formed in February 1991. This group was made up of educators, numerous schools, representatives of the City of Windsor, Ministry of Environment, Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) and the Habitat 2000 Club.

Since its founding, Lil’Reg has experienced growing support at both the political and community levels, and numerous national and international awards have been won. Clean-up of the old channel is now complete and has been continued (by local school groups) along other needy reaches of the river during the spring and fall. A pedestrian/cycling path (Ganatchio Trail) has been created along a portion of the Little River, and includes bridges, which span the old channel with materials and labour donated by local industry. Additionally, more than 11,000 trees have been planted to restore habitat and provide an environment in which

biodiversity can flourish. Throughout the Little River watershed, additional opportunities have been identified where natural corridors and utility rights-of-way may be connected to form an expanded trail and greenway system.

Overall, the efforts of Lil’Reg demonstrate the importance of community involvement. By promoting education and community awareness, the project has experienced tremendous success. The great number of daily users who walk, jog, cycle, rollerblade or simply observe nature within the Little River greenway is a testimony to the tremendous benefits of having such a biologically rich resource “within one’s own back yard.” (Information for this review was obtained via a tour and interview with Faye Langmaid, Co-ordinator of Design & Development, City of Windsor Parks & Recreation Department, as well as literature - “Community Stewardship of the Little River Watershed”, June 1995 - provided by her.)

### Garrison Creek - Toronto, Ontario

A second precedent which addresses the re-integration of an historically significant stream into the urban context is Garrison Creek, which drains into Lake Ontario in Toronto, Ontario. The cultural history associated with this stream dates back to 1792 when Garrison

Creek provided a natural water resource for the newly built military outpost of Fort York. Large, park-like estates were constructed along the Garrison Creek ravine to act as enticements for prospective wealthy settlers at this time.

Later, as Toronto began to grow and prosper, numerous industries built alongside the Garrison Creek ravine exploited this resource for the dumping of waste. By the 1880s, the creek was thoroughly polluted and deemed a public health risk. As a result, the creek was buried within a brick sewer 3m (ten feet) in diameter which was seen to provide adequate stormwater and wastewater control. The continuous open space network associated with the Garrison Creek ravine, however, persisted. An elaborate system of bridges (which became landmarks) was built by the city of Toronto in an attempt to ensure that the ravine would continue to exist within its urban context.

On-going development in the 1930s and '40s, however, led to the in-fill of significant portions of the Garrison Creek ravine. The public parks associated with the open space ravine system were utilized as landfill sites for the dumping of garbage. The continuous open space network provided by the Garrison Creek ravine gradually disintegrated in a piecemeal fashion.

As Toronto has grown, its aging sewer infrastructure has been targeted for replacement. In particular, the

many combined stormwater and wastewater sewer overflow systems (such as the buried Garrison Creek ravine) need to be rehabilitated following the identification of high bacterial pollution levels.

A recent proposal has been made in which local runoff within the Garrison Creek watershed could be held and slowly released within a "connected pond system". This system traces the original Garrison Creek ravine and makes use of depressions in this human-altered topography for water retention. The gravity-fed system stores and treats run-off water from neighbouring residential districts within a network of connected ponds with accompanying natural vegetal filters. The culmination of the system is a small wetland sited within an elementary schoolyard. This provides biological diversity and a tremendous educational resource (*Places*, Summer 1996).

The connected pond system provides an ecological alternative to stormwater treatment and management. By re-tracing the creek ravine, this system also provides a historical connection to the Garrison Creek, and the opportunity for the rehabilitation and re-connection of disjointed green spaces in its watershed.

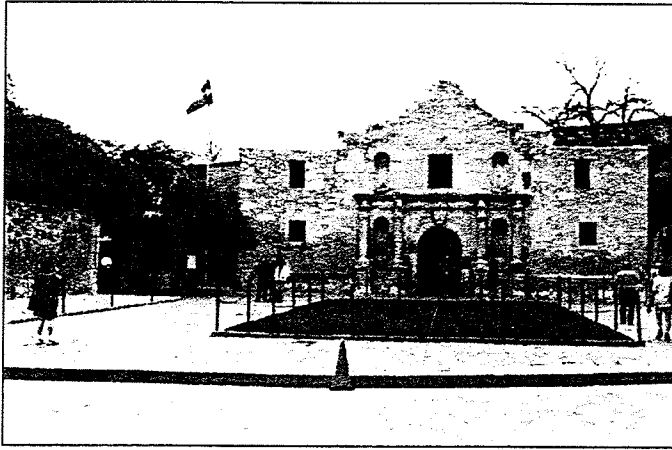
### **San Antonio River - San Antonio, Texas**

A third example of an urban stream which demon-

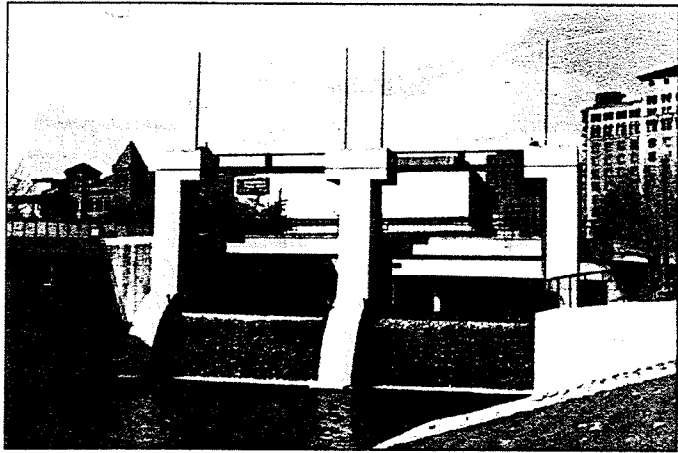


The San Antonio River, near its headwaters, as it enters the downtown area of San Antonio, Texas. *Photo by author*





The Alamo - San Antonio's oldest mission. Photo by author



A small dam, constructed along the engineered bypass channel, which, together with a system of flood gates, regulates the flow within the natural bend of the San Antonio River. Photo by author

strates a successful reconnection to an historically significant place is the San Antonio River in San Antonio, Texas. Fed by a large aquifer and natural springs located approximately 3 miles north of the city, the San Antonio River was known to its early residents, the Papaya Indians, as *Yanuguana - The Clear Water*. The first Spanish explorers and missionaries to enter the region in 1691 were particularly struck by the towering cypress trees in a lush river valley teeming with flora and fauna. The river soon became the source of a complex aqueduct system, which nourished the five Spanish missions springing up between 1718 and 1731.

As more settlers began to arrive in the area, new water projects were undertaken in the form of dams, ditches, irrigation canals and aqueducts to meet the needs of a growing population. Following the American Revolution in 1776, the missions were closed by the Spanish government, and the remaining Spanish governors were later ousted by Mexicans in 1821 in Mexico's bid for independence. Political tension mounted as Americans now petitioned the Mexican government to permit their settlement in Texas. In the spring of 1836, along the banks of the San Antonio River, a now-famous battle took place which witnessed the fall of San Antonio's oldest mission - Mission San Antonio de Valero, later called the Alamo - at the hands of the Mexican army.

Only six weeks later, the American army re-grouped and dealt a decisive blow to the Mexican force and the Republic of Texas was born.

Amidst this turmoil and unrest, the city of San Antonio continued to grow. It soon became apparent that the potential for significant property damage and loss of life from severe flooding of the San Antonio River (a recurring problem over the years) was a serious threat. Ultimately, the devastating flood of 1921, in which 50 people were killed, set a flood plan in motion. In 1926, a bypass channel was constructed, and plans were prepared to drain the bend of the natural stream course in the downtown region, pave over it, and construct an underground storm drain. These plans were immediately (and thankfully) met with tremendous opposition from the San Antonio Conservation Society, which sought to preserve the integrity of the San Antonio River. In 1929, architect and visionary H.H. Hugman presented a plan to the city of San Antonio in which he endorsed the bypass channel, and proposed a system of flood gates and a small dam to maintain a consistent water flow in the natural bend of the existing river. With this in place, he further developed a plan for a River Walk - *Paseo del Río* - complete with walkways, ornate staircases and footbridges. These were to be constructed from native materials, and supported by commercial and retail spaces at the river level

in an early Texas or Mexican colonial style, thus enabling one to fully experience the rich and unique cultural landscape.

Hugman was convinced that the ideal future of the Paseo del Río rested in preserving the historic character peculiarly San Antonio's own; that the flavor of our Spanish, Mexican and Southwest traditions must be emphasized in all future development; that our 'Little River' should be treated as a stage setting on which people are transported to the unusual; that all future architectural growth avoid modern styles; and further, that the river's tempo must be jealously guarded, remaining slow and lazy, in complete contrast with the hustle and bustle of street-level modern city life (quote taken from a plaque entitled "Father of the River Walk" mounted to Hugman's original office building along the *Paseo del Río* in San Antonio, Texas).

Hugman was successful in his proposal and construction of the *Paseo del Río* was begun in 1939. His proposed flood control system was soon tested in 1946, as floodwaters threatened San Antonio. With minimal damage to the downtown area, the system was ultimately deemed a great success. In the following years,

many studies were undertaken to explore the full economic potential of the *Paseo del Río*. Numerous restaurants, hotels, retail and entertainment facilities soon sprang up at the river level along both sides of the San Antonio River, and development continues to this day. Daily boat trips (the *Yanaguana* Cruise) further reinforce the important history of San Antonio, by recognizing that it is the San Antonio River which is ultimately the source of the city. (Information provided by *Paseo del Río* Association, San Antonio, Texas.)

The San Antonio River Walk is a tremendous resource drawing thousands of tourists and residents alike to the downtown region each year. Hugman's creative design demonstrates the adaptive transformation of an historically significant gathering place to a lively commercial/entertainment centre within the context of a modern city. At the same time, the rich cultural history associated with the river (and the region in which it is found) is still sensitively preserved. By recognizing the San Antonio River as the lifeline of the city, the integrity of past, present and future place is thereby maintained.

## 7.2 Design Opportunities

As the foregoing examples have aptly demonstrated, the benefits and rewards of re-integrating an histori-



The *Yanaguana* Cruise - a popular tourist attraction along the San Antonio River. Photo by author



Hugman's *Paseo del Río* is a tremendous resource exemplifying San Antonio's rich cultural landscape. Photo by author



cally significant creek system back into its urban context are tremendous. While the task may appear daunting, these historical precedents and many others are a testimony to the fact that it can be done. Once the opportunities are identified as part of a long-range master-plan, they can be acted upon, whether large or small.

In outlining specific opportunities for development in Steinbach, it must first be acknowledged that the imagery surrounding the creeks has changed significantly over time. When Steinbach was first settled, the creeks had a very practical role to fill. They were initially a point of reference across a broad expanse of prairie and bush. They signified a location, a point of arrival, and an ordering system for settlement for the founding pioneers. Water, then as now, was a necessity for survival, and its close proximity ensured that it was readily accessible for watering livestock and gardens, and for general use in the home. In addition to providing water, the creeks also provided drainage for a very flat topography. The creeks were an essential element on the farmyard, and symbolized in their constant flow, the hard work of the early pioneers. Socially, the creeks, together with the *Straßendorf* village pattern, also served to knit together neighbouring lots, both physically and psychologically, thereby reinforcing the creation of an intentional community. Through this adjacency, a certain egalitarianism and kinship continued to grow.

Unbounded by and irrespective of political borders such as lot lines, the creeks maintained a constant symbolic connection between neighbours.

A proposed development of the Steinbach creeks must now accurately reflect how their use has evolved over time, as guided by the changing perceptions of Steinbach's residents. In their pragmatic functioning today, the creeks continue to provide drainage for Steinbach, although this occurs in a more limited capacity, and is carefully controlled in its engineered form, especially with respect to the diversion of Central Creek. Fresh drinking water is provided through a city well system, which operates completely independently of the creeks. With a highly-structured network of streets and highways operating within Steinbach and beyond, the initial role of the creeks as a point of reference also no longer seems necessary. In fact, the creeks have been virtually lost in this urban matrix. The purely functional role once served by the creeks has been largely replaced by a new imagery.

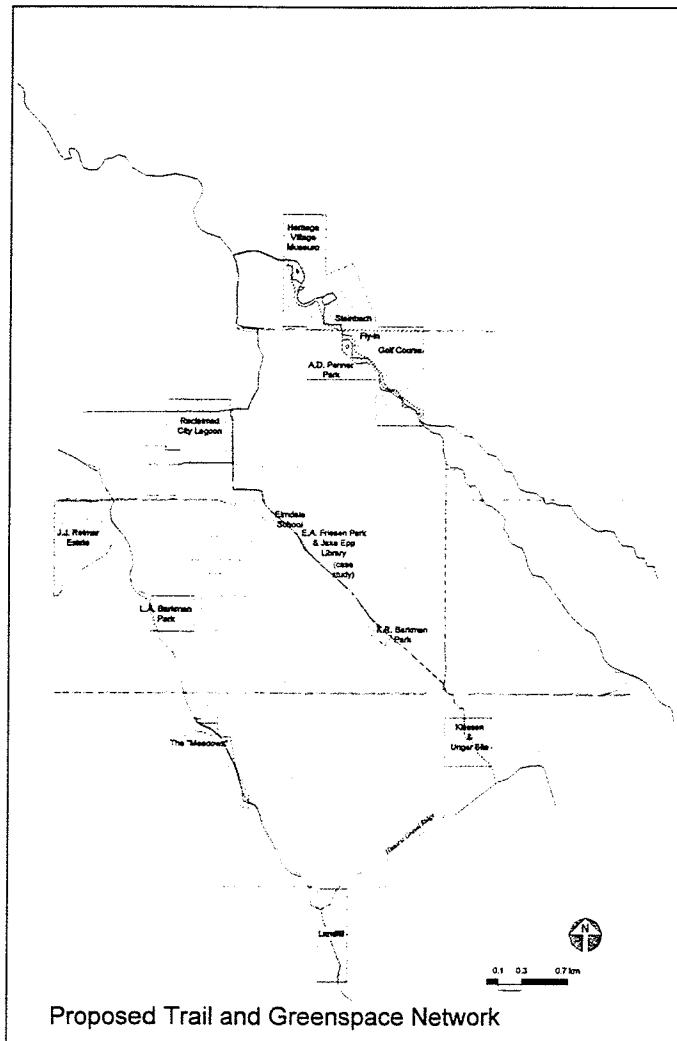
Whereas the creeks initially ran continuously through adjacent private properties, they now flow along public rights-of-way or easements, which, and particularly in the case of Central Creek, are severed at regular intervals by crossing streets. The opportunity arises to provide connections between these disjointed urban islands via the creeks, reminiscent of the connections

which once existed between adjacent lots. The significant difference, however, is that the creeks can now be fully experienced by the public along their entire length of flow within the city (unless underground), without trespassing on private lands. The issue of access to the creeks has now shifted from a purely utilitarian focus of obtaining water, to an opportunity for citizens to commune with nature. In particular, the importance of open greenspace in our modern communities reflects a change in the attitude of society as a whole towards “nature”. The early pioneers experienced a direct connection to the land as they worked the soil and grew their crops. As many of Steinbach’s citizens have now given up their agrarian roots, the creeks are no longer regarded as a necessity for survival. Rather, their appeal is that of a natural resource providing tremendous recreational and educational opportunities. With popular culture’s on-going search for meaning, purpose and a sense of belonging, the changing imagery of the creeks as significant historic and cultural resources serves to address these issues.

The value now placed on greenspace provides a significant starting point for preserving the integrity of Steinbach’s creek system. By providing a greater presence to the stream corridors, an opportunity arises for an expanded interconnected greenspace throughout the entire Steinbach area. In conjunction with a concep-

tual masterplan, the following recommendations outline an implementation strategy, which further acknowledges the important role the creeks have played in the formation of the city of Steinbach:

- First and foremost, it is important to formally name the creeks and place signs of identification along the creeks at all road crossings. This act, in itself, serves to provide a much greater presence to the creeks, and will arouse the curiosity and interest of Steinbach citizens. The names Stoney Creek (Central Creek), Old Tom Creek (North Creek) and Bushfarm Creek (South Creek) have been commonly used by many locals for some time, and should be officially registered.
- A 100m (328’) wide uninterrupted greenspace (currently proposed by the city) should be actively pursued for the full length of Bushfarm and Old Tom Creeks, while the existing 24m (80’) right-of-way and easements along Stoney Creek should be maintained as greenspace. By acquiring and maintaining these lands now, the city could ensure that any future development adjacent to this greenspace is compatible with the long-term health of the creeks.
- Within this continuous greenspace alongside the creeks, a recreational trail network for walking,



Overall reference map identifying opportunity nodes along a proposed interconnected greenspace and trail network. Drawing by author

hiking, jogging, cycling, rollerblading and/or cross-country skiing should be established. While not all of these activities could (or should) be accommodated along the entire trail network, portions of the trail could be tailored to meet the specific needs of a certain activity, through a change in the surface material of the trail, for example. In addition to the recreational benefits of such an amenity, historical connections could also be made. For example, along Stoney Creek, 20 bronze plaques could be embedded within the trail surface at regular intervals of 220 feet (the original lot widths) bearing the name of the original Mennonite pioneer family to have settled in that location. The historic property lines could also be denoted with a thin line of paving stone (or other suitably contrasting material) cutting across the trail. Simple historical markers such as these are often more effective in conveying a story than a written interpretive panel, which risks over-programming a space rather than allowing place to be revealed.

- The creeksides should be vegetated with native plants to restore a natural riparian corridor wherever possible. Naturalization of the creeks through plantings performs valuable functions

such as water retention, water quality improvement, and the minimization of creek sedimentation through bank erosion control. Additionally, this would greatly enrich the habitat for a diversity of new wildlife. The resulting tree canopy would create a dynamic, shaded environment for all nature enthusiasts to enjoy also. In addition to the random planting of vegetation, the regular planting of large trees should also be pursued, reminiscent of the tall cottonwoods found along the main streets of many historic Mennonite villages (Steinbach included). Particularly where the creek has been sunk underground, these vertical elements, which could be seen from a great distance, would further reinforce the creek's presence.

- It is important to make the creeks accessible by linking the proposed trail network to existing paths in Steinbach. Within this framework, the treatment of creek and street crossings must be carefully addressed in order to provide a safe transition for users. In addition to making connections with existing trails, opportunities for incorporating this trail system within a larger, regional network should be examined. For example, the gravel ridge to Grunthal could be explored as the opportunity for an historic trail.

As alluded to above, the creeks and trail network provide the tremendous potential for a connective ribbon of green stretching between significant nodes (points of interest) adjacent to the greenspace. While many of these nodes currently exist as isolated entities, the opportunity arises for them to become integrated elements within the overall design development. Their diverse character as commercial destinations, active focal points or reflective rest areas promises to further enrich the experience for the participant. The potential sites are briefly identified below along each of Steinbach's three creeks.

### Bushfarm Creek

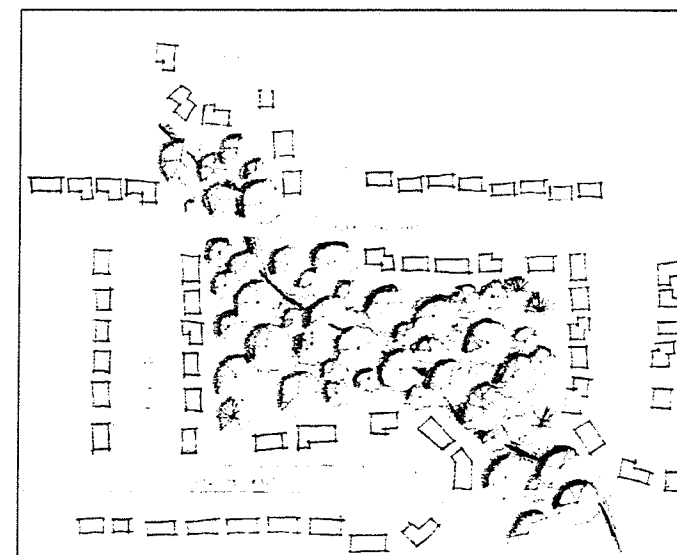
**The Steinbach landfill** site has an estimated 30-year lifespan in terms of refuse storage capacity, but its close proximity to southern Steinbach residential development suggests that a 20 year decommissioning option is more likely. The 21 hectare (51 acre) site consists of a unique stand of natural oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), and offers a tremendous opportunity for a large park, providing an "anchor" to the proposed trail network. While significant reclamation work and ongoing, long-term monitoring (of methane gases) would have to be done, in order to facilitate such a development, numerous examples can be found in other parts

of the world where such a reclamation has been successfully completed. The park could also fulfil an important educational/ecological function by highlighting the importance of waste reduction, recycling and sustainable development. The identification of this site at such an early stage demonstrates the importance of long-range planning in any type of masterplan development.

**"The Meadows"**, located in the southwest corner of Steinbach, is a residential subdivision with a large, treeless greenspace at its centre, through which Bushfarm Creek flows. As a result of its open continuous form, this barren landscape readily lends itself to a miniature urban forest of green. Through the planting of shrubs within the riparian corridor and a well-spaced tree canopy layer throughout the site, a much more hospitable eco-climate could be created. Much like Wildwood Park in Winnipeg's Fort Garry, the urban forest would be understood as the ordering form. The adjacent homes in the "Meadows" community would simply appear to be carved into this apparently "natural" landscape as a result. This sharply contrasts with the superimposed grid which is used for many subdivisions. An urban forest, together with the proposed trail network, would greatly facilitate a continuous ribbon of green through the "Meadows" community, which, incidentally, would need to undergo a name change if the proposal would



A large, open greenspace at the centre of "The Meadows" - a residential subdivision in southwest Steinbach. A small swale denotes Bushfarm Creek at this location. Photo by author



Proposal for an urban forest in "The Meadows". Sketch by author



A large mound, known locally as "Abe's Hill", provides a great winter opportunity for family tobogganing. Photo by Peter Dyck

come to fruition.

**L.A. Barkman Park** is a large public parcel on the western edge of Steinbach development. Currently, a passive park design, complete with a walking path, is already in progress. This could be easily linked to the proposed trail network along the park's western edge. A unique feature, located in the southwest corner of the park, is a large mound (extensively used for winter tobogganing) made up of excavation material from the re-construction of PTH 12 in the 1970s. As a result of the flat, natural topography of the region, the hill provides a great view of the surrounding area.

**Bushfarm (J.J. Reimer Estate)** is a 160-acre (65-hectare) parcel of land located at the junction of Bushfarm Road and PTH 52. While the parcel is currently private property, the city of Steinbach is actively pursuing its purchase. It consists of 80 acres (32.5 hectares) of native poplar (*Populus tremuloides*) and oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), and provides the significant opportunity for a natural wildlife sanctuary along the proposed greenspace network. Its close proximity to L.A. Barkman Park could further result in the creation of a unique linked park system via Bushfarm Creek. Minimal intervention is recommended at this location. A simple, narrow trail network would allow users to move through the space, while ensuring that the habitat remains intact.

## Stoney Creek

The **Frank Klassen/Harold Unger** properties represent approximately 40 acres (16 hectares) of pristine Aspen Parkland, through which the Stoney Creek flows, at the southeast corner of Steinbach. As outlined earlier, an historic route used by early pioneers runs through the site parallel to the creek. The opportunity arises to provide a significant cultural link to Steinbach's early settlement history by once again using the trail, only this time as part of a recreational network. The owners of these private parcels should be contacted to determine whether a city right-of-way (encompassing the trail and creek) could be established for the historic preservation of the trail. If such an arrangement could be made, it is recommended that the property should be maintained, as far as possible, in its current condition. The only intervention should be the trail itself and, perhaps, a small historical marker noting the significance of the site.

**K.R. Barkman Park.** This urban park, located in the southeast quarter of Steinbach proper, is the site of Steinbach's wells and underground water storage facility. Although Stoney Creek has been buried within a right-of-way at this location, the setting is provided to make a symbolic connection to the original creek. The trail network, which would run through the right-of-

way, could effectively act as the original creek by mimicking its meandering form, as it moves from the region of the Steinbach water tower to K.R. Barkman Park. As it enters the park, the opportunity arises for a water theme park, which would recognize both the creek and the existing city water source. A system of linked fountains, plazas, small pools and supporting design elements should be utilized for the creation of a hard landscape in this location.

The **Jake Epp Library** and **Ernie A. Friesen Park**, provide a small, green oasis along a townscaped segment of the Stoney Creek near the centre of Steinbach. In addition to the library, the area features a small totlot and covered picnic areas. With the addition of some additional plantings to further shelter the space, it is recommended that the site be maintained in its present state. Any additional elements should simply reflect the passive, contemplative character which the site currently exhibits.

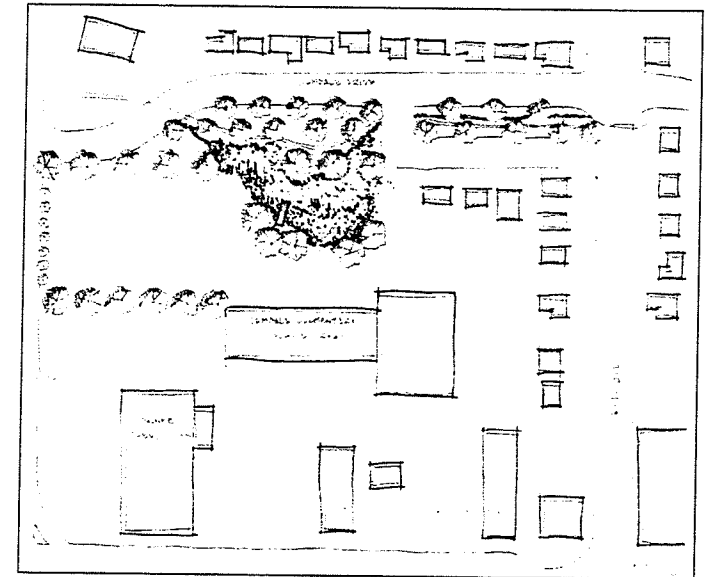
The **Elmdale Elementary School** exhibits a significantly large playground area which abuts Stoney Creek in the northwest corner of Steinbach's central section. With significant room left over for existing playground structures and soccer pitches, the opportunity is presented for a small, educational wetland. In order to accommodate this, the direction of Stoney Creek's flow could be slightly altered, by encouraging its cur-

rent linear flow to meander into the schoolyard. By enhancing the water's flow through the use of an artesian well and/or a small weir with an overflow, a marshland habitat could be effectively created. The children would also be able to participate in the actual construction of the marsh, through the planting of trees and aquatic vegetation. The educational benefits of such an on-site natural resource would be tremendous - an asset to any science curriculum examining nature and natural processes. In addition, the wetland would fulfil a significant ecological role by providing habitat, and retaining and purifying water within the city's drainage system.

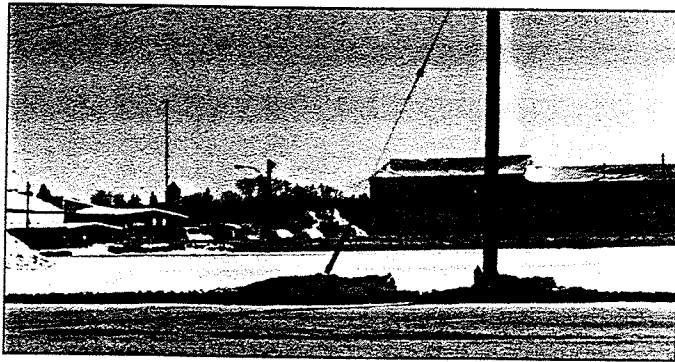
The **Former City Lagoon**, located directly northwest of Steinbach's central square mile, is a large recently-decommissioned waste handling facility adjacent to Stoney Creek. As Michael Hough maintains, sewage treatment lagoons are "one of the city's greatest interpretive and educational resources for naturalists, school groups and the community at large" (Hough, 1984, 178). While the holding cells have been filled in and are no longer in use, this low-lying area still offers a tremendous opportunity for a linked pond or marsh system connected to the creek. An interpretive trail along this segment could outline the former functioning of the lagoon system, and highlight the significance of this natural process.



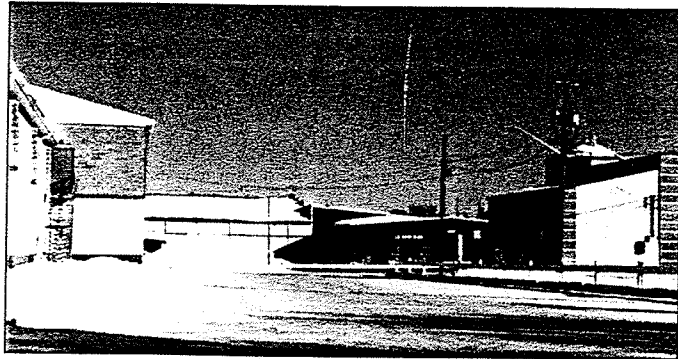
Looking west across Stoney Creek (in foreground) at Elmdale Elementary School's spacious playground. *Photo by author*



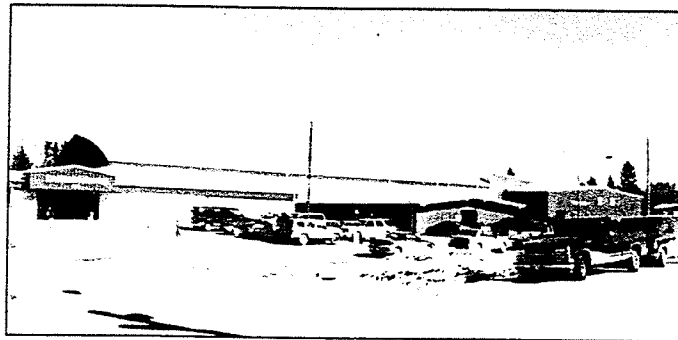
Proposal for an educational wetland at Elmdale Elementary School. *Sketch by author*



Portion of case study parking lot site between Reimer Ave. and Curling Club looking east. *Photo by author*



Portion of case study parking lot site between Curling Club and Legion Hall looking northeast. *Photo by author*



Portion of case study parking lot site in front of arena complex. *Photo by author*

## Old Tom Creek

Old Tom Creek maintains a relatively natural form as it approaches Steinbach from the northeast. At this point, virtually no significant development has occurred adjacent to it, as it makes little contact with the city itself. As Steinbach grows, however, proposed land uses may conflict with the riparian corridor and seriously threaten its current state. The city is strongly encouraged to maintain a protective buffer zone in the form of a right-of-way along the full available length of the creek. An extension of the proposed trail network should be provided, and natural vegetation should be encouraged within this allotted greenspace. The opportunity arises to preserve this portion of Old Tom Creek as a significant linear park.

The **Steinbach Fly-in Golf Course** and **A.D. Penner Park**, located directly north of Steinbach, demonstrate a creative and sensitive treatment of Old Tom Creek in this programmed space. Through structured enhancements in the form of ponds, the creek is exploited to its full recreational potential in these locations, while still maintaining a natural form. It is recommended that, as much as possible, naturalization of the stream corridor vegetation should take place, without jeopardizing the playability of the golf course, or the functioning of the recreational park.

## 7.3 Plan Development

While the preceding examples have outlined significant nodes and opportunities adjacent to the creeks, the following case study offers a more detailed examination of the design potential of one such site. The property is a large, paved parking lot located adjacent to Stoney Creek, in the centre of Steinbach's sectional grid. It is bordered by diverse activities including commercial, recreational and residential land uses. The area is characterized by high traffic volumes – both vehicular and pedestrian – as people are moving about engaged in acts of repeated ritual. Whether paying bills, obtaining a loan from the bank or attending a hockey game during the winter months, many people move through the space on a regular basis. It is familiar to them, and they've been there many times. This is significant, for experience is one of the key components in generating a meaningful "place". As a result of its central location in Steinbach's commercial core, the site is also a "hot spot" for future development, which could potentially threaten the remaining integrity of Stoney Creek.

In addition to this property, an adjacent residential site is also addressed in this case study. The city of Steinbach has been actively pursuing the purchase of six properties on the north side of Elmdale Drive, between Lumber and Reimer Avenues. The city has al-



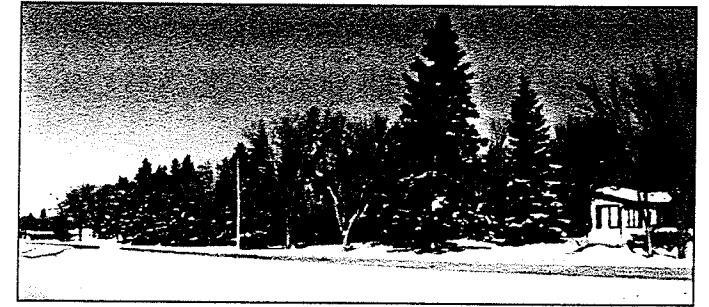
ready purchased two of these homes – demolishing one and renting the other. The additional homeowners have been notified of the city’s interest in purchasing the properties (if they were to be made available for sale) in a willing seller / willing buyer arrangement. The city is also attempting to acquire first bid privileges with the remaining homeowners, in the event that the homes are made available for sale. For the purposes of the case study, the assumption is made that all six properties have already been purchased by the City of Steinbach, and have been amalgamated. The resulting 1.4 hectare (3.5 acre) site thereby becomes part of the case study plan development.

The first stage in the development of the combined site was to eliminate one of the parallel roads, which currently comprise Elmdale Drive. With the removal of the residential driveways along this stretch, the northernmost street was seen to be redundant, and did not contribute to the design development. Additionally, the location of this street was altered slightly between the large parking lot to the south and the arena complex, to better accommodate the design elements. The current depiction of Stoney Creek throughout this stretch is that of a biologically sterile drainage ditch. It was determined by the author that, as a result of the increasing demand for parking and the continuing unaccommodating nature of this hard landscape for a natural creek

environment, the remaining segment of this ditch between Lumber and Reimer should be sunk underground. As outlined below, this seeming “compromise” is more than compensated for, in the remaining design.

The existing parking lot, within the commercial zone and in front of the arena complex, was greatly enhanced at this stage, and additional parking was provided. A much clearer traffic flow and parking delineation was proposed, through the addition of raised curbing and a tree canopy layer. The orientation and patterning of the curbing and trees further acknowledge the original lots of the pioneers, thereby reinforcing this settlement morphology. Through the new treatment of this parking facility a much more stimulating and visually-enriched environment is also provided. In the absence of a physical creek at this stage, an opportunity arose to provide a symbolic gesture to Stoney Creek’s presence, through the introduction of a blue ribbon of paving stone. In its meandering form it is an obvious allusion to Stoney Creek which once flowed uninhibited through this small prairie settlement. The continuous ribbon moves along unhindered by road and curb elements, suggesting that the natural landscape can never be truly conquered.

Within the residential portion of the case study, a sharply contrasting design development is proposed. Throughout this segment the Stoney Creek is greatly



Portion of case study residential site looking north along Elmdale Drive between Barkman Ave. and Lumber Ave. Photo by author



Portion of case study residential site looking east through empty lot currently owned by city. Photo by author



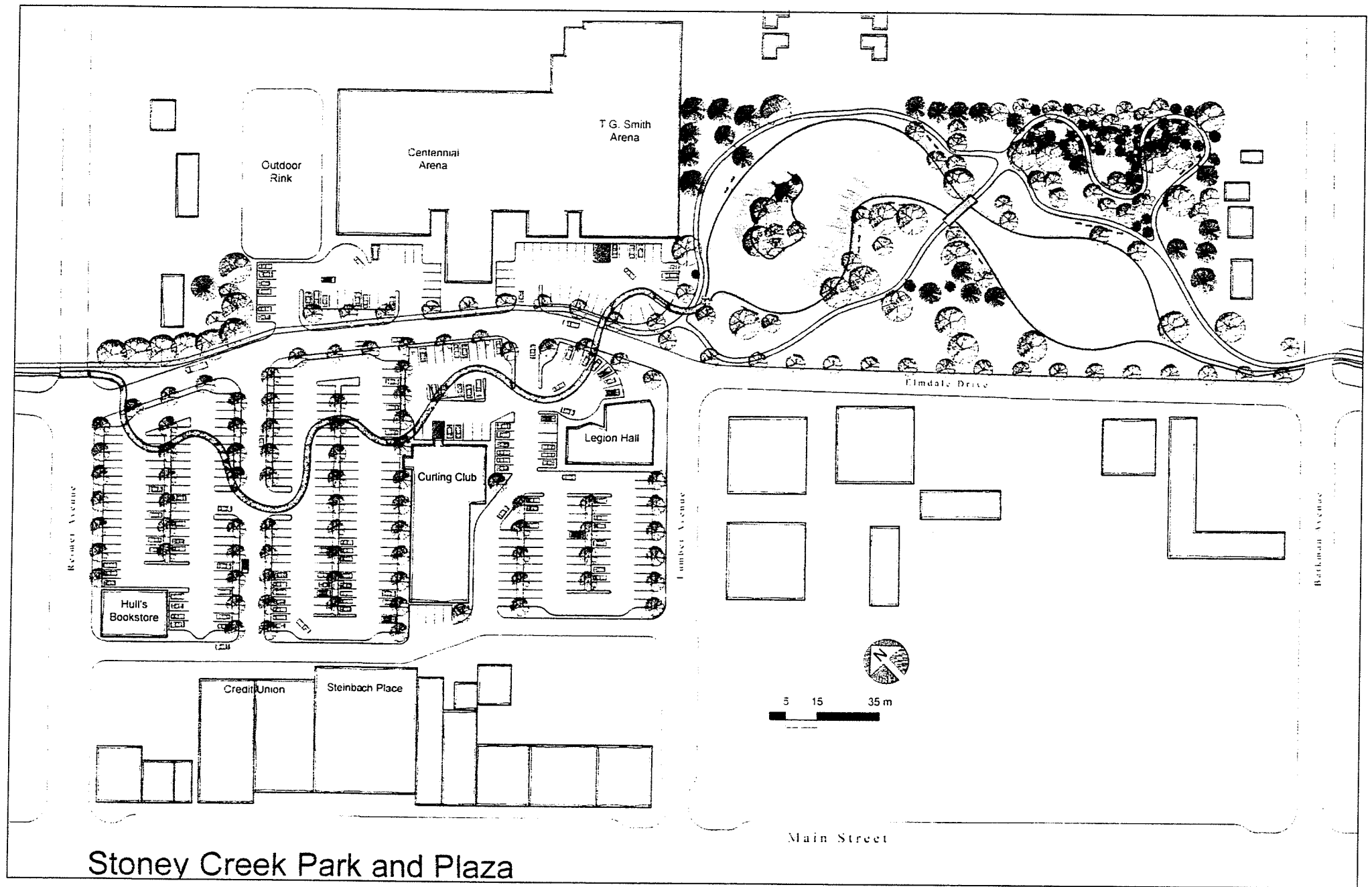
Looking southeast from middle of case study residential site. Photo by author



enhanced to form a large, linear pond element. Its shaping and location result from an attempt to preserve as many of the existing trees as possible. Supported by an expanded trail network, the pond element clearly provides a gathering place for Steinbachers - a point of community and connection. It encourages celebration and a sense of belonging. As the pond narrows at its western edge and enters the commercial site, it appears as the source of the symbolic creek. Together with the unique ribbon of blue, which meanders through the greatly improved parking facility, the pond provides a unique source of identity for Steinbach. Children may experience the pond as a place to watch ducks floating across the water, or an opportunity for skating during the winter months. Older residents who are more familiar with the Steinbach area will be able to peel back the layers of time and remember stories told by parents and grandparents of pioneers building sod huts along a small creek many years ago. These memories could be further reinforced through a small, contemplative sculptural garden, located in the northeast corner of the pond site. As a meditative retreat, the garden alludes to the humble life of simplicity of its founding pioneers.

As in any successful cultural landscape, it is important not to over-program this case study site. Rather, the context or conditions must be simply provided in order to initiate an interactive response from partici-

pants (i.e. allowing place to be revealed). By the same token, however, place must have multiple layers and a rich variety of potential experiences in order to remain meaningful. The diversity provided by the duality of the combined site makes this possible. The active, busy nature of the parking lot contrasts sharply with the quiet, passive pond environment. The lot is a hard landscape made up of constructed elements, while the pond and surrounding area is clearly a soft, natural landscape. This dichotomous relationship further reflects the introverted / extroverted nature of the *Kleine Gemeinde* pioneers, themselves. While living in an insular, sheltered village environment (as captured by the enhanced pond), their entrepreneurial spirit continues to be reflected in Steinbach's thriving commercial core to this day.



**Stoney Creek Park and Plaza**

Plan for a proposed park and parking plaza along Stoney Creek in Steinbach's commercial core.  
 Drawing by author

## 8.0 Summary

### 8.1 Observations

The intent of this study has been to spark an awareness of and appreciation for Steinbach's cultural landscape, through an exploration and documentation of its founding creeks. As direct contributors to the city's unique settlement morphology, the creeks' significance extends beyond a mere historical footnote. Through the identification of a trail network and significant activity nodes along its length, the changing imagery associated with the creeks has been realized.

In many respects, the city of Steinbach is already moving in the right direction to preserve the integrity of its creeks. This has been achieved by maintaining a 24m (80 foot) allowance (easements and rights-of-way) along Stoney Creek in which development is not permitted, and proposing 100m (328 foot) greenways along Old Tom and Bushfarm Creeks. Such actions are very positive, and should be actively pursued along the full length of the creeks. The formal naming of the creeks (as outlined above) is a significant starting point for further implementation.

At this point, however, pressure to outline the recognition and future preservation of these streams must clearly come from the general public (i.e. at the "grass-

roots" level). Short political terms of office often only enable the realization of short-term projects in our "result-oriented" socio-economic climate. What is needed are concerned citizens who understand Steinbach's unique sense of place, and can provide a long-term vision for the needs of the community. Through the involvement of local citizens in the actual implementation of the greenspace network, a sense of ownership and pride can also be realized, as is the case in many other jurisdictions. Additionally, education of young and old must play a decisive role in extolling the opportunities and benefits which the creeks provide, in contributing to a rich cultural landscape.

In developing a long-term strategy for the implementation of the trail network, it will be important to remain open to the changing imagery surrounding the creeks. It will also become increasingly important to recognize that, while Steinbach's population has remained largely Mennonite, the city has also witnessed the continued growth of other cultural groups. This realization must begin to be reflected in future cultural design developments as well.

### 8.2 Opportunities for Future Research

This study has merely scratched the surface of the multitude of opportunities which the creeks offer. In



order for the proposed trail network to be implemented, further studies would have to be undertaken to analyse specific site conditions associated with each segment of the trail (ground-truthing), and the various opportunity nodes identified. This would also include identifying a strategy for the acquisition of private lands along significant portions of the creeks. The identification of additional nodes of varying scale, character and proportions along the creeks is strongly encouraged to provide a wide variety of potential experiences for users.

The opportunity for the proposed 16 km (10 mile) Steinbach trail network to be linked with a larger, regional network (within the Rural Municipality of Hanover and/or the Rural Municipality of Labroquerie) should also be explored. This may take the form of a joint taskforce between adjoining municipalities. Detailed quantitative (cost-benefit) analyses would also need to take place at this level to determine the impacts of the proposed designs to the area's surface drainage system, in which the creeks play a significant role. The main issues would include flooding and erosion control, runoff handling and water storage and the overall maintenance of the system. The implementation of the expanded trail and greenspace network along with the development of various opportunity nodes could very successfully address all of these concerns in a highly cost-effective manner, provided the ground-

truthing studies were thoroughly conducted.

Another significant area of research would involve additional interviews with long-time residents of Steinbach, and the further examination of diaries/memoirs, which may provide a broader collection of memories specific to Steinbach's creeks. In particular, a philosophical examination of the Mennonite view of and relationship to "nature" (historically and present-day) provides an, as yet untapped, opportunity for further study.

Within the case study area and in the region beyond, it has been demonstrated that by providing a greater presence to Steinbach's formative creeks, a more meaningful sense of place can be achieved in the community. While the discussion has been rooted in the historical context, an examination of the changing imagery, associated with the creek environment, has also recognized that new histories are recorded everyday. By preserving the integrity of the creeks, the opportunity is provided to forge an essential link between this formative past and a promising, directive future. The opportunity to exploit the multi-layered potential of the creeks as a tremendous natural resource, must, however, begin today.

## Appendix A

### The Mennonite "Privilegeum" from the Dominion Government of Canada

*The accompanying letter of response was addressed to the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde and Bergthal delegation, following their Manitoba tour of inspection and subsequent negotiations in Ottawa with the Minister of Agriculture, J.H. Pope.*

#### DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Ottawa, 25th July, 1873.

Gentlemen:

I have the honour, under the instruction of the Hon. the Minister of Agriculture, to state to you in reply to your letter of this day's date the following facts relating to advantages offered to settlers, and to the immunities offered to Mennonites which are established by Statute Law and by orders of his Excellency the Governor-General-in-Council for the information of German Mennonites having intention to emigrate to Canada via Hamburg.

1. An entire exemption from military service is by law and Order-in-Council granted to the Denomination of Christians called Mennonites.
2. An Order-in-council was passed on the 3rd March last to reserve eight townships in the Province of Manitoba for free grants on the condition of settlement as provided in the Dominion Lands Act, that is to say, "Any person who is head of a family or has obtained the age of 21 years shall be entitled to be entered for 1/4 section or a less quantity of unappropriated Dominion lands, for a purpose of securing a homestead right in respect thereof."
3. The said reserve of eight townships is for the exclusive use of the Mennonites, and the said free grants of 1/4 section to consist of 160 acres each, as defined by the act.
4. Should the Mennonite Settlement extend beyond the eight townships set aside by the Order-in-Council of March 3rd last, other townships will be in the same way reserved to meet the full requirements of Mennonite immigration.
5. If next spring the Mennonite settlers on viewing the eight townships set aside for their use should decide to exchange them for any other unoccupied eight townships, such exchange will be allowed.
6. In addition to the free grant of 1/4 section or 160 acres to every person over 21 years of age on the condition of settlement the right to

purchase the remaining 3/4 of the section at \$1.00 per acre is granted by law so as to complete the whole section of 640 acres which is the largest quantity of land the Government will grant a patent for to one person.

7. The settler will receive a patent for a free grant after three years residence in accordance with the terms of the Dominion Lands Act.
8. In event of the death of the settler, the lawful heirs can claim the patent for the free grant upon proof that settlement duties for three years have been performed.
9. From the moment of occupation the settler acquires a "homestead right" in the land.
10. The fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Mennonites without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever, and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in schools.
11. The privilege of affirming instead of making affidavits is afforded by law.
12. The Government of Canada will undertake to furnish passenger warrants from Hamburg to Fort Garry for Mennonite families of good characters for the sum of \$30.00 for adult persons over the age of eight years, for persons

under eight years half price or \$15.00 and for infants under one year, \$3.00.

13. The minister specially authorizes me to state that this arrangement as to price shall not be changed for the seasons of 1874, 1875, or 1876.
14. I am further to state that if it is changed thereafter the price shall not up to the year 1882 exceed \$40.00 per adult and children in proportion, subject to the approval of Parliament.
15. The immigrants will be provided with provisions on the portion of the journey between Liverpool and Collingwood but between other portions of the journey they are to find their own provisions.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) John Lowe

Secretary, Department of Agriculture.

Messrs. David Klassen

Jacob Peters

Heinrich Wiebe

Cornelius Toews

Mennonite Delegates from Southern Russia.

(copy of document found in *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* by E.K. Francis, pp. 44-45)

## Appendix B

### Origins of the name “Steinbach”

#### Steinbach, Molotschna

The name “Steinbach” has its origins in the Molotschna Colony first settled by 355 Mennonite families in the spring of 1804. Steinbach, Molotschna was located along the Juschanlee River, a tributary of the larger Molochnaya River in Southern Russia (present-day Ukraine). Steinbach was not a village but rather a large, private estate founded in 1812 by Klaas Wiens, the first *Oberschulz* (comparable to a municipal reeve) of the Molotschna colony. In honour of his work in establishing the Molotschna Colony as an economic showpiece for all of Russia, Wiens was awarded a large tract of land by Czar Alexander I. In its prime, the Steinbach Estate was one of the most impressive Mennonite properties with land holdings totalling 11,000 *dessiatini* (12,020 hectares or 29,700 acres).

The estate prospered greatly until civil war broke out in 1917 between the Bolshevik Red Army and the White Army made up of officers of the Tsarist army. “With the victory of the Red Army in 1919/20 the Bolsheviks abolished private land ownership and all major industries were nationalized. With the end of economic in-

dependence and the loss of local political control the Mennonite Commonwealth, almost a state within a state in Tsarist times, came to end” (Friesen, 1996, 20). The Steinbach estate owners gave up their residences, barns, garage and private school, and were forced to occupy a small tavern while their property was converted into a state orphanage. Many of the Steinbach estate buildings still remain in use as part of the orphanage facility within the village known today as Kalinovka.

#### Steinbach, Borosenko

The village of Steinbach, Borosenko was founded in 1865 as the first community within this *Kleine Gemeinde* daughter colony of the larger Molotschna Colony. The village was laid out from east to west along the Basavluk River (a tributary of the Dnieper) approximately 30 kilometres northwest of Nikopol on the Dnieper River in present-day Ukraine. Its name in Imperialist Russia was Kizmitskoye.

Although the name “Steinbach” may have been inspired by a mound of large white boulders strewn along the riverbank, it is more likely that the name was borrowed from the Klaas Wiens Steinbach estate in the Molotschna Colony. Wiens had developed close ties with the founding members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and was supportive of their belief and social structures.

According to historian Delbert Plett, "It was probably Wiens' intercession for the KG which saved the early leaders of the movement from banishment to Siberia" (Plett, *Preservings*, June 1996, 2-3).

As a result of the political reforms adopted by the Russian government in 1871, the *Kleine Gemeinde* settlers sold their farms to other Mennonites and emigrated to Canada in 1874-75. The new inhabitants of Steinbach, Borosenko were unaware of the horrifying future which awaited them. During the revolution which erupted in 1917, groups of bandit bands, led by the Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Machno, routinely attacked the Mennonite villages whose inhabitants, in many cases, did not defend themselves in adherence to their pacifist beliefs. On December 7, 1919, Steinbach, Borosenko also fell victim to the atrocities of these roving bandits. During the ensuing massacre, entire households were rounded up and brutally shot or hacked apart by sabres. In addition to these horrific acts of violence, women and children were routinely raped, while properties were plundered and destroyed. A total of 54 Mennonite men, women and children lost their lives on this fateful day in the village of Steinbach. Those who managed to hide or miraculously survived these attacks fled with their lives.

It remains unclear as to whether the village of Steinbach, Borosenko was dismantled at this point or

whether it was inhabited by Ukrainians until its eventual obliteration near the end of World War II when fierce fighting accompanied the retreat of the German army in 1944. At first glance, the only present-day indication that a village once existed here is a 3/4 mile stretch of trees denoting a central street parallel to the Basavluk River near the existing Russian village of Mironovka (Plett, *Preservings*, June 1996; Epp, *Preservings*, June 1996). Upon closer inspection, however, the suggestion of a small human settlement can be found in the remnants of bricks and clay roof tiles scattered throughout the surrounding fields.



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