

S alifornia with Mom and Dad in 1945 we visited Peter S.L. Friesen and his wife in Santa Cruz. We both thought that at age 70 they were the oldest people we had ever met. And to think that he was born just four months after his mother arrived here from Russia. That seemed very remote. They proudly took us for a ride that evening to show us the city of Santa Cruz. Today's energy conservationists would likely award Mr. Peter S.L. Friesen for his attempts to conserve gasoline. As we drove around the hilly streets of Santa Cruz, Mr. Friesen switched off the ignition every time we started down the slightest hill. Then, with some fumbling for the starter, he would start the car for the short uphill climb and immediately switch it off again for the descent. The trip was definitely "steady by jerks" and our amazement was as great as our mirth. We all heaved a sigh of relief when we at last returned safely to their home.

But the relief was short-lived for Esther and me, because we had to share a most unique bed for the night. We were never certain what our bedding actually was but it was very bulky and very heavy. No matter which way we turned the bedding shaped a deep V and we both rolled to the center of that V. For sisters who preferred to sleep alone, this was no fun. The cover on top of us was also very bulky and heavy and we kept getting lost and smothered in it. We thought they might be featherbeds from Russia but we didn't know how they could have brought them across the Atlantic without sinking the ship. One thing was certain, we were ready to get up early in the morning. No sleeping for us!

Friesen Foundations

From New York City our great grandparents traveled to Jefferson County, Nebraska to settle on the prairies with other Mennonites from Molotschna, Russia. In Russia they had isolated themselves from the "English" and clung to the traditions they had brought to Russia from Prussia and before that from Friesland in Holland. They were used to working very hard for the necessities of life and it was a factor which helped them in the early difficult years on the prairies as they struggled to survive.

All our great grandparents immigrated to the United States from Russia. Old ship lists show that Cornelius Friesen, a farmer, and his wife Sarah, came to the United States on the S.S. Hammonia with departures listed from Hamburg and Havre. They arrived in New York City on July 17, 1874. On the same ship came the Heidebrechts who would have been our Grandmother Katie Heidebrecht Friesen's parents. Her grandfather Peter and his wife, Aganetha, are also listed. Peter is listed as a farmer. Mom's maternal grandfather, Henry F. Loewen, also came to America at that time as an orphaned lad of age 12. Grandpa A.H. Friesen's parents came to America the same year. They were married near Jansen, Nebraska. Grandmother A.H. Friesen's parents were married near Jansen but Grandpa and Grandmother John J. Friesen's parents were married in Russia before the immigration.

Our grandparents were all born in the Jansen and Fairbury, Nebraska area and it was here that Grandpa John J. Friesen married Katie Heidebrecht on November 25, 1900. The ceremony was performed by Grandpa's father, who was a minister in the Kleine Gemeinde church where they were married. Grandma wore a brown dress for the wedding. Grandpa

had dated both Katie and her sister but one day while walking in the country, he asked Katie to marry him. She promptly replied, "But I can't cook." Grandpa assured her that he would teach her how to cook. She had been required to work outdoors on the farm and in the fields and had not had time to work in the kitchen and learn the skills of cooking and baking. She did learn how to cook after her marriage to Grandpa and most of her grandchildren will recall one of her specialties, a light chocolate cookie with white frosting and coconut. Her cookies were very soft and delicious. She also baked good bread and zwickbrot and mastered the art of holding a loaf of bread vertically in mid-air with her left hand and the knife in her right hand as she sliced the bread into thin slices for serving.

While living on a farm southwest of Jansen, Nebraska and northeast of Fairbury, Grandpa and Grandma John J. Friesen rejoiced over their firstborn son on May 28, 1902. They named him Henry H. The initial chosen usually represented the mother's maiden name, in this case, Heidebrecht. Dad later, at about age ten, changed his initial to A because there was another older Henry H. Friesen in the community. Changing the initial was simple because he did not have a birth certificate to change.

A few months after Dad was born, the family moved to the Colson farm three miles northwest of Jansen. Another young married couple, Abraham H. and Margaret Loewen Friesen moved into the house on the farm just vacated by John and Katie Friesen and baby boy, Henry. Soon after, Abraham H. and Margaret Friesen had a daughter born on September 21, 1902. They named her Margaret L. The letter L represented her mother's maiden name, Loewen. Little did these young families realize how these two Friesen babies born the same year and in the same house were destined to be married when teenagers.

The John J. Friesen family moved to Kansas in March of 1907. Dad was nearly five years old. Dad recalls how they went to his maternal grandparents' home for their last meal before boarding the train for the trip to Kansas. After the meal Grandpa carried Dad to the train in his arms while Grandma carried John who was then 1½ years old. Grandpa, Dad and his brother, John, rode in the passenger car while Grandpa had to travel in the freight cars so he could look after the cattle, horses and implements on the long trip to Meade, Kansas.

In Meade they were met by Mrs. A.J. Friesen and Lizzie Friesen at the train station. They took the weary travelers to the settlement southeast of Meade to the A.J. Friesen home for the night. Abraham J. Friesen was Grandpa's brother. The next day they moved in with Grandpa's parents, the C.L. Friesens, for a few days until they were able to move to what we later knew as the Henry R. Friesen place, located eight miles south and three miles east of Meade. The EMB church is located one mile east of this farm. Here Grandpa had a well drilled for water. This was one of the first wells dug by Mennonites settling in the area and the drill was powered by horses going round and round in a circle. Then they built a grain storage bin, pouring cement between the studs to hold it down in the strong Kansas prairie winds. Next they built a square house with ceilings nine to ten feet high. It was a simple structure but it still stands firm in 1981 though various additions have been built and it has been remodeled.

Dad remembers that when he was a child they used to go to his Grandpa C.L. Friesen's home for a Christmas celebration. There would always be a very large family gathering and they would get the traditional "sack" of nuts and perhaps an orange or an apple and a nickel. That was a very special treat.

Dad's step-grandfather Isaac and Grandmother Heidebrecht Isaac moved to Meade shortly after the John J. Friesen family moved to Meade. Dad's grandfather Heidebrecht had died in 1897 long before Dad was even born. His Grandmother Heidebrecht then married Peter P. Isaac who was an uncle to Henry F. Isaac, Peter F., John F., and Jacob F. Isaac.