ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

OF

RUSSIAN-MENNONITE IMMIGRANTS

of the 1920's (Ontario)

Interview 12 in the series of Oral History Interviews conducted by Henry Paetkau, Graduate History Student at the University of Waterloo on behalf of Conrad Grebel College under the direction of Walter Klaassen.

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Place of Interview: Residence of the Interview

Interviewee: Mr. Herman Koop
35 Dunbar St., S.
Waterloo, Ontario

See also in conjunction with this interview Family Chronicle, Vol. I by David D. Rempel.

Interview:

PAETKAU: Why don't you start Mr. Koop and tell me where you were born and when you were born and a little bit about your family background.

KOOP: Well I was born in Schonwiese, Southern Russia. I'll give you the new date. I was born in an old date you know, --the other calendar. But in the new calendar I was on October 18, 1898. I was born in Schonwiese. My father's name is Abraham Koop. My mother's name is Katherine Koop born in Neebor(?) . Well I had four sisters. We were-- well how shall I say it. We were quite well off you know. Father he was in company with his brothers in a farm implement industry. And father was the President of the firm. I had a very nice childhood, no worries, no nothing and had a--then I went to public school. After public school I went for a year and a half to Centralschule in Chortitza. Then I came back home and I had a tutor to get prepared for what they used to call in Russia the Middle School. So I made exams and entered the School of Commerce. Well that time it was Alexandrovsk now it's Separosee(?) It was in 1905 when that first revolution started. I remember it very well. I was 7 years old then. The unrest and looting and Jewish , the Cossacks. Well that failed, they didn't make it. After that revolution things changed in Russia. It wasn't as sure, or what shall

I say. It wasn't as safe as it used to be. There was unrest. There were bandits and all that stuff right along. But we in the city we didn't notice anything, not much. Especially I as a young person. And I wasn't interested in politics either. Church, well at that time church was different than now. Now there is activity in church just about every day. At my time we had one service a week. Sunday mornings we went to church. At the time when I went to school yet, to public school--I don't know how it was. One Sunday I guess I asked dad,"could I go to church with you." And he says, "No you are too young. You grow up a little bit and then we'll go to church." Well we had the religious education in the public school. See that was like a separate school the Mennonite school. And we had our religious instruction and we studied the Bible and all that. Everything was in German except, I think, mathematics and language as such was Russian. The rest was all German. Well we lived happily right up to the first world war then things started to happen.

PAETKAU: What happened then?

KOOP: Well the first thing they added towards the foreigners--we were--like I was the fourth generation in Russia, born in Russia and we still were looked on as foreigners. Here any person that is born in Canada he's 100% Canadian. Not over there. They were looked on as foreigners. Not only the Germans. There were all kinds of foreigners; French, English, German, Polish. Even Poland belonged to Russia but still they used to say, "He's a Polar." He wasn't a Russian, he was a Polar, and he was a German. They knew it by the name you know. It was not a Russian name. And as soon as the war, the first world war started the propaganda started against the foreigners. And right from the beginning things went wrong on the front. The Germans defeated them to pieces. Of course somebody had to be blamed. The foreigners--well there were the Mennonites too you know. It didn't take long and they started to press and it got that far that they issued a law that all the land from the Mennonites would be confiscated. The Mennonites they would be transferred to Eastern Siberia or someplace up there. Away from here. Well it didn't come that far. There was all kinds of maneuvering and all briberies---you know Russia bribery was everyday happenings. And the big shots in the government they often put this of this confiscation of the property and of the land you know and all at once in February 1917 the Tsar was put away and there was a Revolution. Everything was different.

PAETKAU: How did the Mennonites feel about the Germans and about being called Germans? Did they identify with Germany at all?

KOOP: Yes. There was a--well, at home all the Mennonites they talked either the platt deutsch or hoch deutsch not Russian. You see the most Mennonites that came from the Densich(?) district they originated from Holland. They came to Poland from Holland to the swamps along the river. Later on Poland was divided amongst Austria, Russia and German. And this Densich(?) part of Poland went to Germany and I guess until then they were talking dutch. But when they were by Germany they had to change into German. That's why we were talking German. But the that's the real dutch name. There's a lot of in Holland; we found that out. Amongst the Mennonites there were real Russian patriots. And there were real German patriots amongst the Mennonites. I don't know about my relatives how they were. But I know my father was a real Russian patriot. He said, "Russia let us in and we did good in Russia." All the Mennonites did good in Russia and we had to thank this country to give us this chance to make good. That's why he stuck to Russia. He said he was for Russia. Right to the very last moment. When I left Russia in 1924 he said, "Well you're going to leave Russia but I stay here because I believe that it'll turn out alright here. I'm not going to leave Russia." Well my father he was very liberal.

PAETKAU: How did he feel when the Tsar was killed?

KOOP: Well. In a way we--most Mennonites we were, I would say, Republicans but not Bolseviks. Not Communists. No. They condemned that killing. I think everyone condemned that killing. But they--you know that the whole system was so corrupt in the latest times, well any time. Bribery and all that stuff you know was a daily occurrence. I think you could bribe the Tsar himself. That was no good.

PAETKAU: So were they happy for the new regime?

KOOP: Yes. They were happy. They welcomed that because they saw how corrupt the whole system was. And they hoped that through the Revolution there might be something better coming up. And the first--there were two revolutions you know--one in February and the other in November . They called it the October Revolution because according to the old calendar it was in October 22 the revolution occurred but according to this calendar it was November. And the first government was, I would say, Liberal Socialist--Socialist Revolutionaries they called themselves. And there was a real freedom; freedom of speech and movement and press. It was Alexander Korenski(?) he was the leader of the--but he---. The first thing, Revolution was made by those mostly students of universities and old revolutionists that used to fight for that for years and years. And they were idealists. That was their mistake. They were not practical. They were going according to the books, to the ideals. And that's where the Bolseviks took advantage of them. And then another thing it was still war against German. And

Keneski was convinced that he had to stick to the promise to give the allies you know, France, England and Germany and United States to stick together to the end, victorious end. That's the slogan he put out, "We'll have war to the victorious end." Well then as soon as Lenin--then the Germans they countermoved and they led Lenin through Germany into Russia from Switzerland. Trotsky and all those stalwards of Bolsheviks. I'll take back--they had the Socialists--the world organization of Socialist they had their meetings--conferences--world conferences. And they always had it in Holland in Hague. This was the Third World Conference of the Socialist Party and there the Socialists split. The majority they were for far rigid regime--real Socialists, Communism (what do they call themselves) and then there were the other ones, the minority they were for more lenient, for more liberal way of Socializing the world. The majority wanted to fight--we fight and we kill and we do this you know, like the Bolsheviks. And that's where the name came from. There were the minority Socialists, what they call themselves--in Russia they call them the Mensheviks and the minority they call themselves the Bolsheviks. See that's where the Bolsheviks came from and that's where Lenin, Trotsky, Konev, and all those they belong to that party. The Mensheviks they had the first revolution; they started the first revolution. All that students and all the more intelligent people they belonged to that party. But they were idealists. And then the Communists--Bolsheviks, they didn't call themselves Communists yet, they were Bolsheviks. They came to Russia and started to spread propoganda---peace to the poor people, down with the war, we want peace, everybody take your arms and go home. And that's what disorganized the whole army . There was chaos --they started to have meetings there and they started to kill their officers and generals and they took their arms and that's how they came back home. And that's when all kinds of bands started, bandits, armed bandits. That was awful. You didn't know if you would live tomorrow yet, because they were murdered. They had the whole country in their power. Was chaos in whole Russia and that's what the Bolsheviks wanted. Then in October, the end of October in 24, 23rd, something like that the Bolsheviks took over Leningrad. That was Petrograd then. And after the Bolsheviks took it over they called it Leningrad. Well of course Kerensky he left Russia and went to the United States and the others. The Bolsheviks they called themselves the Bolsheviks-Communists, a double name. Then they started to clean up on all those that were against them; to destroy them all.

PAETKAU: How much of this were you informed about at the time? Could you read it in the papers?

KOOP More it was on the grapevine you know. No papers they came up--Revolution started--well there were local papers then.

that was, the whole paper it was all propaganda against the rich, the big shots and everything for Lenin and Trotsky; they were together then yet. But we had kind of a rest. The Bolsheviks they made a peace treaty with the Germans at the City of Brest Litovsk. And according to that peace treaty the Bolsheviks seeded the whole Ukraine and they done it especially to the Germans . Then the Germans came in and occupied it, but they had it only for about ten months or something like that. Then Germany lost the war to the allies 1919. Then they had to clear all out and then the Bolsheviks came back again.

PAETKAU: You remember the German Occupation? What happened then?

KOOP: The Germans then--after the first world war?

PAETKAU: When the Germans came into the Ukraine.

KOOP: Well there were a few masacures before the Germans came. Like maybe the Germans were 50 miles away from this place then there was chaos in this district. Like I was in Chortitza at that time and everybody was just waiting. They used to call it the night." You remember in France they had that " night when they killed off all the Protestants. Well that's what the Bolsheviks called these nights in Russia-- Then they killed them. We were really--but the Germans in Chortitza and the Germans they--I am not quite sure but somehow the Germans specially hard to get into these Mennonite colonies and the Russians didn't have time to organize these murders and robberies and all that stuff. It was so fast. In the morning we--I think it was on a Sunday morning, not quite sure but I think it was Sunday morning--we got up and this man, he was a labourer, you know, he worked for this farmer and he came in and he says, "There are people they are talking a different language on the street." Then we went out and here the Germans were standing there on the street. I'll never forget. There was the Centralschule and there was a very big room like a kitchen something like that. I don't know what they used that for. Well in platt deusche we used to say "meergroppe", you know when they wash--well anyway it was a big one. Anyway they cooked the meal there and everybody brought something to the Centralschule and they had a great big meal for the German soldiers. I know there was the commanding general was a--what was he?--a count or something like that. And he came to that meal too and ate with them. And in Germany there was a very very strict rationing of food. They didn't eat too good that time because they were vacated from outside and here they had a meal and they were eating and eating and eating and half the army was sick after that. The General he says, "No more feeding of my soldiers." They have to fight. But it went all good. And they took all over Ukraine, gradually. But it was

a short stay. I think by end of December this was in, well when was it? Before Easter, just before Easter they came in and end of December they were gone again. No wait a minute. Wasn't it November that the peace treaty was signed with the allies and German, 1919 I think it was in November. Maybe in December they got going out again. Then the Communists came in and then they stayed. No, then the Civil War started between the Whites and the Reds. That was--oh--that was still the old Russian way. The White army they had such--they were on the verge of beating the Communits, you know. Then all at once everything collapsed and they were retreating and retreating and they left Russia then altogether. Then the reprisals came against those that were serving in the white army. It was awful, oh, it was awful! I was in the City of Sevastopol when the Reds came in and they were executing as many as 3,000 a night. With machine guns they were killing . Putting them in a row and killing. Then the other row and killing.

PAETKAU: Were there Mennonites who had joined the White Army?

KOOP: Not voluntarily. Well they say; I have no proof of it but they say that the chauffer, chaufer was a Mennonite by the name of Braun. That's what they would say but I have no proof. But there were quite a few Mennonites in the White Army and I was one of them.

PAETKAU: Had you been in the Selbstschutz before that?

KOOP: No. There was a unit came, a unit that took our city. They made known that they needed recruits. We never served in the army or anything, We never knew anything. And this was an artillery unit. There were two of my cousins and some friends--oh there were about 6-7 of us from Schönwiese. We went there and joined there. But I wasn't long in that artillery unit. One of my cousins he got killed. I got sick. I had a terrible cold and the commanding officer sent me back to our city and he says, "You go back home and get well and then come back here." But I never went back to the artillery unit. There was a unit organized in our city, something like the Selbstschutz. It was a local unit. Then when the Reds came back again we; our family went to Sipia of Sevastopol. We lived there for two years. And there I rejoined the White Army. There was a medical unit in the city and I joined there. I served there for about a year and a half and then the Reds came again.

PAETKAU; What were conditions like in this unit? How did they treat you? What did you have to do?

KOOP: Alright. There was no trouble, no nothing. No. It was a strict medical supply unit. We supplied the army with

bandages, with medical and medicine, instruments. We used to get it from the allies. There was--like--mostly Americans. There was so much of our supplies left in Europe by the American army that it would have cost more money to take it back to the United States than to give it to some other uses. We--the White Army--they supplied the White Army with uniforms, and with medicine and with ammunition and everything. In our artillery that I joined there was 3 inch field guns. They were dangerous. In some units they had American guns. But we were--when I joined the unit boy we were advancing, and advancing and advancing, advancing. The Reds they were retreating all the time. It was so well organized. Then all at once it collapsed. And that was because the English there were elections in England and the Labour government took over--MacDonald. Right away they stopped supplying the White Army with ammunition and then we were licked. We had nothing. We had no ammunition or anything. Oh it was a chaos.

PAETKAU: How did they treat you in the White Army?

KOOP: Good.

PAETKAU: What was it like there? Can you tell me a little more about your experiences there?

KOOP: Well my father, like I said, he was a very liberal person. When the first revolution started there was a strike that lasted for maybe about a month. When they went on strike father called the leaders up and he said, "If you want to fight this thing they're yours." But it didn't get that far. And later father was very much in danger of being sent to Siberia for that action.

PAETKAU: Why is that?

KOOP: Because he was too liberal. But somehow he got over it. After--when the second revolution started my father was very common. He--like the factories were taken over by the Red government and all that stuff and we were pushed out altogether. Out of our house and all. Later on the manager of all the factories. There were 16 farm implement factories in our surroundings. There was one person. And that person used to come quite often to father and ask for advice. And father always was giving him advice . They were in good terms. And nothing happened to father. But in 1937 I was here already. I came in 1924 and this was in 1937 father was arrested again. And then it wasn't the local authorities that arrested him. They were from Moscow. And he was accused of something that he never did. That was such a stupid accusation. He was accused that he invented a lamp that would burn on coal oil and on electric power--a combination. Well anybody can invent something like that. Have a wick there and have coal oil here and on the side

have an electric fixture on it that both would be working. My father said, "No, I never invented that thing." And he stuck to it. All they wanted that he would sign it. Then they would send him to forced labour camp or something. And dad he was old and he didn't realize, and he kept on refusing to sign that accusation. And they tortured him till he died then. Died in prison. And he was such a liberal man . In 1922 there was what the Red call a clean up of all undesirable people in their business, in factories, offices. I was working in an office as an accountant, in the head office. Of course I was thrown out as undesirable for son of a former capitalist. It was a whole year and a half--it was in 1922 in the beginning--then the immigration started to Canada. I was too late to register so I waited for awhile and then---. I couldn't find no work, no nothing because everything was government. I used to go to the unemployment office and register every week and they said, "No we can't find nothing for you." Well that was intentionally. They kept me away---well undesirable. And finally I say, "Dad, how about going to Canada?" "There's no future here for me." Then I started to talk live for the foreign passport. It took me a whole year to get that foreign passport. Till I got all the papers together. That would give me the allowance to get the foreign passport.

PAETKAU: Like what did you have to do? Where did you have to write to and so on?

KOOP: Well forinstance one biggest item was everybody registered in an army in a war department. Every city had a war department and every--like I was past the active service. I was like we used to call it the territorial army; the reserves. I was in the reserves. And to get the passport I had to get off the list in the army in the war department. I had to be declared unfit to serve in the army. How could I? I went there and he says, "You have to get persmission from your territorial army unit." So I went to that territorial army unit and on the way there I met a good friend of mine. We used to go to school together. And he says, "Herman, where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to the army office. To the territorial army office." And he says, "Well I'm working there. What did you want?" I says, "I want permission to go to the medical commission in the next bigger city--territorial--to be declared unfit for army service." "Oh," he says, "I am the secretary of the commander." You imagine a thing like that? He says, "I'll get it." So we went in and he wrote it out and he laid it to the commander and the commander signed it, Here I had permission to--- I went down to , they used to call it now it was Vladikavkas . It was like the capital of the province like Toronto for Ontario. There was the commissioner. Well we had a very known doctor in that city. He

and his wife they both were very good children--what do they call it--youth time, when they were young with my mother they used to go together to school and he was a doctor there. So I went to them and they took me up nice you know, gave me a bed to sleep. Then the Mrs. she asked me, "Herman what is your trouble?" "Well I says, so and so and so and so, uncle so and so could he put word for me with the doctor at the commission there?" Then they came and oh they gave it--she was so mad at me. So I-- . She said, "What do you think, my husband will risk his life for you or something?" I says, "No." "No," she says, "never, never, you will never do that." I went out and I went down town and was walking along the street and all at once I saw a person sitting on a bench there. And he was from our city. He was a railway engineer, he was running the engines, the express engine. Now he was retired. I didn't know that but his three daughters they were living in that city. One daughter's husband a, what would you call it--interrogater in the GPU , that political police you know. All Russia feared was her husband. The other was I don't know what he was. And the third husband was a doctor, that was the oldest. And I say to this man, "What are you doing here?" "Well he says, "I am visiting my daughters here. Come on, come on, let's go over." And it was lunch time. "We'll have lunch at my place ." And the three daughters they were all living together in one big apartment. So the older daughter she came to me and says, "Herman what's your business here in the city?" "Well," I says, "I have to go to a commission of doctors to be declared unfit for army service." She says, "What's your trouble?" I said, "My ears. I hear--my hearing is bad." She says, "You just came to the right person. My husband knows that doctor that lives in the commission there. My husband will phone him and tell him about you." Can you imagine a thing like that. So the doctor phoned him and next day I had to go to the commission. So I went to the hospital and I had to stay there for about pretty near a week before I called to the commission. And when I came to this doctor, I forgot his name, then he asked me "What is your name?" In Russian our name was "Kope". We were spelling our name in Russian with one "O" because if we would spell it with two then they would call it "Ko-ope" and that sounded kinda funny so we called ourselves "Kop" And I said my name if "Kop". And then he looked at me and he says, "I know." That was all. He never looked at me. Never looked in my ear, nothing. He sent me back to the ward where I was lying in bed and then one day we were all called in the big hall there and the names were called out. And then came my name, "Herman Kop, not fit to,for service in the army. To be taken off the list." Can you imagine that? Yah. I took that paper down to our city and they took me off the list and another month I had my foreign passport.

PAETKAU: Were there a lot of people who were trying to get out? A lot of the Mennonites?

KOOP: Yah, We were--well we went in three freight cars as far as Moscow. And in Moscow we were joined with a couple more cars, We were--well we came to--we embarked in a boat in the city of Liba. It was Latvia. We were 127 people in our group. But in 1924 the Moloschna immigrated and the first three groups they were way over a 1,000 people .

PAETKAU: Have conditions changed in Russia under Konev? The new economic policy, did things get any better?

KOOP: Yah. Just like overnight. Everything went--stores opened and you could buy everything. The market was full of products. But it lasted only for a about 4-5 years. Then they changed it again. But it was, oh it was very nice. People--I know people that never had flour and flour mill they rented flour mill from the government. And they made business. They got rich in no time. And everything just flourished. All over.

PAETKAU: Did that change people's attitudes toward Russia?

KOOP: No I don't think so because really nobody trusted it. You know--in a revolution you take how many chance for granted? Now there was Konev and we lived like barons--had everything, flour and meat and everything'. The factories started to work again. The flour mills and people were building houses. But everybody knew that this was just temporary. That there would be a time when the government would take it all back again. But they lived. We had everything to eat and to drink and clothes and some people were buying that they knew that there would be a day and the day came again and they just put the lid on and out. They arrested and shot all those that got rich again. Some of the Mennontes they came out to Canada. But the majority they didn't get out. They got them.

PAETKAU: What happened to your father's business during the revolution?

KOOP: Well it was taken away, just the way it was.

PAETKAU: He was left with nothing?

KOOP: Nothing. Abso--just we--, We had some furniture saved. My brother-in-law he was an engineer in the factory and he stayed there as engineer. He died before the big push was on in 1938 it was starting. He ordered 10% of the nation to be arrested and sent to forced labour camps. --10%. Not only fromthe former rich people but 10% of

the labourers, 10% of the police, 10% of the army, 10% of the Communist Party. From everything 10% was taken. That's where all the--like in our factories all the engineers were Germans, all Mennonites. Some were from Germany and some were Mennonites. In our factory the head engineer was Peter Dyck. There was a Gerhard Heim, there was a Rempel, there was my brother-in-law and my brother . And there was the head bookkeeper was a Mennonite. They were all taken and sent away and they never came back. Everyone. This Mr. Heim and Mr. Dyck they were sent to the United States to study the combines, how they--. They were in Detroit, in Chicago, they started it and they went back to Russia and they built the combines there. They got the first class Lenin order. Both of them. And that year when the big parade was on in May their pictures, such big pictures were carried in front of the parade. Peter Dyck and Gerhard Heim and Rempel and maybe a year or so later they were arrested and sent to forced labour. They never came back.
Well religion was not much. At my time they still had church in 1924. But later on there was no church, no nothing because there was no ministers. They were all taken, every single one. Taken. Destroyed. But you know when you--
I don't know how these people that come now from Russia to Germany; these new repatriates how they look at religion. You go through a revolution, you know, and you really realize that there is a God. You can't deny it. There is so many like me--"Why did I meet that man that was a secretary to the commanding officer, that got the paper to go to the city? Why was that man sitting there on a boulevard and I met him? Maybe a minute later he wouldn't be there but when I passed there he was there."
You can't explain those things. You experience it.
You can't deny it. Yah there was--- and I ask myself so often ,--I am here and all my friends they vanished, they're all kind, that stayed in Russia. Everyone! None of them living, I am here. There was another incident in Sevastopol. They called all the Reds, they called all the people that had anything to do with the White army to a meeting in the big square. And I and my two cousins we went to--at least they told us, "Nothing will happen to you, nothing will happen." And all at once we noticed that we were surrounded by the Red army. Then they started to push us onto the street. And we marched on. Oh there were thousands there , maybe 20,000 or so. And we used to live on that street. A year before that. And people were standing on the doorsteps and looking, what's going on? What are all these people walking? Where are they going? Then it came to me if I stay here that's the end. Then I approached the place where we used to stay. We were walking like this you know. Then I marched to watch the houses, closer, closer, closer to the houses. Then when I came to the steps I went like this and I was looking over like I was living here. Then my two cousins came along and I motioned to them to come on over here. And they came over and stood there too and the Red Army soldiers they were passing by

and nobody did anything. And we were safe. And all those people that were in that bunch they were all shot. Everyone. Now why did I get that? There's something, somebody told me to step on that step. Yah? And I called my cousins and they came to me and they were saved too. When everything was passed we went down and I went to my home and they went to their home and nothing happened.

PAETKAU: It's a miracle.

KOOP: Miracle! And a revolution there there is so many such miracles.

PAETKAU: Did your father get anything back from his business after wards?

KOOP: No. There were friends of ours they lived in another city and they came back when the Germans occupied the Ukraine. After the second world war. And they got their property back from the Germans and they put it to work--he had a flour mill and he organized the movie show. When the Germans retreated after the collapsing and all that stuff then this new government that at Germany they are paying them compensation for their lost properties. You see all the Mennonites they were declared German citizens. They were, then when the German army retreated they were forced to go into Germany. My mother and my two sisters they went there too. From Germany they came to Canada. Some got money back but we never got anything.

PAETKAU: So were you the only one from your family then that left?

KOOP: Before the war yes.

PAETKAU: At that time?

KOOP: At that time. My sisters, three sisters and my parents they stayed there. Well my one brother-in-law he was a bookkeeper. He was I think in his third year in university in Moscow when the revolution started and then he had to quit. And my other brother-in-law he finished university in Leipzig and the engineer brother-in-law he finished in Germany they called it technical. In Germany he finished it. He came home; both of them they come home just in time before the first world war.

PAETKAU: What was your trip like from Russia to Canada?

KOOP: It was very pleasant. Very nice. From home we were all loaded in freight cars. Went to Moscow was there one day and then we went to the border. At the border there was a check off again; very rigid check up, Every individual was questioned. Somehow I passed again. Nobody was taken back. We all went. We went to the first big station outside Russia and there we were deloused.

Everything was cleaned up. Then we went on to the city of Libau, there we boarded the steamer that took us to London, through the (what do they call it?) canal Keel Canal, North Sea and to London. There we stayed about 5-6 hours then we boarded the train to Southampton and there we stayed 24 hours then our group boarded the Transatlantic Steamer, Meleeta. I think we were about 5 days on the Atlantic. We landed in Quebec and from there we went to Waterloo. Then here we were distributed amongst the farmers.

PAETKAU: What were your feelings on leaving Russia? How did you feel about leaving?

KOOP: Oh I didn't like it. I love Russia. Russia--Oh I don't know--somehow if a Russian trusts you he'll give his life for you. But if he hates you then watch out. That's the Russian. (Unintelligible) I had very very good friends I don't know, we have no enemies. Maybe we had but we didn't know it.

PAETKAU: So the relationship between Mennonites and the Russian people was quite good?

KOOP: Was good. Was good. Personally. But that was--some Russians they envied the Mennonites, because the Russians they were , they were good, they were hard working Russians and they were getting places amongst the farmers. They used to get land and they used to work it but big majority they were sloppy and they were drunkerds and they never saved money, and they were getting poorer and poorer. If the government would have driven them to work; made it interesting for them to have something. But the government didn't give a hoot about them. They didn't care. Many Russians they envy the Mennonites, and the Germans and the Swedes. There were Swedish villages further south . There were others. The farmers as a rule they made good in Russia. Very good. I know for instance in our city we had a factory owner he was a millionaire. When he came to Russia he had a hand wagon. He walked into Russia. He had just the hand wagon, that's all he had. And now he had the big factory and land and he was very wealthy. He was a millionaire; Badovsky. When the first world war started he was to Siberia with his children. There were others. In another city there were English people by the name of Elliworthy(?). They came to Russia as immigrants. I don't know what they were--engineers, something. Well they started business and then flourished. They were very wealthy.

PAETKAU: How did you feel when you came to Canada?

KOOP: Well it was very strange. Very strange. (Would you stop that for a little bit?)

PAETKAU: I want to ask you a little bit about your life with these Mennonite here in Canada. How did you get along with them? How did they treat you?

KOOP: Well when I came here I was alone. All by myself. These Mennonites they were more interested in a family, like married, like couples. And I was left till the very last. Well we came to this Mennonite church, that's where we were brought. Then the local Mennonites came and looked us over. Who should (?) whom. And soon they would be taken by cars and by buggies to the farms. I was till the very last. Nobody wanted me. So there was the farmer by the name of Linc Weber. He was from Drayton. My uncle he came to Canada two weeks earlier and he was on that farm. And this farmer he came to fetch my cousin and her finance. They both came together and I was with them; we three. Mr. Weber says, "Well, I'll take you on and I'll take you to a farmer. He might take you." So we went there and he says this farmer, Angus Weber , he says, "I have a farm hand. I really don't need him." And he says, "Ah you can come and work for me for the time being." And I was there for two months. And worked there on the farm. I never ploughed, didn't know what it was and here I had a gangplow. He showed me how to plow and I started to plow and I ploughed one piece of field after the other. Then harvest came and I had to bring in the harvest. Here it's different than in Russia. Here they thresh one part of the harvest right away and the other part is being stored in a barn. Then sometimes in November or so when they have more time then they finish the threshing. Well I was there for the first threshing, the second threshing and then we had all kinds of work. I never used to work manually. I always worked in the office. It was pretty hard for me to get used to it. The farmer used to have fun with me, my inexperience. How to handle this tool, how to handle that tool. Then he asked me, "Can you milk?" And I said, "No. I never touched a cow yet." And he said, "Well, I'll show you how to milk." But that was the second farmer--Angus Grove was near Preston there. And he had 27 milk cows. Well we were three of us that milked 27 cows, We showed me how to milk first. I got on to it and every morning I used to help milk the cows. Our firm in Russia had agencies in different cities. Sales agent. And they were selling our machines. Besides our machines we used to sell Massey-Harris binders. We had business with Massey-Harris. And when we came to Canada we talked with my uncle--we were in Waterloo then. Then he says, "Let's try and write a letter to Massey-Harris, maybe we can get work there." So he wrote a letter there and they answered us to come over. We came over and they gave us a job then. I worked there for two years at Massey-Harris in Toronto.

Well then I used to work at other places, I worked in winter. Then depression came. There was no work, no nothing. So in the wintertime we used to run around and look for work, and. As soon as spring started we used to go to Vineland, Jordan and work in the orchards there. Then in 1931 I got a job in Guelph at a luggage factory. I worked there for 10 years. Till 1940 I think I worked there. Then I quit there and came to Kitchener and got a job here at a luggage factory in Kitchener, McBrien's . And I worked for 27 years there. Then I got in years; I was 67 years old. Then I was retired. Very second day I was home the telephone rang and well friends, Doris, she asked me, "Uncle Herman, do you want a job?" I says, "Sure thing I want a job." "Well, she says, "Conrad Grebel College they need a janitor. Their janitor is sick. Peter Dyck, he had a heart attack." And he was laid up you know so they were--, They has a temporary part time man, Gordie Johnson. He was studying and he was teaching and everything. And he was cleaning too. That didn't work very good. So I went there and Dr. Fretz he--I asked him--- I guess my friend's daughter she phoned Dr. Fretz that I was coming. And he was so glad that I came there and offered my work then. And I worked there for 7 years at Conrad Grebel College. Then I retired. When I was 77 I retired. NO, 75.

PAETKAU: How did you find..,how was it learning the English language and getting used to new customs and....?

KOOP: Yes it was. Well I was lucky. At both--well at Weber's farm where I worked first they used to talk that Pennsylvania dutch you know. Well mostly amongst themselves they talked English but when they talked to us they talked that Pennsylvania dutch and I could understand that halfways. When I came to other farm they didn't know no German, no nothing. I had to learn English. And I was three months and in those three months I learned quite a bit of English. And that Mr. Groh he gave me very good advise. He says, "You want to learn the language you have to read the newspaper. That's the everyday language in the newspaper. You read a book that's a literary language. But in a newspaper that's the everyday language. And that's what you want to know. Read the paper even if you don't understand it. Read it. And you see words and maybe next you hear that word and say,'Oh that's that word.' And then you remember," And that was a very good idea; to read the newspaper. And then I went to Toronto and in Toronto that's all English. Then I had to learn English but that didn't take very long. So many words in English that root is from the German language. Like house and bread and knife and in blatt deutsch "kneiv". Many many words. And

French too, I went to the, 7 years I went to the Middle school and they had the French language there. That helped a lot too knowing French. When I came to Canada my French was pretty good yet. Now in these 50 years that I've been here I've forgotten quite a bit of French. I wouldn't be able to converse. But at school we used to converse in French. That's how good the foreign language was taught in Russia. Russian schools were very good, very good.

PAETKAU: How did the people treat you since you were an immigrant and a Russian?

KOOP: Not too good. Not like now. Now they open both arms. I know. We used to go from one factory here to another and there were all other Canadians standing there too for a chance to get a job. They used to talk openly "those foreigners they should all be sent back to their own country." That was no good. But we didn't consider that as suggestion of Canada. That was personal. Those people they were out of work too and then they were scared that we would take their jobs. Well many foreigners they took--they used to go to the hiring man and said, "I'll work for 15¢." Just to get started. There were cases like that. But I never did that.

PAETKAU: Did you talk about your Russian life and your experiences to Mennonites at all?

KOOP; Here?

PAETKAU: Yes,

KOOP: Yah! In the beginning we were inexperienced ourselves. We used to--they used to ask us questions and we used to give, tell them stories about what happened to us. And they used to say, "Why didn't you call the police?" When bandits used to come and search our house and taking things away. And they used to say, "Why didn't you call the police?" And I used to tell them that that was the police that was robbing us. They couldn't believe that. They couldn't grasp it.

PAETKAU; But otherwise you got along with them?

KOOP; Oh yah.

PAETKAU; What about church life? Where did you go to church those early years?

KOOP: The very first years--I was in Floradale and that was the Elmira district. Then we had church in St. Jacobs Mennonite Church, on Sunday afternoon. That was

organized pretty good, Like our farmer he used to-- his father had a car and we were two; a girl and I that were working on that farm. And he used to take us to church on Sunday afternoon. There were; like we had the "kirchengemeinde" what we used to call it. There was the "Kirchengemeinde" and the "bredegemeinde", the Brethren. There was only ministers from the Brethren church here. There were no ministers from the "kirchen-gemeinde". And they were serving us. And there was nothing said about it. But when Rev. or Bishop Janzen he was coming to Canada. And it was all unofficial But we knew there was quite a pressure made to prevent Janzen from coming to Ontario. That way the Brethren church had a chance to get all the "kirchen" Mennonites into their church, And as soon as Rev. Janzen came here he organized a community of "kirchengemeinde". That's how it started. Rev. Janzen. But by that time we had no church. We had nothing. We had service Sunday morning in a local dance hall. On Saturday night there were dances and on Sunday morning we had our church meeting there. It was nice. That's how this Waterloo-Kitchener kirchengemeinde was organized, in that local there. Then the church that we have now. The Methodists and the Presbyterians and another church they organized into a United church. That church that we have now that used to be I don't know was it a Methodist church or a Presbyterian church. Well anyway that was vacated, it stood empty. I don't know. Did we buy it right out? We bought it very cheap, I think $5,000. Something like that. And that's how we started our congregation. Bishop Janzen was our minister. Then later on Jacob Wiens he was assistant minister. He was working in an upholstery factory during the week. Then Sundays sometimes he used to preach to us. Then Janzen he moved to Vancouver and Jacob Wiens took over this con-gregation as leader. Then later on they changed; Wiens went to Vancouver and Janzen came back here again.

PAETKAU: Can you tell me more about Bishop Janzen? What kind of a "altester" was he? What kind of a man was he?

KOOP: Oh he was very good. At that time he was the only "kirchen altester". We had congregations in Vineland. Vineland was one and Leamington was one. And in Harrow was one. Kingsville too. And he used to serve them all. He used to travel a lot. There was a group that went to Reesor, Northern Ontario and he used to go there once or twice a year. I guess when a baptism was on or something like that. Then Vineland got their bishop and Essex theirs. Then what we got organized was the United Mennonite Church. All these congregations united

into one big church. But we had our bishops.

PAETKAU: So you didn't stay with the Brethren for very long?

KOOP: As soon as Janzen came up it was divided. And they acted very funny. Their ministers would never come and preach in our church. Later on, yes. There were ministers, they used to come. Like there was a Rev. Tielman. And there was this Frank Peters, he preached in our church too. They were quite liberal. But some preachers they wouldn't come. And they never invited our ministers to their church. People as such they got together. Like we have people by the name of Reimers they belong to the Brethren church and we are very good friends, very good friends.

PAETKAU: Did you get together with other immigrants quite a bit for social occasions and so on?

KOOP: Like Ukrainians?

PAETKAU: No, other Mennonites from Russia.

KOOP: Oh yes. Well through the church. Like we had every year, we still have it, every year we have a church picnic. Then we all come together and have a good time. But I don't know, who got the initiative to start Conrad Grebel College. Was it the local Mennonites? I always used to call it the Russian Mennonites and the Canadian Mennonites. Like Dr. Fretz he was the first president there. I don't know what started it. But that--Dr. Fretz was very good in organizing stuff like that; getting the resources. It must have cost a lot of money to build that college.

PAETKAU: How do you feel about the relationship between the Russian Mennonites and the Canadian Mennonites?

KOOP: Well it's--at first we were quite divided. We had no contact. We were for us and they were for themselves. Then they--when that General Conference was organized that brought us together. Now we have ministers from Canadian Mennonites speaking in our church and our ministers preaching in their churches. Except the Old Order they don't.

PAETKAU: How do you feel about all these experiences that you've had now? Do you often think about them?

KOOP: In my life? Oh, I'm getting old.

PAETKAU: We're all getting older.

KOOP: It's not the same anymore. Yes there are times when I reminisce, think back how it was. Then you think, "Well, all those close shaves that I had." And there were good times in Russia. I had such good friends amongst the Russians. And very good friends amongst the Jews too. Our city had about good 60% Jews. A lot of them. We had good friends. Like 1904, 1905 when that was in Russia. The persecution of the Jews. They had about 3 or 4 families, Jewish families, living in our house at that time, hiding. If the Russians would have found that out we wouldn't fare too good. We took a very very big risk. One family was a lawyer and the other was a doctor and one was a dentist. We have a very big house in Russia. It had about 22 rooms.

PAETKAU:

I had a very pleasant visit with Mr. Koop. The portion on Russia is particularly interesting, informative and detailed in as much as he was somewhat older during those experiences having been born in 1898. The stories he told were very moving, deeply personal and it was very difficult for him to continue at points. Very often he became quite emotional. The remembrances, the memories, the experiences have obviously left a very deep impact on him. And it was hard for him to continue at times yet it seemed he wanted to continue. He wanted to tell me these stories and relate his experiences. I was reluctant to force questions on him, to push him at points or to pursue issues too strongly because I didn't want to bring him to the point where his emotions would overwhelm him or would have a negative impact on him. So there are things that were probably left out that would have been good to pursue though he indicated that he we willing and interested in talking to me again some time if I had other questions . So when I returned to him I may pursue some other issues. There were things about which he was reluctant to talk and he some of my questions and so I didn't pursue them any further. But I feel the portion on Russia is very good. Very strong on information. The section of Canada is rather weak. There was much less there that he felt moved to tell him. And obviously the experiences have not had the same impact on him. So that section is somewhat scattered, and weak. However I did feel good about the interview as I said, particularly about the first portion. He carried the conversation most of the time and I only sought to steer it occasionally. As indicated I will be returning to him as I have a copy of the Family Chronicle, Vol. 1 by David D. Rempel, the English translation of an earlier German volume which is a family history of a number of families. Family trees, Rempel, Nebuhr, Neufeld, Dyck, Koop, Paetkau, Dyck, Neufeld and Rempel.

However the first 45 or so pages are synopsis or short histories of various aspects and elements of Russian life. And hence should be quite interesting. So I will be looking at this manuscript and possibly will also be microfilmed and on deposit in the archives at Conrad Grebel College.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

OF

RUSSIAN-MENNONITE IMMIGRANTS

OF THE 1920's (Ontario)

Part II of Interview #12

Interviewer: Henry Paetkau, Graduate History Student of the University on behalf of Conrad Grebel College under the direction of Walter Klassen.

Date of Interview: Wednesday, July 14, 1976 - 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Place of Interview: Residence of Interviewee -
Mr. Herman Koop, 35 Dunbar St. S.
Waterloo, Ontario

Interview:

PAETKAU: You mentioned a couple times last time Mr. Koop that your father was a liberal man. Can you tell me a little bit more about that? How he was liberal? How you meant that?

KOOP: Well for one instant, when that first try for a revolution there in 1905 they--he offered the factory, he told me that. I says, "I offered the factories to the working people--that if you want it, take it. It's all yours." And afterwards he was reprimanded by the government for saying that. He for instance the Russian government issued bonds and he persuaded some workers to buy these bonds and save money and build themselves houses. For instance one worker he even won 5,000 rubel--the bond that he bought that way. Father loaned money to the workers so that they could build themselves houses. There was a beig suburban of Alexandrose. Originally there were the railroad workers lived there. Maybe they were given land or bought it cheap. Later it developed into a working man village. In Russian they call it " " That was "A Working Man's Settlement". That was a nice part , very nice houses. Some had the a cow you know, and some had chicken and so on, and garden at the house. Father was very interested that they had their own houses. That made them more stable and then they would stick to the job and work there. We had workers who worked there for 20-25 years. That's a good sign that they were treated alright.

PAETKAU: So he had a real concern or interest in his workers?

KOOP: He was really interested in making the working people satisfied and content. When they---1912 my parents celebrated their silver anniversary. And all the workers pitched in

and everyone gave a rubel. Then they presented my parents with a great big photograph. They were standing there--mother had her silver wedding dress on and all that stuff. And the frame of that--there were oak and some other leaves laying there and that was all solid silver. That must have cost them a lot of money. Every worker was presented with a photograph and during the revolution when the Communists took over one man that worked at our place for quite a few years he says, "Your parent's pictures still stands on the table there." That's how they liked my father you know.

PAETKAU: He spoke a good Russian; he could communicate well with them?

KOOP: Well. My father he had very little education. I don't think he could write Russian very good. He could talk Russian but not to make a deal or negotiate. He understood everything but he couldn't talk back so he had a very good lawyer. And that lawyer was always with him when they negotiated with the government or with other industries. Like my father he was one of the initiators of that big trust company. There were three big farm implement factories; owners. There was the plough factory that manufactured ploughes; was the biggest plough factory in Russia, by the name of Hayne. Then there was English people owned a family, the name was Elworthy and our company. They organized a sales business that would sell all the products of these factories. They called that the " " and the main office was in Moscow. They did big business and the plan was to purchase big forest and make all the lumber for these factories and organize the minings and all that stuff you know. He had in mind to organize all the farm implement industry in Ukraine into one big combined. They would be able to compete against the American competition. That was the reason that father wanted to organize because International Harvester and Massey-Harris they were selling a lot of machines in Russia. And that was hurting the Russian industry. And father said they complained to the government many times. And the government said, "Who shall we protect here in Russia? Is there a Russian industry here? All the industries here is in foreign hands." So the government said, "We're not interested in..." But lately they were getting more success and curtailing imports into Russia. But, father said about 90% of the farm implement industry was not--well you take like us we were all Russian citizens but the Russians considered us foreigners, because we weren't Greek Catholics. We were Protestants or Anglicans like the Englishmen. They didn't consider them Russians.

PAETKAU: Was this lawyer a Russian or a Mennonite?

KOOP: Yes, he was Russian citizen. He was a Jew. He was a good lawyer.

PAETKAU: Do you think your father was a good businessman?

KOOP: Yah, yah. He was a very good businessman. Well 25 yrs. ago when the Revolution broke out, it was about 27 yrs. when he came. There was nothing. There was a little shop there that's all there was and he built it up. Well you saw it here how big it was. And was a very little place there; maybe a little more than a repair shop or something. They were making very little and when father started there he built it up. For instance that "Malleable Foundry" later it was the only malleable iron foundry in Russia. And there was a German he came from Germany. He was working in a malleable iron factory in Bonn. He came to Russia like so many other Germans you know, trying to establish something. He went through all those, about 5-6 other Mennonite factories and offered his knowledge in producing malleable iron and they all rejected him. And he came to father and first he went to another factory--Lepman-Walman and they rejected him right away. And father says, "I'll do it on my own." And he put his money into this enterprise. There was a little rich shop--building there and they made everything there. There has to have a kneeling oven you know and all that stuff. And they tried it and then father convinced his brothers after they produced a certain amount of this melleable iron. Then they agreed to start the factory and then they built that factory Copen-Hellgar. And it was a very very big success that was. Oh you take all the cuplings and the pipes you know --water pipes and gas pipes and everything. These cuplings they were all made of malleable iron because there was so many breakages when they tied them up they broke from cast iron. Then they made it from malleable iron and oh, Russia, all the cities that had water cisterns they sent in orders for these cuplings. We doing them --and then all these fingers, we used to call them the fingers and reapers you know--where the knife goes you know? The fingers were of cast iron and as soon as they hit a little stone they broke. Then they had to take the whole thing off and put another finger on and oh it was a time waste. Now when they made them of malleable stone they bend. And they just took a hammar and straightened it out and off they went again. That was a big success. They started it --I don't know when they started it--I think it was in around 1912 or 11, something like that. They were going only for 6 years you know.

PAETKAU: How many brothers were there?

KOOP: Six brothers, and three sisters.

PAETKAU: And were all the brothers working together?

KOOP: Yah, they were working together. Some of them they had very little interest you know. There were only I would say about 3 brothers that really worked for that business. And the other brothers they just weren't. That's in all businesses . There's always--there was another factory too and there were 1,2,3,4 partners you know in that factory and there was only one that really worked and the other three they just took the profits out and used it instead of putting it--my father he always was fighting for the brothers--take out as much as you need for your living; don't bother about getting rich , put it in the business. Let's build the business up first and then get rich. But they always wanted the profits out and that was hard on the business you know because there was no capital there. But our firm they worked very little on loans. They were fortunate enough to have enough of their own capital to--see at that time now I don't know how the business is run. I guess they order supplies as needed . But at that time father told me they had for instance in January they had the general meeting . The 9 brothers and sisters and grandfather he was then too. And then they decided how big a production they would have. Then they divided it in half for half a year and ordered all their material--iron and cast iron and coal and lumber and paint and everything that they needed. In May they usually knew how the harvest would be. Well they got the news from all over . Then they ordered the other half. And that's how they worked. If they decided to build 20,000 reapers then they ordered everything for 10,000 reapers. And that's how the production went. There was no such a thing as slack times in the industry. Oh industry was going like anything--growing and growing and growing. It was Russia because Russia was growing--more and more people were buying machines. We had times when farmers came and took machines they were still wet from the paint. " We don't care but give us that machine." And we had to travel--sometimes maybe we had to travel 60-70 miles you know. You couldn't do it on a working day so we were selling quite a few machines on Sunday because they needed it. As I said sometimes they took the machine when it was still wet. That's how it was going--wonderful.

PAETKAU: These were sold all over Russia then?

KOOP: Yes. We had--well not European Russia, it was more the southern part. Because in the northern part the farmers were very poor. They had big estates, there was mostly big estates there--maybe 15-20,000 acres. They used to buy those big big machines from Germany and England, mostly Germany and England. We weren't building those big machines. I think 8 hp. no 12 horsepower threshing machines, that was our biggest.

PAETKAU: What was the line of machinery then that they built? What different kinds of machine?

KOOP: In Russia? Well they were making ploughs. Then, I don't know how they call it in English but in German we used to call it the "bleuker"--it was the 4 plough and 6 plough machine. It was, I don't know is it here--and then they built reapers and then they built the raking machine. You saw them? They built that machine and they built the seeders and the threshing machine. But this what I say, "bleuker" they had 4 ploughs and 6 ploughs and that was built like this you know. But the ploughs were built on an angle so that they were ploughing 6 furrows at the time. And it was seeding at the same time. They set the plough so shallow you know because that land was ploughed in the fall. Then in the springthey used this "bleuker" to--it was just scraping maybe about that deep and putting the seeds right in there you know. Corn or wheat, whatever. And it was very handy, very handy.

PAETKAU: But they never built any tractors in your factory?

KOOP: Yes. No, not moveable tractors. We built motors for threshing. We built a 12 hrp. and 16 hrp. They were running on crude oil not on--in Germany (I forgot what the name was) that motor was running on gasoline. And those motors they were so complicated you know and there was some breakage that ours were so simple. Very simply built and they were very good. The last couple years, I would say the last 4-5 years there were many many farmers they had these motorized threshing outfits. And they were doing very well. But tractors, no, we didn't. But then after when the Revolution was on then they ,well I think they started around 1930 something like that,they really started to produce then. They built a tractor on the principles of that motor that we built.

PAETKAU: Then when the Revolution came all this was lost?

KOOP: Oh yah, everything was taken away. There was a standstill for about 25 years before they started producing again.

PAETKAU: You were telling me last time a little bit about you were in the artillery of the White Army and then you took ill and then you were in the Medical Corp for awhile, is that right?

KOOP: In Sevastopol, yes.

PAETKAU: What kind of work were you doing there?

KOOP: Oh, just labour work. We were like soldiers. The higher positions were all pharmacists. They were producing medicine and....

PAETKAU: So you were looking after supplies?

KOOP: Yah. We were getting supplies from the West you know, from the allies in boxes. And we were unpacking them you know and putting them in storage and all that stuff. And we were assisting the pharmacists. There were all kinds of orders--we were making up orders to be sent to the fronts, to various regiments. Then we had a branch right behind the front and we would send supplies to that branch.

PAEKTAU: Were you working with other Mennonites or were they mostly Russian?

KOOP: Yes. There was a bunch of Mennonites when we --see they were vacated to the Crimea from Kharkov. That's where this base was before then they vacated to Sevastopol and these Mennonites they came with them. They all came from the colony of Memrik. They all knew each other. I don't know how they got there in the first place. And then when the Reds took over this whole unit went over--surrendered or what do you say to the Reds? And saved all the medical supplies and instruments and everything. They were very grateful to us that we did--the Reds. And they didn't touch us. They never arrested anybody there .

PAETKAU: Did you work then for the Reds for awhile?

KOOP: Yes. And then I had a chance to go home. They wouldn't let me out of the army. Then I disserted. Some of the Mennonites they knew I was from Schonwiese and later that unit was transferred to Moscow. The whole unit was taken to Moscow. When they passed our station, some of them went through the village and asked where I was living. They didn't find me. Later I found out that all the Mennonites disserted too at Kharkov but they went through Kharkov--the whole bunch they disserted and went hom to Memrik. None of them went to Moscow.

PAETKAU: But the authorities never did anything to you?

KOOP: Not to me, no. See I had a good--very good friend in--well what would you call it--military office or something like that, no not a military office--a civilian office that issued passports. I had no documents, nothing. I was walking on the street and if they would have stopped me and asked me for a document they would have arrested me or something. But it never happened. And this--everybody in Russia then had to be registered and he was issued a registration card

That was just as much as a passport. And this fellow he was a very good friend of mine. Well his father he worked in our factory. He was--he managed the finer products. He worked in this office. And one day I met him on the street and he says, "Hey, Herman have you got a registration card?" I said, "No. What is that?" "Oh, man," he says, "you need a registration card. I'll get you one." Then in a couple of days he brought me a registration card and then I was fixed.

PAETKAU: How did the Reds treat you? You said they didn't do anything to you?

KOOP: Yah. They had--the Reds organized units to disarm. You see when the army broke down after the first world war everybody took his rifle or whatever it was, even machine guns came to the villages in groups and the whole population was armed. And the Communist government they set the task up to disarm, to get all those arms out because there were so many terrorists bands. Oh, it was all over. It was bad. They decided to disarm them. Then they came for instance they came to a village they told the village you have to deliver so many rifles, so many machine guns, so many this and so many cartridges and then they took people as--well, guarantee that they would do that.

PAETKAU: Hostages.

KOOP: Hostages, yes. And they gave them a term. For instance in three days you have to deliver it and if not then we'll line up the hostages and every fourth hostage will be shot. And they did it! They took every 4th hostage and put him to the wall and executed him. And then they got terrorized and then they came up with this ammunition. And the same thing was in Schonwiese. They said Schonwiese had to deliver so many guns, so many rifles and so many cartridges and all this stuff--I think even machine gun we had to deliver. Well we didn't have it because we never got any rifles. And you know what they did? They took 6 hostages. There was my father and my brother-in-law and I was there and then there were some others--no there were more than six. But 10 maybe.

PAETKAU: You were taken as well?

KOOP: Yah. And they took us to a village, and we were sitting there. We had no prisons then, just in a farm house. There were sentrys standing around. We had to deliver so many military stuff and I don't know how much--I think $250,000 or $300,000 in money. That was like a fine you know for having that ammunition. We were fined $250,000 -$300,000. Well the money somehow they got it together but--then they went to the Red Army and bought those rifles and bought all those cartridges and they bought the machine gun and they brought it to here. Yah, that's

a fact. We bought it from the Red Army and gave it to the authorities. Then they let us go. It took about--oh I think we there over a week, Not knowing, well they were able to take--put us up and take every 4th or every 3rd guy and shoot him.

PAETKAU: You didn't know whether you would actually come through alive or not?

KOOP: No. And they interrogated us too. And the guy that was interrogating me I knew him from little boys, we used to play in when we used to visit there. He came from , a Jew.

PAETKAU: What kind of questions did they ask you? What did they ask you about?

KOOP: Oh all kinds of questions. What were we doing? Was I serving in the White Army? Was I ever arrested? Oh, all kinds of questions. A revolver was lying on his desk and he asked, "You know what this is?" I says, "Yes, I know what it is," "Well," he says, "you might get one of the bullets." And I knew him from--Leo was his name. I says, "Leo, what are you doing here?" "Well, I'm going to interrogate you." he says,

PAETKAU: So you weren't friends anymore?

KOOP: Well, he didn't do anything. We came out....

PAETKAU: Was your family down in Sevastopol too when you were down there?

KOOP: Yah. We were there for 2 years.

PAETKAU: The whole family?

KOOP: No. Just the one sister and the parents. The other sisters were married. They had their families you know. They stayed there and nothing happened to them.

PAETKAU: So how did they provide for themselves?

KOOP: Well they were all employed. Oh yes. The factories--some workers there--I really don't know what they were doing. But there was a big office. I was working in that office as accountant. Oh they were busy filling out reports to Kharkov, Kharkov was the capital of the Ukraine at that time. And we were sending in reports every so often. What we were doing--it was all on paper but nothing in reality.

There was no production. But we were getting our wages and we were getting our products. The wages I don't know what was it, one-quarter in currency and three-quarters in products--bread and potatoes and meat and everything. There were no stores. You couldn't buy anything. Everybody belonged to some organization, everybody. And whoever didn't he had to buy that on the black market. Bread and potatoes and meat--yah. What they call it here?--Flea market, yah. They were blossoming there. We could buy everything.

PAETKAU: But you had to have money.

KOOP: You had to have money. Well many people they saved gold coins and gold coins they were high. I say for five rubel in gold you could buy a cow. For five rubel! That's how high the gold coins were. And many people--and there was big big market of that; buying and selling, buying and selling and dollars--for instance men and some people were getting dollars from United States from their relatives and they were selling. They were high too--dollars--just like gold. Well you know, it's funny, there were no stores, no nothing, no banks or anything. Everything was government. There was one government bank that gave us the money to pay our wages. Everything was government. There was no private enterprise. Only the flea markets that was private enterprise.

PAETKAU: And the government permitted those flea markets?

KOOP: Oh, once in awhile they were raided, and they arrested a couple. Then they were running, running in all directions. Then five minutes soon as the Molotschna was gone they were here again and trading again. Sometimes it was funny the way life was going on there.

PAETKAU: But you were the only one of your family that immigrated?

KOOP: (Unintelligible).

PAETKAU: Did the others want to?

KOOP: Well my sister, my second oldest sister she was in Hamburg. Her husband he was injured while walking in the street in Audisa. Some person threw a stone, not at him but just threw a stone and that stone hit him in the back of his head. And that developed into a tumor. And he had to--in Russia they couldn't operate it. There was too surgeons in the world, one in Berlin and one in Detroit. They were the brain specialists. My brother-in-law was an engineer and he finished a technical school in our city. And he was going with a Russian young fellow, was very good friends. Jewbar was his name. And this Jewbar was the secretary of the Communist party in the Ukraine. Such a high person. Very very high. And my brother-in-law knew about him and

when he was sent to Harkoe(?) to get examined you know, his tumor, he phoned this Jewbar. And right away Jewbar he came to him in the hospital and he said, "I'll do everything to get you get out to Berlin to get that surgery done." And he did. And my sister was permitted to accompany him. But they had two children in Russia.

PAETKAU: And they had to stay?

KOOP: They had to stay. They stayed with--well I was gone. I wasn't there that time. This happened in 1929. And he was sent to Berlin. They didn't operate. He died before they operated on him. Then all the friends in Germany they advised my sister to stay there, not to go back to Russia. So she went to Hamburg and friends helped her along. She got a little business you know--store. And she made her life that way. Then in a couple of years. About 5-10 years she got permission to get the children out. And then they were--

PAETKAU: They were together again?

KOOP: Yah. That was the only one in our family that went out. The others stayed. They came all after the second world war with the Mennonites, went to Germany. From Germany then to Canada.

PAETKAU: Your parents stayed there as well?

KOOP: My mother she came over during the German occupation of the Ukraine. Then one of my nieces she helped her. The one that was in Hamburg. She helped her to get out of Russia to Germany. Then she stayed with my sister. I got my mother over here. She was one of the very first ones that came to Canada, you know, from the Mennonites. One of the very very first ones. I was fortunate.

PAETKAU: So she spent her last years here?

KOOP: Yah. She was here. For about two years she lived with us and then she went to that sister that was in Hamburg. She was used to her, you know, and they.... But the very last couple of years she was in Vineland Home for the Aged. That's where she died. She was just about 92 years old when she died. A couple months....

PAETKAU: Are there other things that you remember about Russia that you can tell me? Experiences that you had?

KOOP: Well I don't know what~~~~. I was a year and a half--I went to Centralschule in Kortesa (?). I had--to the Mennonite schools. Then I went to the School of Commerce in our city. And I finished seven. In Russia we didn't have the grades we had the classes. First, second, third, and eight classes

we had in the Middle School. And I finished seven classes. Then the Revolution started and everything stopped.

PAETKAU: Did you work in the business then at all? In the family business?

KOOP: Well in the summertime. My father he didn't let me loaf around too much. He gave me two weeks maybe for the summer vacations. Then I had to go and work in a factory. When I was young then I worked in warehouses you know, putting up supplies and issuing them. Then I went and worked in the office for a couple of years. No he wouldn't stand for doing nothing. He says, "I worked hard all my life and you should know too what it means to work." And I don't regret it. I really had a lot of contact with the working people and I know what they were doing.

PAETKAU: Do you know about how many people were employed in this big factory?

KOOP: Oh there were about 600-700. I think there were, oh, about a good 1500 altogether, the four factories. Of course it wasn't as advanced as it is now. The manufacturing was like the assembly was all done by hand, yah? It was different. Then when the war started we had to change over to war material. We were producing 3" and 6" shells for artillery . They had no choice. They told us if we wouldn't do that--if we wouldn't agree to their demands then they would take over the industries and send us to Siberia. Yah, as enemies. So we had to convert the whole factory to war industry.

PAETKAU: Everything?

KOOP: Yah, everything. We weren't allowed to do--to produce any farm implements. We were producing those shells and then we were making one-horse wagons and then two-horse wagons for the army--army wagons. That was--they were so particular --like all the wood in the wagons, there wasn't suppposed to be a single knot. All 100% wood. That was very hard to do. Very hard to do.

PAETKAU: Did they have inspectors there?

KOOP; Oh, yes. And because we were foreigners you know,--they considered us as foreigners and as hostile to them. They were twice as rigid in their inspection in our factory then in the other factories. Like they rejected quite a bit of stuff. Then there was such a big accumulation of rejected shells that they finally agreed to take them and use them as aerial bombs--those shells. Then they took them all. But we got our production so perfected that there were hardly any rejects. And then they government sent a very high official

to all factories. We were 1,2,3 factories that were making the deal with the government. See the government wouldn't make a deal for 10,000, 20,000 shells. They made a deal for let's say 200,000 shells . Then....there was a Nighfeld(?) factory about 15 or so miles away from us on a station. And they had a farm implement factory, the Nighfelds(?), and Lebon-Wildman(?) and our factory; we three we always made the deals with the government for so many shells, We three worked together in organizing the production. About the second year a very high government official came up to us and he said, "You know that you are the biggest production centre of ammunition to the Russian army? And the least trouble with your shells and your wagons." But we still were considered as hostile to the Russian cause. They were very very rigid inspecting our production.

PAETKAU: How did your father feel about producing ammunition for the Russian army?

KOOP: He didn't like it. He didn't like it from the first time but we couldn't...

PAETKAU: There was nothing you could do?

KOOP: ...we wouldn't change anything if we refused. "The ammunition would be produced in this factory", that's what my father said. Even if we are against the war and against the---well against the war, they would have taken the factory over and send us to Siberia. But the factories would be producing it anyway. So what was the difference? There was no difference. We tried our best. And too he said, "If you refuse...." In Halbstadt there were factories and there were in other places Mennonite factories and in Hortista(?), Anlocker(?) and Schinvesa(?) there were all Mennonite factories--they were all producing war material. And if they refused maybe that would have hurt the Mennonite cause as such too. They could have turned against all the Mennonites,--"You are against us."

PAETKAU: What happened to these factories when the Germans came?

KOOP: Well they were not long enough there. They came in April and in November they were all gone, no, December, they were all gone. It was about 8-9 months that they were there. And there was nothing--there was some machinery left over and I think some machineries were half finished and maybe some were finished and sold to the farmers. But I don't think there was a full production yet.

PAETKAU: But you stopped making ammunition for the Russians?

KOOP: Oh yes. Right away.

PAETKAU: When the Germans left did you have to start all over again for the Russians?

Yah, yah. Well it was--you see then there was a time of --after the Germans (wait a minute) After the Germans the Reds came, 1919-1918(?)--well late--well the real Reds came in 1919, in February. Until then there were all kind of bands, Ukrainians and terrorist bands and oh, everything. Then 1919, February, the first Red Army came. Then there was a certain amount of order. Anyway the terrorists didn't come then. Then that summer 1919 the White Army came and they had it for about 6-7-8 months, something like that. Then the Reds came in again. The Reds were for a couple of months and then the White Army came again. You know our city was, I think, 23 times in different hands. And always was with fighting. Twenty-three times.

PAETKAU: Were you producing anything during this time?

KOOP: Nothing. Nothing. Everything was standing still. And everything, if you wanted to buy something it had to be done on a black market you know, on a flea market. Because there was no stores--there was no time. It was only 5-6 months then another government and then 5-6 months and another government and.....

PAETKAU: No order.

KOOP: Then in 1921 in the fall then the final paper work came from the Reds and then they stayed. I came home in1922 from Ukrainia--no 1921. I came before Christmas.

PAETKAU: What did you do until you immigrated then? The rest of those years?

KOOP: I was--well I was employed by this head office of the farm implement. At my time there were 16 farm implement factories combined in one. And this was the head office of all the 16 factories. Then in 1922 I was thrown out. There was a clean up of, well, I was declared enemy of the country and all the others too. And we were all thrown out of the office. Out of the factories you know. And I tried to get a job and I couldn't get right up to my immmgration in 1924, I was unemployed. I didn't get nothing. No products, no nothing. Well were going and taking in clothes, whatever we could. We used to go into villages and bargain for products. And got such interest for that you know. That's how we were. Well we never starved. There was this famine then the Mennonite Relief Administration they came over. But we never got any help from them. We managed to help ourselves somehow. We never starved. But we worked hard to get it.