

Chapter Three

Personal Writings of Gerhard S. Friesen

One striking feature of Gerhard's personality was his love of writing. With the busyness of fathering eighteen children, moving at least a dozen times, and attending to the demands of farming, his desire to make time for writing speaks to his passion for it. Gerhard was a prolific contributor to the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, a Mennonite newspaper whose pages were largely filled with reports from its readership. From 1885 to 1902, at least 35 of Gerhard's reports were published.⁴⁴ His writings have also been found in the Steinbach Post.

Gerhard's reports in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* were often a couple of paragraphs in length, stating the weather, market prices for the harvest, and updates on the health of family and friends. Others include reports on travel, obituaries, or local news.⁴⁵ This chapter provides a few samples of his writing.

Report published June 24, 1885

Below is a report published in German on June 24, 1885, written by Gerhard to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* newspaper. It typifies one flavour of report that Gerhard would write to the Rundschau: common everyday agrarian concerns and news. Rundschau submissions are prefaced with the post office address of the sender and date of the letter.

Hochstadt P. O., 8 June. The lovely spring has clothed itself in a beautiful green dress and everything stands in full splendor and praises God's goodness. Fruits are beautiful here, namely strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, cherries, plums, etc.; they wash with no effort. On June 6th, we had a cool rain and the night of the 7th to the 8th there was some frost, so that the vegetables and especially the potatoes which were fairly mature were wilted today.

The market prices lately are somewhat better than in autumn; wheat is priced at 75-80c, barley 70c, oats 55-60c and potatoes 60c a bushel. Those who have some of these commodities for sale, have a difficult time getting it to the city because of the bad roads, for it is a distance of 30-40 miles. Chickens and eggs are the farmers best income, however, currently there seems to be a plague that is rampant among the chickens, because some farmers have lost a quarter [of the flock], and at others places almost all of the little chickens are dead. They appear sickly in the morning and are dead by evening. If anyone knows of an antidote, please report it. G. S. Friesen

Report published March 5, 1890

Below is a report published in German in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* newspaper on March 5, 1890, written by Gerhard. It provides important genealogical clues on the extended Friesen family (see *Preservings*, January 1995, p. 11) and demonstrates the hardships of weather among pioneers.

February 17. I wish the readers good health and blessings in Jesus Christ. How time flies and passes, even winter will soon be over, which will bring joy to many a one, since the winter has been difficult, not only the temperatures, but also the snow storms. On February 6, a great storm raged, worse than anyone had experienced. But it was good that it began the night before, so that people could not go on the road; you could not even go ten steps - and it was almost like this on February 8th as well. The way I heard it, two people (American), a man and a woman froze to death not far from Langdon.

There are hardly any roads and paths, because when some snow falls and the wind rises, it really drifts, and there is already fairly much snow.

My friends say next to nothing, especially those in Russia. Dear uncle Gerhard Friesen, Grossweide must probably be dead, since we don't hear from him. Gerh. Friesen, Blumstein, Russia and his siblings should also write. Is Mrs. Voth still living, she was a former Heindrich who lived in Klippenfeld fourteen years ago? Where are the Joh. Friesen's children living that formerly lived in Schordau - please write me letters. Uncle Herman Friesen, Sagradofska also is not writing - ditto for his children. Our dear mother is well as far as I know. I visited Manitoba in the fall.

Greeting to all friends far and near with 1 Peter 5:14. G. S. Friesen

Received by H. Penner Hillsboro, Kansas via I/J. F. Funk, Elkhart, Ind., \$2.00 for friend Kehler who had an accident. G. S. Friesen

Report published April 11, 1894

Below is a report published in German in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* April 11, 1894. It exemplifies Gerhard's priority of family, his search for quality land, and the hardships, such as weather and sickness, faced by pioneers in Gerhard's day. The parents he is referring to are his mother and step-father, Katharina Friesen Penner Baerg and Peter Baerg. They were age 69 and 76, respectively.

Daniels, Cavalier County, 28 March

Am reporting that I have been in Manitoba for a visit, and arrived home yesterday, the 27th, safely and in good health. Our dear old parents are to be especially complimented; they drove by themselves for four miles to the Penners, (my sister Maria), in order to come visit with me. Visited also my dear old friend Gerhard Kornelsen, the former school teacher in Lichtenau, Russia. When I greeted him, he immediately recognized my voice. He is 78 years old, and quite weak, and has almost completely lost his voice, so that he is difficult to understand. As he himself says, his end is near. The Lord be with him. They have many cases of death, especially among the children. My dear siblings, the I. R.

Loewens (my sister Elizabeth), just recently lost their youngest child, and the next youngest child is only slowly recovering.

I greet Heinrich S. Friesen, Alexandria, South Dakota with this letter. I have received his letter and have deduced from it that he intends to move to Missouri. I believe that to be a better decision than moving to the Canadian Northwest, as he had first decided on doing. Will also, if it is possible, look at the southern states, and settle somewhere there where the land or a homestead is cheap. I have at one time corresponded with Samuel Kaufmann of the Missouri and am still considering that area. The dear brother is asked to write when he arrives. Our address will from now on no longer be Daniels, Cavalier County, but rather Park River, Walsh County, North Dakota. Am also reporting that we had a terrible snowstorm here on the 23rd of March. We learned that two people were found frozen not far from here, and we will probably hear about more. I, myself was on the road from Grafton to Park River, and if we hadn't seen a house, we would have been lost, since it was impossible to go against the wind. I have experienced much similar weather, but never a snowstorm such as this. We also met an old lady with her son, who was so cold and afraid, she could hardly speak.

In conclusion I want to express my heartfelt thanks for the love that was shown to me in Manitoba. Greetings to all dear friends.

G. S. Friesen, Park River, North Dakota

Report published June 20, 1894

Below is a report published in German in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* on June 20, 1894. This stilted report contains family information: Heinrich S. Friesen is Gerhard's brother; David Unger is Gerhard's father-in-law. The report also hints at how the search for quality land is forefront in Gerhard's thinking.

Park River, 10 June. The weather is very dry. The state of health is good. This area is cultivated well, has good land and good price for it; it is not to be compared to the country 75 miles west. There is much work and good wage. Friend Jb. Borchler, Elktou, Montana, would serve to answer that I am a native of Russia, Lichtenau, 42 years old, for the second time married and have six children. Pity your situation, it is too bad if the preachers place themselves as hirelings and leave the flock. – God gives light to discern His way and truth. Write again.

Is Heinrich S. Friesen already there where he wanted to be?

David Unger, Hochstadt, Manitoba, greets me; he wants to know something of here, so he inquires. Greeting to all Rundschau readers here and there.

G. S. Friesen,

Park River, Walsh County, North Dakota

Report published January 29, 1902

Below is a report published in German in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* on January 29, 1902. It was written from Hannah, North, Dakota where Gerhard was living at the time.

Hannah, December 30, 1901. Dear editor of the "Rundschau"! Please exempt these lines, for I wanted to report a few things for this area. We had harvested some goods, and the prices were also good. Wheat 62 cents, barley 45 cents, oats 30 cents, flax \$1.25.

The weather is presently beautiful, little snow and little frost. The state of health is not too good. One hears that the measles broke out, and the pox were also already in the city. Should a person cross the border, he should first be examined by the doctor.

It interested me to read friend Froese's trip report, because he travelled where I was also, rekindling so much in me about what is new. Believe also certainly that he will have encountered my cousin Hermann Friesen in Sagradofka, Nikolaifeld. In Tiege we had also lived, nearby to the main street, with Esaus as neighbors, where now Duerksens live. I wonder if Franz Kasdorfs live there still. Do you yet live, my dear cousin Hermann? Write us yet once and also the other friends are asked to write.

Also one hears through the dear "Rundschau" much from the Crimea. We had also lived there, in Kultomack for probably eight years, where we also have many acquaintances. How is it going our with old neighbors there? Are they already all deceased? Johann Strauss who lives in Minnesota and by now is very old— dear elder—another greeting from your Gerhard. Our parents are both dead; father died 24 years back and mother last May. We six siblings yet live. Heinrich now lives three miles from here. He thought to move, however, to Alberta next spring.

Go yet to Landskrone; who knows how it looks there now. I would gladly go along the street and visit my school friend G. Fast, and then dear old father who lays so sick. Yes dear Johann Deleski, you are now my neighbor because I think of you, and merely over the cow path, you lived there yet. And where are your dear siblings, Aganetha, Jakob, and Maria? Unless you think otherwise, friend H. Thiessen, Hierschau, please report.

Because I read your report in the "Rundschau", of a certain Franz Heinrich searching for his siblings, I ask if he finds them to please give me also the address, for after all they are my cousins and nieces. Franz is supposed to have moved from Texas to Oklahoma.

Have still to report that here in the autumn a great misfortune happened with the threshing machine. Also the misfortune that my left leg encountered when it came into its sheaf binder, when I was on it to place the regulator, and at the same time the engineer released the machine without signal. The Lord however to be thanked, it will now soon be better and I already can sit and write, but the past 10 weeks were long to me. If however everything to us works for good, so I believe, then this also works for good. For if we believe that the hair on our heads is counted, and without God's will nothing happens, so this must likewise work. For the Lord Jesus wills that we should only will as he does, and he went through

suffering to glory, therefore you are only confident in that you suffer. Our Savior comforts and we come believingly to Him and cast our burdens on Him.

Once again greeting to all friends and acquaintances, your

G. S. Friesen

Report of September 20, 1919

Below is a letter published in English, written by Gerhard to a newspaper called the *Steinbach Post*, a forerunner to *The Carillon*. Gerhard was living in Arawana at the time. The editor of the *Steinbach Post* happened to be Gerhard's younger brother, Jacob S. Friesen. Note below that Gerhard's son John had fought for the U.S. overseas during World War I.

Arawana, Man. Sept. 20, 1919.

To the Steinbach Post.

Threshing is almost done in this district, the summer has been very hot and the crops suffered considerably from that cause. The average yield of wheat will come to about 12 bushels to the acre, the yield of other cereals will yield in proportion, but we are getting lots of hay and straw, thanks to God for it all.

We are all well. What are all our friends doing, and also the editor? Is he still sitting on the wide chair? When will the Post appear in the German language again?

Could some one tell me what became of the "*Rundschau*", as we do not receive it any more. (The Post will be printed in the German language as soon as we get permission to do so from Ottawa. The *Rundschau* is not allowed to circulate in Canada on account of an Order in Council forbidding all German newspapers, and those of a few other languages. Ed.)

Our son John came home at last but today he went back to N. Dak. because he was called to be there on the 23rd of Sept to receive his pay consisting of six hundred Dollars and one-half Section of Land.

What has become of uncle Henry and his sons, as they never write. Please let us know when you all will come here.

Our son David and family are coming in their car and expect to be here about the 3rd of Oct. Daughter Martha is also coming home from Leduc, Alberta.

I find the Post too small and not enough news, that's the reason I am sending a dollar and this letter, in order to help improve things. (That's right brother, let others do likewise Ed.)

Greeting and best wishes to the editor and all mine and his friends.

G. S. Friesen

⁴⁴ Gerhard's known reports in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* are: 1885 – June 24, July 15; 1886 – Jan 20, Feb 10, Dec 8; 1888 – Mar 14, Apr 11, July 11, Aug 29, Sep 26; 1889 – Feb 20, Mar 27, June 5, Aug 7, Nov 27; 1890 – Feb 19; 1891 – Apr 29, May 20, Jun 24, Sep 9, Sep 23, Nov 25; 1892 – Mar 30, Aug 17; 1893 – Apr 19; 1894 – Apr 11, Jun 20; 1896 – Aug 26; 1898 – Jan 12, Aug 24, Nov 2; 1899 – Mar 15, Apr 12; 1902 – Jan 29. Gerhard's move to Alberta about coincides with the cessation of reports.

⁴⁵ *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, 462.