

The Helena and Heinrich R. Reimer Home

“Memories of the Helena Dueck Reimer (1878-1950) and Heinrich R. Reimer (1876-1959) Home, Landmark, Manitoba,” written by granddaughter Adina Kornelsen as told by granddaughter Hulda Plett, Box 54, Landmark, Manitoba, R0A 0X0.

Introduction.

I am thankful that I had the privilege of getting to know my grandparents, Heinrich and Helena Reimer. They were my maternal grandparents and I spent a lot of time with them since they lived just across the road from our place. I was already well into adulthood when they died and thus I got to know them very well.

Helena Dueck Reimer was born on February 16, 1879 in the village of Grünfeld, Manitoba now known as Kleefeld where she lived till she was 14 and then together with her mother and step-father moved to Blumenort, Manitoba.

Here she met Heinrich R. Reimer and they were married on October 18, 1896. They were married for 53 years and had 13 children, seven sons and six daughters.

Henry Reimer was born on July 26, 1876 in the village of Blumenort, Manitoba. Here he was raised and educated. He was a school teacher for 26 years teaching in Neuanlage, Blumenort, and Prairie Rose, and a minister for almost 42 years.

They were one of the first pioneers to settle in the Prairie Rose community. Their house in Landmark was built in 1919 and they moved into it the following spring with their 11 children. Their oldest daughter, Susanna, (Mrs. C.K. Plett), my mother, was already married and the youngest, Elsie, was born after they moved into the house. In 1940 one of their sons, Ben D. Reimer bought the farm and moved in together with his family. The grandparents lived with them till 1941 when they built a small house in their garden.

Another change of ownership took place in 1949 when their youngest daughter, with her husband, John and Elsie Hildebrand purchased the farm. Their youngest son Roy, together with his young wife, Lynn, now own the house since 1977. The farmland has been developed for the townsite and sold as lots as the small village has

grown to become a fair sized town. The original house and lot remain. Roy and Lynn have renovated the whole house, the solid frame structure was well worth restoring. The gleaming hardwood floors, the garage replacing the summer kitchen, the dingy attic transformed into a spacious family room with the added feature of a domed sky-light, have made this house into quite the masterpiece. However the house as you see it from the outside has kept much of its original appearance and sits there as dignified and stately as ever.

Memories.

I loved going to my grandparents house and I have many fond memories, some not so fond, that go back to my young childhood. In that house lived not only my grandparents but a host of uncles and aunts. I received a lot of special attention since I was the second oldest grandchild although my youngest aunt was only four years older than I was. I looked up to her as a much older aunt at the time but that age difference doesn't seem as great now and we have been good friends for many years now.

The memories are not recorded in any particular order since I don't remember my exact age when these events took place. It's kind of a hodge-podge of mixed remembrances but each holds a lot of feeling and vivid images that are somewhat difficult to put into words. As I think about these things I feel the warmth, the love, the acceptance of the people that lived there, I see the cookstove and smell the tantalizing aroma that exudes from it, I can almost taste the mouthwatering, home-baked cookies, buns, and pies, I see the people as they looked at that time, I experience the life that was lived there and words are a poor substitute.

The House.

Firstly I will attempt to give a detailed description of the house as I remember it. Each nook and cranny holds some nostalgia for me and thus worth recording. As a child my grandparent's house seemed like a great mansion, particularly if I compared it to my parent's two bedroom house which was home for me. It was a big, square, three-storey building and in total had nine spacious rooms, a full basement and an attic.

A large summer kitchen where most of the cooking took place was attached to the side of the house. The main house measured thirty eight feet by forty feet and there were all told 39 steps connecting the different floors together and 25 windows which made for an airy, bright interior. On the main floor there were basically four rooms, a large dining room, a kitchen, one bedroom, and a livingroom, one walk-in closet, and a large walk-in pantry, a hallway with connecting stairs to the second floor and an outside door leading onto the verandah.

There was a divider between the kitchen and dining room, the upper half from the dining room side was a china cupboard displaying blue trimmed dishes, beautiful to look at but meant for every day practical use. On the kitchen side this same cupboard held a large variety of pots and pans and baking sheets and several drawers for winter mitts, scarves, caps, and mufflers. All these rooms were connected with doors making a perfect “round robin” for chasing each other as kids. What greatly intrigued me as a child was a boxlike structure that protruded from the ceiling in the dining room. I had visions of precious treasures hidden away in this huge treasure chest as it appeared to me. How disappointed I was when I found out it held no such mysteries as that but was simply a boxed in cold air pipe.



The house, 1930. View from the east. All photographs for this article are courtesy of Hulda Plett, Box 54, Landmark, Manitoba, R0A 0X0.



The house as it looks today. It is presently owned by Roy and Lynn Hildebrand, grandchildren of Heinrich and Helena Reimer.



Heinrich and Helena Reimer, circa. 1950

The Second Floor.

As a child that stairway to the second floor was massive, and very long with lots of stairs, and led to a long hallway with lots of doors leading to four bedrooms, a parlor, one closet, and one door opening onto the stairs to the attic, and an outside door which led to the verandah. What fascination all these doors held for me as a little child! What hidden mysteries lay behind these doors? That illusion was quickly broken as I opened the doors and peeked in—except for the parlour and the attic, they continued to hold a lot of intrigue for me. The two verandahs, one on the upper level and one on the lower level gave this house an old style country look. The spacious verandah on main floor surrounded two sides of the house, front and side.

The verandahs, both bottom and top were covered with lush, green ivy vines giving the house an appearance of warm hospitality and cozy family living which, of course, was exactly how it was. In fall these vines were covered with little, blue berries which were good to look at but not good to eat.

However as young people we found another purpose for these berries. I remember at aunt Tina's (Mrs. Walter Penner) wedding in fall they were having a program outside on the lawn and a group of young people were gathered on the upstairs verandah where the view, of course was the best. Here we spied these juicy, fat berries and we began picking them. What could we possibly do with these berries that were no good to eat! The temptation was just to great! We began throwing them at the people standing on the lawn below us and as if that wasn't bad enough we particularly targeted the minister's head. To this day he must be wondering why the sudden "rain" of blueberries! (He has long passed on by now and I've never made my confessions.)

Games.

Our grandparent's house was the perfect set-up for hilarious games of hide and seek and what fun we as cousins had doing this! I don't know how grandmother endured the noise and busyness of many feet running hither and yon. Maybe we did this while she was visiting in the living room with one or the other of the married children that would visit regularly. Hiding spots in that huge house were not hard to find. The spooky dark basement which had just a few tiny windows and of course no electric lights in those days, was the most favorite spot of all. There were several bins for the many different vegetables stored there for winter use. There were cobwebby, dark corners galore. What a haven for us to hide and squeal and squirm in our treasured hiding spots.

Another wonderful pastime were the exhilarating rides down that long stairway from the upstairs hallway to the main floor. The wooden stairs were brightly polished with black rubber treads on each step which probably softened the bumps somewhat. What fun we had as we literally flew down, supposedly in turns but sometimes several of us landing on a heap at the bottom and none the worse for it. A great wonder there were no broken bones never mind broken necks. The most exciting for me was to lie on my stomach and go down head first. I cringe when I think of it now but at the time the slogan that prevailed was "the more daring the more fun." This was probably as exciting for us then as skiing is for the young folks today.

Probably after some reprimands we found ourselves a hideaway far removed from the downstairs living room and that was the most fascinating room in the whole house, the attic. There was only one window out front in this attic and so in the semi-darkness we explored all kinds of treasures. Lots of junk was stored up here, to us these were treasures, old furniture, cast off clothing, books, and boxes of different shapes and sizes. It was a feast for our young imaginative minds. The carton boxes became castles and palaces. The old clothing became elaborate gowns for the queen. The books stimulated stories about ghosts and goblins. For one brief hour we lived in the fantasy of a make believe world.

The Pantry.

The walk-in pantry simply compelled me to walk in. The smells I can still fantasize over as I think back to the mouth watering aroma coming from those shelves. Grandma, in her generosity, always had lots of goodies for us and this is where they came from. I can still see the huge containers sitting on those shelves out of which came an assortment of cookies, large, soft, white cookies, dark brown molasses cookies, spicy current buns (pepanate), cocoa (chocolate) cookies and much more.

One day for some reason I found myself alone in this pantry. I probably was simply following where my "aroma detectors" were leading me. My parents had left me in the care of my aunts and I must have been approximately three or four years old. There I stood surveying

all this good stuff when I spied a large pail of syrup sitting there in the middle of the floor. Taking a large wooden spoon I began to stir it.

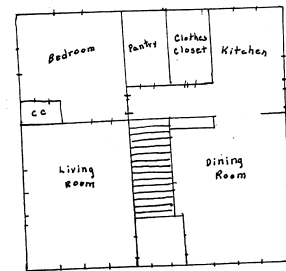
Being a resourceful, little girl I decided it would be much more interesting if I could mix something into it and, of course this is something I had seen countless times, different ingredients get mixed together when you work with a wooden spoon. As I was deliberating this my eyes caught sight of a large box of fine sawdust and promptly I began to mix the two together. With much gusto and enthusiasm I worked away at it. I can only imagine the syrup and sawdust all over myself and all over the floor. What a sticky, slimy mess but most enjoyable! I have no memories what happened when I was found out.

Whatever happened I was not too deeply impacted by it so there couldn't have been harsh words, harsh scolding or a spanking, a reprimand probably but nothing too severe. Someone there must have had a good understanding of children and probably also a good sense of humour.

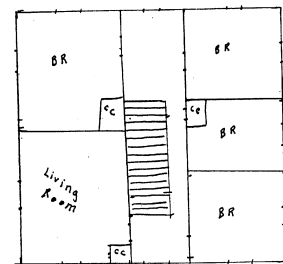
Dancing.

Another time I was left with my grandparents for the weekend. Grandmother and grand-

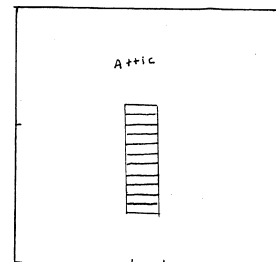
Main floor



Second Floor



Attic



The floor plan. Three diagrams show the floor plan for the main floor, second floor and attic. Drawing by granddaughter Hulda Plett.



Three sisters 1948. Mrs. Susanna Dueck Penner and Abram R. Penner, Mrs. Elisabeth Dueck Kroeker and Peter B. Kroeker, and Helena Dueck Reimer and Heinrich R. Reimer. They are the parents and grandparents of many citizens of the Hanover Steinbach area.

father must have been away for the evening and I was in the care of my aunties again. Many young people were over that evening and the old record player, the kind with a crank, was playing records such as the Carter Family, Wilf Carter and other modern hits of the day.

In the midst of this one of my aunties came to me and asked me to go with her and she took me to the bedroom. She carefully explained to me that I could play here by myself, that they were busy with their friends and she would like me to stay here. I was not very happy with this arrangement but I agreed to it. I became very unhappy there all by myself and started crying and when my aunt came to check on me and saw my unhappiness she gave me permission to go with on one condition that I would quietly sit on a chair and be no trouble to them. I quickly agreed to this.

The melodious sounds of Hawaiian waltzes were coming from the gramophone now, the huge dining room table and all the chairs had been pushed aside and my aunts and uncles with their friends were engaged in a lively dance. I sat there in amazement, stunned, I took it all in. Never in my life had I seen anything like this before. No problem with me being any trouble, I was entirely entertained and too engrossed to even think of moving. The next morning I innocently, maybe not so innocently, told my grandmother all about it, after all this was exciting news that needed sharing. One of my aunts overheard this and she quietly drew me aside and told me in no uncertain terms, "If we wanted Grandma to know about this we would have told her ourselves." To this day I appreciate Hawaiian music and enjoy listening to it and I need to thank my aunties for this. However I never did take up dancing.

Gatherings.

I remember many family gatherings where the adults, probably the men, were visiting in the downstairs living room, the women probably nursing their babies in the bedroom or making dinner or faspä or cleaning up dishes from all the food that was cooked and consumed there at those times. Although the meals were not fancy there was always a lot of whatever was served, plumi moos, fried potatoes, fried ham, zwieback, preserves, chokecherry jelly, among the most staple foods as I remember them. Us younger folks were in the upstairs parlour, unsupervised, and we probably got into things we

shouldn't have. We opened drawers that were none of our business.

One time we found our aunts' makeup and what fun we had with it as we played dress up, tried it out and consequently got carried away with fits of laughter. When things got too noisy up there grandfather would tap the stove pipe which came through the ceiling from the downstairs living room to the upstairs parlour (this served as their heating system). What an effective way of quieting us down. We had much respect for those tappings and it never occurred to us to not respond to it. However sometimes they were quickly forgotten which meant repeated tappings. On second thought I don't know how we ever dared look into any of these personal drawers and closets because we firmly believed, as we had been told that "Yale Tane" (an ogre) lived in them and that this scary, mysterious creature would jump at us and attack us if we as much as touched these drawers or closets. Maybe this came as a result of what happened that day and so the visions of this unearthly, violent, monster kept me from ever snooping in my aunties drawers and closets ever again.

There was always singing at these family gatherings. What a choir this family made as hymn after hymn was sung in four-part harmony. These songs were usually in German and I sang along most gustily although I didn't really understand the meaning of the words too well since we spoke the Low German and these songs were sung in the High German. Songs like "Grosser Gott Wer Loben Dich" and "Lob Gott Ihre Christen Alzugleich" and many more. These powerful, ageless songs hold special meaning for me now and the meaningful messages in them continues to be personally uplifting.

There was also a lot of laughter among the adults at these times and I remember grandfather admonishing his own sons when the boisterousness and joking became too loud according to his standards.

Grandmother.

My grandparents were committed to live what they believed. They taught me by example what it means to love my neighbour. Grandmother was a generous, self-sacrificing woman. She had a sense of humour which I remember so well and often would laugh at her timely wit. She was a hospitable woman, entertaining people regularly and to add another few plates to an already full

table was no problem at all. Generosity was second nature to her as she gave to those in need.

Her own ideas were original and she didn't hesitate to share her opinions. When grandfather was elected as a minister she was known to have said when people criticized them about owning a telephone, which in those days was considered questionable, "They have elected us with the telephone and they will have to accept us with the telephone now."

Nursing homes and senior citizen homes were not in existence in those days and thus older, dependent, sickly people were cared for in the home. I remember my grandparents taking in an older, sickly woman and taking care of her. She needed a lot of care and I felt very honored that I could be of assistance here at times. When grandmother went out to do the milking or gardening she would very carefully instruct me to stay with this woman and feed her a few teaspoons of water as was needed.

Our grandparents taught us that Christmas was a deeply religious holiday. I can now better understand grandfather's shocked behaviour when he came to our house one time close to Christmas. As he entered the house we jokingly called out to him, "Here comes Santa Clause, Here comes Santa Clause." With his white hair and white beard he seemed of it the picture so well. He was not appreciative of this at all. He sat us down and very seriously admonished us saying, "Please, never call me Santa Clause again, Santa Clause is not a good thing."

Grandfather.

In his strict pursuit of holiness grandfather must have found it incredibly frivolous to spend time looking at an Eaton's catalogue. However when the catalogue arrived there was a sense of excitement in the household. In those days ordering from the catalogue was a common occurrence and hence looking for new fashions in dresses, shoes and hats was interesting and time consuming. Grandfather's standard once more prevailed as he told his daughters that to spend more time looking at the Eaton's catalogue than reading the Bible was sinful.

For further reading: see article by Doris Penner, "Heinrich R. Reimer's Schriedevsch," in *Preservings*, No. 8, June 1996, Part Two, pages 57-59.

I remember the devotions we had around that huge dining room table. It is heartwarming for me to recall sitting there at that table surrounded by adults listening to grandfather as he shared the morning reading with us. Everyone quietly and respectfully listened to what he had to say. Unfortunately, I don't remember any of the content, but he did speak at a level that I could

understand and I remember appreciating that.

A picture of my grandfather that is most vivid and has stuck with me through the years is a picture of him sitting at his writing desk doing what he found challenging and interesting, and that was writing about what was meaningful to him in this life. Many are the sermons he has written, many are the diary and journal entries

he has made, and many are the "Familien Freund" articles he has composed. Many of these "writings" I still have in my possession and I treasure them very much.

These memories continue to hold meaning for me and I am thankful for them. They have enriched my life and have influenced me to become the person I am today.

The Kjist and the Prush

The "Kjist" and the "Prush" of Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99) and Agatha Klassen Friesen (1848-1902), Blumenhoff, Imperial Russia, to Blumenort, Manitoba, by Glenn Kehler, Box 280. Oakbank, Manitoba, R0E 1J0.

Introduction.

Cornelius P. Friesen was born in Rosenort, Molotschna, Imperial Russia. His father Rev. Klaas Friesen (1793-1870) had moved from Altona to Rosenort after his marriage to Karolina Plett Friesen (1823-87) the previous year. Cornelius and his brothers received a good education, something which in the Friesen family extended to include *Fraktur* art and furniture making. (See *Preservings* No. 8, Part Two, page



The Cornelius P. Friesen Kjist, showing the intricate hardware, the handles and lock. The five pedestal stand on which the Kjist traditionally stood has been removed at some point and replaced with wheeled rollers. Perhaps this too can be restored?

55-58, for an article regarding Cornelius P. Friesen's teaching career and samples of his artwork.)

The Cornelius P. Friesen family lived in Blumenhoff, Borosenko, Imperial Russia, from where they emigrated to Canada in 1874. They were among the first group of 65 Mennonite families to arrive in Manitoba on August 1, 1874.

The "Kjist."

The "kjist" pictured here was crafted by Cornelius Plett Friesen (1844-99) prior to emigrating to Canada in 1874.

Cornelius was a teacher as well as a gifted craftsman, who enjoyed carpentry. We have only two items he created, a wooden chest and crib, but from these works it is apparent that he was very meticulous.

The kjist measures 51" x 26" x 19" high. Cornelius must have picked his materials very carefully as the wood he used is a clear, knot-free fir, similar to the fir that grows in British Columbia.

The ends and sides are of one piece, 7/8" thick by 18" wide. The top and bottom are made up of three 8 1/2" pieces, 1 1/8" thick. The corners are beautifully dove-tailed to a perfect fit. The bottom is fastened to the sides with 3/8" diameter dowels, placed at a 45 degree angle, and possibly glued in place.

Inside the chest, Cornelius made a small box with a lid along one side. I'm sure this was for where all of the small valuables were placed for the voyage to Canada.

The hardware was another very practical part of the kjist. The drop handles and the lock were factory items. A sturdy brass flush lock, with a rather large key provided a sense of security. The rounded drop handles have a very intricate design, which became evident only when all of the layers of paint were removed. The hinges,



Erna Friesen Thiessen poses with the Kjist with lid open. The inside of the lid cover shows evidence that various pictures were displayed inside the Kjist at some point. They may have been removed by someone who did not realize the prominent role they played in the 500 year old Mennonite furniture tradition. Traditionally the Kjist was an acceptable place where conservative Mennonites could display colourful photographs, drawings or artwork, sometimes a picture of the Czar, or other royalty. Note the "till" at the end a standard component in the Mennonite furniture tradition. It was a place where valuables could be stored.

bolts and nuts were all made in the local blacksmith shop. For the long strap hinges, black strap iron was heated, bent and shaped to fit and the exposed bolts were covered with brass domes.

One can only imagine which of the treasured belongings were contained in the kjist, as most household items would have been left behind,



The Prush, side view. Granddaughter Erna Friesen Thiessen and her daughter Kathie Thiessen Kehler pose with the Prush. All photos for this article are courtesy of Glenn and Kathie Kehler, Box 280. Oakbank, Manitoba, R0E 1J0.

either sold or given to relatives.

The Kjist was carried by horse-drawn wagon and then by rail to the steamship that brought the family across the Atlantic. After landing in North America, the kjist travelled again by rail, boat and wagon until reaching the family's final homestead in Blumenort, as part of the first group of Mennonite families to arrive in Manitoba on August 1, 1874.

The Kjist was passed down to the oldest son, Cornelius Klassen Friesen (founder of Friesen Drillers). "C.K." remained a bachelor until the age of 33 and lived with his parents until they both passed on. The Kjist stayed with Cornelius upon his marriage to Katharine Penner Friesen, the oldest of the Klaas I. Friesens