

the southeast and slightly north of the present Mariupol on the Black Sea. Here our forefathers lived for approximately 40 years. However, in the early 1870's, the Czar was proposing universal conscription which would include all peoples including the Mennonites. That, and the fact that there were reported stories of attractive land offers from North America, prompted the colonies to consider emigration. The years 1873 - 4 - 5 saw the entire exodus of the five villages from Bergthal to Manitoba. Here they were settled into areas east and west of the Red River. Originally, our families came to the East Reserve at a point in the vicinity of Niverville. However, many of them emigrated shortly thereafter to the West Reserve because the land was better. Two whole townships were set aside by the government for the Mennonites in the West. The composition of the area therefore was homogeneously Mennonite.

The first years were extremely hard. It was a struggle for survival. However, the hardy nature of our people, the closely knit society which insured mutual aid, helped them through this difficult period. Soon villages and the communal way of life was established. The history of 100 years of the Mennonite presence in Manitoba has been one of steady growth and increasing prosperity. From Manitoba, they dispersed into the other four western provinces of Canada right up to the Pacific Coast. Later they went to Mexico, U.S.A. and Paraguay. At least two families have gone to the latter country, the H.A. Braun (1926) and the Heinrich G. Klippenstein family (1947).

In a changing society thousands of Mennonite families have moved from original rural agricultural settings to larger urban centres. There has been an assimilation in many ways into the larger society. They have moved into business, the professions and into public life. They have expressed themselves in cultural and other ways.

Today outwardly they are indistinguishable from the larger society around them. However, there is a constant concern for identity based upon historical roots to find and renew this in the society today.

THE KLIPPENSTEIN FAMILY IN ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The name Klippenstein is obviously of German origin. It may have been the name of a place. In the Middle Ages and later, it was common to designate a person from the place that he or she came from, for example, Jan of Leyden. The place then often became the family surname. Friesen indicates a person from Friesland. As to the origin, it could have come from several provinces in Germany, either Lower Saxony or Lower Franconia both of which had many converts to Mennonitism. However, as indicated in history, many of the religious refugees gathered in Northern Holland and East Friesland. They settled together, inter-married and gradually formed the ethnic-religious community of Mennonites. Our names indicate origins in Flanders, Holland, and Northern Germany. This is the Russian Mennonite branch. The other branch, namely the Swiss Mennonites, who emigrated to Pennsylvania towards the end of the 18th Century have names of Swiss, South German and Alsatian origin.

The language that evolved as Low-German (Platt-Deutsch) also reflects these various origins: Flemish, Dutch, North German with additive words of Russian and later English. It is a distinctive language expressing the life style of the people who spoke it. It is earthy, and yet very descriptive. It includes nuances and infinite shades of meaning. Yet, in the past it has not been a written language. It does not have a structured grammar. Only in this century has it been committed to paper