ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

of

RUSSIAN-MENNONITE IMMIGRANTS

of the 1920's (Ontario)

Interview #24 conducted by Henry Paetkau, Graduate History Student of the University of Waterloo on behalf of Conrad Grebel College under the direction of Walter Klassen.

Date of Interview: Monday, July 26, 1976 - 7:15-8:15 p.m.

Place of Interview: Residence of Interviewee, 9 Linwood Ave., St. Catharines, Ontario

Interviewee: STEINGART, Frank, born in 1896.

Language: English

Interview:

PAETKAU - Your autobiography gave some information about your own background and your education and so on. Did you work for your father in the mill?

STEINGART - No, I was too young. That was in my school years--public school years.

PAETKAU - I don't recall if it said which village you were from.

STEINGART - Rückenau

PAETKAU - And how large was your family?

STEINGART - Well, my father was a widower with two sisters. And my aunt was running the household. Of course we had hired help. We had farm and mill both.

PAETKAU - How large was the farm?

STEINGART - Sixty-five desjatin , that means about 100-200 acres village. That was an ordinary village farm. They were just about all the same.

PAETKAU - So was your family considered average or well-to-do?

STEINGART - Average. No, not well-to-do, average.

PAETKAU - And how was your father's business in the mill?

STEINGART - Well he worked hard and he, after slugging there he finally sold out and bought more land and did only farming.

PAETKAU - When did he sell out?

STEINGART - I was--I would say--you see our village burned down in 1904. And this was, I would say, 1905. The whole village burned down except us and a few more farms that didn't burn down, all the rest of it just...

PAETKAU - It started in one house and just spread to the other.

STEINGART - Mh, mh., through the whole village, 1904.

PAETKAU - Then everything was rebuilt?

STEINGART - Then everything was rebuilt and it was a beautiful village of brick houses all well-to-do farmers. Of course there was a lot of mutual activity, you know, we had 56 villagers there and a lot of people from the other villages came in and helped as much as they could. The fire insurance and all that was mutual at that time, the same as we have the burial society here. This was very, very, very convenient.

PAETKAU - Do you remember hearing about the outbreak of the war?

STEINGART - Oh yes, I remember that well, 1914. The first world war, yah, I remember that very well.

PAETKAU - What was the talk like? What were people saying about it?

STEINGART - Well, it was Germany, and we were all of German origin. The ones that were worried about the country, worried about probably even the Germans,wouldn't dare say anything because it was very dangerous. We were forbidden even to use the German language openly, which we obeyed. A lot of our boys went voluntarily into the army, into the Red Cross, not into the army, into Red Cross.

PAETKAU - "Sanitaetsdienst".

STEINGART - Yah.

PAETKAU - Did conditions change then for the Mennonite people during this time?

STEINGART - Well, they quit bothering us, you know. There wasn't too much trouble in the villages because they knew we were honest, we didn't do any work for the Germans or against the Germans or against the Germans, or against the Russians. We just were good citizens. I would think that. If there's somebody who says different well they must know better.

PAETKAU - Were you required to supply certain things for the Russian army?

STEINGART - Oh yes, quite often they came around and asked us to volunteer in one thing or another and we always did.

PAETKAU - What kinds of...

STEINGART - Well, help on state flour, for instance my father with the flour mill, they come and they tell him, they just, you see these flour bags they were five puds a big bag. Today we would say that was a 200 lb. bag, twice as big as our bag here. So he would donate every time they come, and they appreciate that. We never had...of course among all working men there were mostly Russians, some of them were a little bit prejudiced and they would probably want to start trouble but they didn't have no legal start. They couldn't do anything.

PAETKAU - Were there some kind of resentments towards you as German people?

STEINGART - Well we lived in closed villages more or less. The working men we had they were paid good and they went home after they finished their season. They went home and it was all quiet. No, we didn't have trouble.

PAETKAU - What about when the Czar was shot? What did people say about that?

STEINGART - Oh we were very unhappy to hear that, but that was revolution for you. You see the real revolution started 1917 and then it really took, in fact 1919 then it really went ahead. You see we had a February Revolution and an October Revolution.

PAETKAU - Were people following these events quite closely or didn't they hear much about them?

STEINGART - Well there was not much to follow. Everybody that, I mean every German , we stayed more quiet than we probably would have any other time, the Germans you know, because we didn't want to have any trouble. Our families were all dear to us and we kept more or less quiet. We paid whatever the government told us to pay and that was that, until the final revolution came and the hordes run into the villages and burned and killed and whatever what have you. They done that many times. Now that was 1919 when that started heavy, and when the famine started.

PAETKAU - How did the villagers respond to that?

STEINGART - Well they couldn't do anything. Everybody hiding wherever they could, whenever the hordes came into the village they run--hide. Of course quiteoften somebody was shot and somebody was probably raped, women especially. Well, that's what happened in the villages then. Of course I remember one occasion I was secretary of the Soviet there and we had a whole there of 5,000, there was a division, they moved into the village and they occupied every house, every house, and destroyed, and whatever they could get their hands on they just took it away or destroyed or--and I was at the Soviet there and I had a Komissar sitting with me at the desk there, and I said, "What do you do that for? You are ruining, this is a village they are quiet people what are you doing that for? I mean, sell the property instead of destroying it, what, to whom is it good if you destroy it." And he said , "You are right." So I told him, I says, "Close your eyes and ears and get back into that dark room, next room to my office." And he says, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "You just don't hear nothing! Just don't say nothing, just don't hear nothing!" And I run on the street and I hollered, "Pokoynia, on the horses." That was all, horse, people you know, they all had horses (what you call it?)-- cavalry. By golly, they listened to that. I hollered as loud as I could. And they all jumped on their horses and they start moving and they shook my hand, it was a commissioner out of the old army, you know, an officer They wasn't grabbed but they was forced to. And they came to me , shook my hand, and they said"This is wonderful, this is wonderful!" He hopped on his horse and away he went.

PAETKAU So then they left you alone.

STEINGART - They left us alone. If they had known they would have shot me right on the street there but I hide I went away there right away. But I told them before I done it.

PAETKAU _ You wrote in that little article that the mill was closed during the revolution, is that what had happened, when the mill was shut down?

STEINGART - No the mill exploded. The boiler exploded and the mill was closed. We sold the mill to a different party and they had overdone the firing of the boiler, there was too much steam and not enough water and it blew the whole thing up.

PAETKAU - But they were still operating during this time.

STEINGART - They were until then, but then it was all over, it was all busted, everything was gone.

PAETKAU - Do you remember the German occupation?

STEINGART - Oh yes, very well.

PAETKAU - What were the reactions like when the German soldiers came into the ...

STEINGART - Well, it was wonderful. We reacted to that very friendly, I must say. The people, or the Soviets, the rulers of the village I don't know who it was that time, it wasn't me. They came in, I don't know, maybe about 200,000, into our village. And naturally we were going to entertain them. So they took the biggest house in the village which was a very large home, private people, and we prepared a meal, luxury meal and we fed those German soldiers, the officers and soldiers whatever. And I remember one fellow got up at the table and they was to deliver a speech in German. And they said, "Lieber Gott, wenn ich einen grossen Magen haette, jetzt." (chuckle, chuckle) That was it, I don't remember anything else. That was really action. Of course we fed them good, they had chicken, they had anything they want. Of course they put a couple of people they left there in the village to watch the things that was going on. They took out a couple of people and shot them and stuff like that. We had Communists there you know under, what you call it, of course they didn't call themselves Mennonite but they were German people, our people.

PAETKAU - There were some who favored the Communists?

STEINGART - Oh yah, yah. Favored the Revolution, I wouldn't say Communists. What's really Socialism? Socialism is a body that wants to divide the country and Communism is a body that wants to take the country for themselves. And that's what they done. Socialism first and then Communism.

PAETKAU - For what reason would these people have favored the Revolution? Were they also from the poorer people?

STEINGART - No. Well, they were poorer,maybe, well educated like your doctor. We had a doctor there who was Communist from top to bottom. And we had another fellow, very educated man, very nice man, if you talk to him, I could tell you things that,--he was a revolutionary, I would say a Socialist at first,but then of course Socialism quit and there was Communism. So nobody talked Socialism no more. A lot of people those days didn't know what it was--a Socialist or a Communist. Two different things altogether. But one thing starts with the other.

PAETKAU - What happened when the Germans pulled out of the villages?

STEINGART - Well now, that's beyond my time. That's in the second World War what you're talking about.

PAETKAU - No, I mean still in the first World War. When they came I understand there was a little bit more order, they restored some order and then they left.

STEINGART - Well then the White army took over and finally they lost. There was this Revolution War and finally the reds took over , and the other were driven into the ocean and wherever it was, to the crematory.

PAETKAU - Was there a Selbstschutz in your area?

STEINGART - There was, yah. I was in it too.

PAETKAU - How were you organized?

STEINGART - We organized ourselves. We were organized, but we didn't have no particular weapons, we had some machine guns and we all had rifles but most of it was about the village privately, by ourselves, because nobody could supply them. It didn't really work. It wasn't any good. Of course we had a couple of skirmishes and we lost out on them. Once the Red army came with the might you know and weapons we had to go. We were fighting bandits you know and that we could handle. We were placed in the villages, for instance we watched night time around the farms and houses, and watched that nothing would happen there. It was always a half a dozen men were awake you know and they changed off every, I'd say, 4-5 hours. Nothing happened those days at night but then the armies, especially that guy, Machno , he was abandoned, and he really tried hard to take over but he never could. After the Red army had visted here they say he committed suicide in Romania/or somewhere. He crossed the border.

PAETKAU - After the Selbstschutz collapsed or dissolved did some of the people join the White Army?

STEINGART - The Selbstschutz dissolved that was the finish, I mean, the Red Army took over then. That was before that. We could join the White, we call them White and Red, you know. Yah, there was some.

PAETKAU - You lost all your land I suppose or your father lost all his land.

STEINGART - Oh yah, they just took over the whole village. They didn't take ours and the neighbors they took everything.

PAETKAU - When did that happen?

STEINGART - That happened 1919. That's when we really quit. We got each a piece of garden land or whatever we wanted to but

the ~~cholchoz~~ Kolkhoz or communal outfit took over the whole thing and they cut the borders up and that was all one piece of land after that.

PAETKAU - And it was distributed then to various people?

STEINGART - No, no, no. We only had a little land that we could work ourselves if we wanted to. But they took the horses away and there was no food, no feed, no nothing. We couldn't work it. The horses couldn't, we had cows and all that to put on plows and what have you and tried to sow a little bit so we could live. No, that was impossible.

PAETKAU - You mentioned you were secretary in the village administration. Can you tell me a little bit more about that, how you got to that position and what it involved.

STEINGART - Well, it was elected as they elect today, reeve or councilor or what have you.

PAETKAU - This is when the Reds were already in power or before?

STEINGART - That was before. Right away when the Revolution started then they had to do that. I mean, my father used to be the head of the region. I know my neighbour was there at the village one time and they had terms that they worked there and then they quit and they elected somebody else. But after that, they couldn't elect no more older people they had to take the young fellow with a bit of education and so on you know, because you had to know reading and writing and arithmetic.

PAETKAU - So you were elected then in 1918?

STEINGART - I think I said that in there.

PAETKAU - I thought that was the date.

STEINGART - That could be, you just don't remember the exact dates but that was the time.

PAETKAU - Was this a fulltime job?

STEINGART - Oh yes. Oh yah. I'd go to the office there in the morning and I'd come back at night and quite often even at night I would go there if I had to protect some money.

PAETKAU - What kinds of responsibilities did you have then?

STEINGART - Full responsibility.

PAETKAU - For the village?

STEINGART - Yah, full responsibility. I had, that was secretly, I asked for a committee that would support me in case of emergency. I had to make a big decision say, deliver so many cattle or deliver so much grain, or do this or do that. I wouldn't do that on my own I'd call that committee in and I'd say, "What will we do?" And they quite often said,"use your own judgment." Because they were older people and they didn't get that feeling of what was going on, I mean the real power bind. And there was no way out of it--you don't deliver, boy, you had it. You had to!

PAETKAU - So you were directly responsible to whom, which authorities?

STEINGART - To the Kommissariat, what was like the Region here. Or up there the Volost we called it and that was the---what do you call it here--here there is the region and then there is Toronto. Well I was responsible to Toronto like you know, the province. Of course there was steps between that yet,--I forget what they were called, Volost was the region, what we call now. But there was not as much government as there is here, you know, staffs. Of course here after Toronto there is Federal.

PAETKAU_ And villagers came to you with their complaints as well, their problems.

STEINGART - Well they couldn't come with their complaints, I mean, when we had a meeting they would come and say, "What can we do about it?" This committee that I had--"What can we do about it?" I said, "THis is it, we have to." So they try to find a way out. How? For instance I'm going to tell you a story here about the seed grain. We had, the village had 60 individuals there, individual farmers, and we were supposed to put the seed grain that we would need next spring into a special place --that was like a fund--that would stay. The rest of it they would take a broom and clean up. They would take everything but not the seed. So we had a meeting about that and we put the seed in one place, of course we put more than we should have, but I permitted that. I said let's save some. And it only took so long, they broomed the attics and everything, there was no more grain left so they would begin to tackle that seed. And they would send about 25 or 50 wagons out from the district or from the province and would order--give, supply these people with so much and so much seed. They would say, 50 puds in one wagon and 20 wagons: say 1,000 puds. You have to give that to them. So whenever they came we did and I would fight them nail and hammer. I wouldn't give it to them. I said this is our seed and nobody touches that. They send them

back. Naturally the next day the Kommissar comes up and boy I had to fight again. So one day I was sitting in the office and they came again and they took his sword out, you know, pull it right out, long one, it was a Cossack, you know. Pull it out and sit down. I told him, I says, we cannot deliver that seed, the seed is a seed and we don't deliver seed, that stays here because we have to seed our field. The...guy swat me, right on my... I was sitting and writing there you see and the hammer that just (bang) right close to my ? and split my desk. I had a gun in my drawer. I was permitted to have a gun and I drew that gun and I says, you clear out or I kill you here, you're not going to take that seed. And he cleared out, he was afraid of me. And I didn't even have a loaded bullet in my gun. You had to show superiority or else they'd ride you right away. The next 2 or 3 days afterwards big wagon, 3-4 horses comes into our village and stops right in my office, in front of it turned around and point the machine gun right into my office. I said, "What do you want?" He said, "Grain!" I says I haven't got no grain, that's the seed grain and you're not taking no seed grain! He says, let me see how much you delivered. You see we had a quota, we had to deliver. Now this was really something. They had information in black and white we were to deliver 10,000, 50,000, 100,000 , I forgot what. Well anyway I had a stack of receipts, that high. And the guy was as drunk as you could make him. And I had a rubber clip over those receipts. Now what could I do, I had to lie or get rid of that man somehow. So I sat counting receipts and he writes down and he writes down and he writes down and by the time I was one side at him I put underneath, so I counted through the same thing again and again. And he says I believe you fulfilled your quota. And I says, yah the way the receipts...(chuckle, chuckle) That's all illegal but what could we do? So he went away happy. The wagon he had the machine gun on and him sitting on the back there disappeared --- went to the next village. And there were 60 more to see or 55 more to see. And I remember that has to be . And when this guy was there with the sword and the helmet right on my desk and cut the desk nearly in half at the next room near my office there was my committee there and I had notified them to come because there was going to be a hot discussion here and they were sitting in the next room . And you know one of these old men, I was that time 24-25 yrs. old, and energy, anything--he came in, he was one of the men that was 55 or 65 yrs. old and he told that guy that cut the table there--he said, " If you want to kill this man you're going to kill me first." Imagine, having guts to say a thing like that. The other three didn't show up but he did. he showed up. And after all this thing the next time we had a meeting, you know a gathering where the village meets and we sit quietly and talk things over, I told it to the

village, I said, "Is there three more men like this man here?" And boy oh boy they cried, I'm telling you they cried. There is no more men like that. Just one man 55 or 60 yrs. old, he would stand between me and that guy. I give you another thing here. We had a meeting where the village was gathered on the outside, sitting down, benches were furnished and chairs and all that. I was secretary of the meeting and the commissar, they done the talking you know. It was ordinary things, we were to do this and we were to do that and naturally we said yes and all that just to have him leave, we didn't want him there. And I was writing down what they wanted and what we could do and could not do--the protocol or what do you call it here? Yeh, that's a protocol--this summary of a meeting--to summarize the whole thing. You know I couldn't leave my writing, they gave me his and that was worked out at the Center, they were all the same, that we wholeheartedly agree with everything that was said and so I had to write that down and signed it and that was it. There was no way, no any other way. And we had that many, many times.

PAETKAU - They kept their thumb on you pretty closely in that way.

STEINGART - Now I'm going to tell you something against all the good things that the village had--something against this. There was say 65 members and they most of them were well-to-do. In school I wasn't one of the gifted men inschool but I went to high school with boys that were gifted, they were so good in school. If I didn't understand something I would go to them and we would sit down and talk about it and they would explain to me like a teacher would. I loved that kid, his name was Peter. And this was before the Revolution, before any Selbstschutz or anything and he wanted to go further to university or college, whatever. We called it "Stipendium" that time, what would you call it here--ah, you would call it here, scholarship. And we were great friends, me and him. His father was the night watchmen in our village--he go with the rattle, all night hammering that rattle. And Peter he was such a gifted boy, such a gifted man, anything in books that was just beautiful. So we got--great big friends. Now I'm not talking against my father or against Peter, or against Bill or Jim , I'm talking against the whole village . This nightwatchmen he came into a meeting, I wasn't in charge then I was just a young fellow in high school. He came in and he parked in front of the door and he said, "Men, I don't make enough money to send my boy to high school. Is there anyone here who would help him. I would pay it back." You know, that's what they said, "I will pay it back. But I haven't got the money and I want him to go to college, university to make something out of himself." Do you think there was one of them

that would give him a cent, a dollar or a hundred dollars, Not one of them. And that kid could not go to high school. He went to high school but not where he had to start paying for it, you know, board out and all that. Because he was the night watchmen in our village. Now that's for a discredit to the village. That which we so much get and we were the best friends with him--he was such a nice boy. He got killed. He joined the Selbstschutz and he got killed. There's no use putting the name there on the tape. I wouldn't want that because it's too personal.

PAETKAU - That's fine.

STEINGART - This concludes my report to you. If you have something to ask me , ask me.

PAETKAU - What I wanted to ask you yet is....

STEINGART - Is that all on tape , what I have said here now?

PAETKAU - Yes. And I appreciate that, I really appreciate that. About your work in getting visas, you mentioned you were quite involved in getting that and I imagine you must have gone through quite a bit.....

STEINGART - But that was in 1924

PAETKAU - Right. That was later on, yes.

STEINGART - Way later on. I was involved that time something awful. You know I had all the vias, I had all the passports . I had them all in my pocket, and I paid all their legal money to the authorities because there was corruption from the start to the bottom, from the lowest to the highest, all corruption. But I had to have those passports in the cheapest way I could. Nobody had any money. We were moving, we were going to Canada. We didn't have no money and we couldn't sell anything, I mean, that was impossible. I don't know whether I should mention that, but going back from Moscow, I have that there in my memory . Going back from Moscow I couldn't get a ticket. Our train for Canada would leave the next or the day after, and I had to travel the 2,000 miles from Moscow home on the train. How would I get home so I took the chance without a ticket, just hopped the passenger train and I went and I went and nobody caught me. Then when they came to check I pretended between the trains on the platform to be a sick man. And you know, by golly, God must have closed their eyes. They didn't ask me anything they just went by and let me go. And I had bulky pockets full of passports, if they did catch me with those passports I would have been a dead man. And I got off at our station there, free and happy as a lark. But that's only when you are young you can do that.

You couldn't do that. I couldn't do that now. So I got home with the passports. Now to crown all this passport business I'm going to tell you something now. There was a fellow here, I'm 52 yrs. in Canada, two years ago a man , our Mennonite, called me up and said, "You done something wrong that time, when you got a passport for my wife." I got one for his wife. I says, "What do you mean I done wrong?" He said, "You didn't trust me." I said, "What do you mean by trusting you?" "I owe you ten dollars yet, and you wouldn't give me the passport yet unless I pay you the ten dollars." And I says, "Is there a man in God's world that would give you the passport and you not pay him the ten dollars?" We were leaving the next day. Can you imagine--nerves--after 50 years here. Now this happened two years ago, right here in this house. One of our Mennonites. You get disgusted sometimes at a thing like that. Well, I got all through that. We went on that boat, all of us on the cattle boat--they call it "Mel ta" And we anchored in St. John , got the train and moved into Canada-- 24 people. No money in the pocket but happy in our souls. (chuckle, chuckle,)

PAETKAU- How did you get involved in, or how did you come to be in a position to gather these passports.

STEINGART - Well, I'm one of the guys that can't keep his mouth shut, I talk too much. And when you talk you are voted on. You know how that works. And they appointed me to get the passports because they knew that I knew where to get them and how to get them. Before I started the very bottom of them I knew the commissar, his name was Galiotzgay. I bought his wife a piano and from then on everything went very smooth. I paid, oh that time I don't know what I paid, lots of money for a piano. Our villages were all educated people with girls at high school and piano lessons and music lessons and singers and all that. It was plenty of them and so I didn't have no hard time to find a piano,but you had to pay for a good piano. I couldn't deliver to that wife something junk you know.

PAETKAU - What kind of steps did you have to go through? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

STEINGART - Oh, all the steps, all the steps, from the village to region, from region to higher, higher, higher, till I was to the highest authority in Moscow. Province and Gubernia-what would you call that, and then (?) #563 and finally Moscow. Oh there was lots of steps I had to go.

PAETKAU - Were there other Mennonite leaders or men who were working on these passports?

STEINGART - Yah. There was one who was working for the majority for whoever they could, but they had to produce, they had to be barency we called them, they had to be people that were moved from one district to another and they were sitting there, sitting in their boxes and didn't have nothing and to move them out, and they couldn't go back to where they used to live. Oh yes.

PAETKAU - Was that Janz?

STEINGART - Yah, that was Janz.

PAETKAU - I see. So you were just working for your village then.

STEINGART - I was just working for these 24, what I had, 28 at the start.

PAETKAU - Were these also on credit, on CPR?

STEINGART - No. That was cash. Most of them. Of course anybody could have gotten credit you know. The CPR was very generous. When I, my wife, she was a credit passenger she could go credit, so they offered it to me--go credit if you want you don't have to pay it. I didn't have any money you know. I couldn't pay for my wife and child and myself. That would have cost at least $500 and I didn't have that kind of money.

PAETKAU - So you were married in Russia then yet?

STEINGART - Oh yah, in 1924/and our honeymoon trip was here . I married Of course I married the second time. My wife took over the child of my first wife.

PAETKAU - Yes I know that. You moved to Albert then.

STEINGART - No, we were sent there.

PAETKAU - You were sent there? You didn't have a choice?

STEINGART - Well, we had a choice but our brother-in-law was there and he was , he had some place where he could put us for the winter and so we went there. It was really foolish to go there. It was too cold.

PAETKAU - Was this farther north?

STEINGART - Well it was, yah, the exact centers from there to Sutherland that was way far north. There was farms left by people you know they didn't want them anymore and they couldn't make a go of it and they left houses and buildings and everything and went away.

PAETKAU - So what kind of a deal did you make to get the farm that you bought up there?

STEINGART - Oh then from Alberta we moved to Manitoba. And there was the immigration board here set up. And they were dealing with big concerns, big companies and the big companies bought up the farms from people that were moving to Paraguay, and they gave us the chance to take over those farms. It was at the normal set price but we took them we didn't have no choice. So I took one there too.

PAETKAU - You mean there were no other farms available?

STEINGART - There were but without money there was nothing available, and that you couldn't buy. These farms you could buy with a $1.00 down.

PAETKAU - This company, you worked in conjunction with them?

STEINGART - Yes, I was their field man.

PAETKAU - Was it an American company?

STEINGART - No, that was a Philadelphia company, an American company, Intercontinental Company.

How did you get to be fieldman for them?

STEINGART - Well I spoke the language and they appointed me. And I stayed with them for several years.

PAETKAU - Did they pay you then, or what were the benefits?

STEINGART - Oh they paid me $35.00 a month. And of course they gave me an old jalopy to drive around you know, I had a Model T Ford they gave me.

PAETKAU - And you bought a farm as well?

STEINGART - Yah. So the $35.00 that time that would be equivalent to $350.00 today I would say. That was a big amount of money for me that time. I could buy my food and travel a little bit and work a little bit and all that you know. I remember there too and do the work.

PAETKAU What do you think of this setup that the Colonization Board made with this company then? Do you think that the immigrants were kind of taken advantage of or something?

STEINGART No I wouldn't say that. They could have known, they did see everything but they were forced to accept. And the Colonization Board couldn't do anything else. I must give them credit for that. A lot of people talk against that and all that, that don't mean nothing. Those people couldn't do anything else. I was also elected up there as the man to collect the fare you know, transportation, cause I had the bill of $500 myself. And we were in the country 2-3 years

and very little was coming in because they were too poor they couldn't pay. And I was to press and get money to send to the CPR because they wanted that. They had sent a man out by the name of Klassen, you probably heard about him.

PAETKAU - C.F.?

STEINGART - C.F. Klassen, yah. And he was above me, you know, he could collect everywhere. He was a reasonable guy but he worked for them. Of course he was dressed nicely and we couldn't afford to be dressed like he was dressed with white gloves and all that stuff and we (chuckle, chuckle) didn't like that. So one time I remember he came over to my house, I had a nice clean house, and I told him, C.F., Cornie, I called him Cornie, I says,"you can stay here overnight, we save that money." He says, "I don't stay on farms overnight I go to a hotel." O-o-o- I couldn't tell that to anybody because they would have stoned him you know. They didn't like those expressions, I mean that was, would run you down, a hotel, I had a better bed than the hotel had because my bed was clean. So I went with him collecting and he came to one place. I remember today, and the fellow told me, he says , "Look, drive up with the car, I'll fill that car up with my wheat, I've got lots of wheat but nobody wants to buy that wheat." So we cleared out because the fellow was roaring mad. Of course I didn't talk, he talked. He talked a different language. The high German language that our people undestood very well but they couldn't take it with the English call it with the snotty expressions you know. I mean, where did you get that rug? You have no right to have a rug, pay the transportation first before you buy that rug. Well boy your wife wouldn't take that. My wife would just walk right out and go in a separate room and keep quiet but she wouldn't like that 'cause a lot of times the rugs were bought second hand and some worth for peanuts, you know, for richer people that could afford a good rug and they would sell this for next to nothing. Klassen couldn't understand that. Lots of times he wouldn't, now mind you he was a good man and all that . He was the right man for it but a lot of people did not understand him.

PAETKAU - It was a pretty hard job collecting that money.

STEINGART - Oh, that was in the middle of the depression, 1932. I went to the bank, that time I had a dairy herd and I was shipping milk and I wanted to buy a cow. I had only $50.00 and I knew that cow might be $60.00 on the auction sale and I wanted to get that cow because that was the cow I wanted. I went to the bank to get $10 bucks and they wouldn't give it to me. They says,

we don't loan out--I says, I got 20 head of cattle there you can have them. I want only $10.00 , and they wouldn't give me the $10.00. That was 1932-33.

PAETKAU - Did a lot of people lose their farms during those years?

STEINGART - No. We had a Conservative government. That time, that was Bennett, Bennett was there then. And you know my company where of I bought the farm I owed them $1,600.00 on the farm yet, I had only 100 acres. And they were foreclosing on me , so the Conservative government elected to that adjustment board. There was a lawyer, a doctor, a farmer and what else, and somebody else, so I got in front of that Board and I lived in a French district there I took French people around and this lawyer he got up and says, "He's no farmer. He can't pay..." I think my payments were $50.00 in a month and I couldn't make the payments. So he says, "He's no farmer." And then the Frenchman gets up and he says, "You call him not a farmer, he's the only farmer, he has a registered bull, we have only scrap bulls. We bring our cattle to his bull. He only charges us $1.00. And he feeds the bull the year around." They dismissed the case just like that--took out all the interest. But they couldn't do anythingwith the taxes, I had to pay the taxes. And from then on I think my payments were $9.00 a month. Now that was help, that was Conservative government that time. And they wandered around in the district whereever there was complaints they settled that and settled it quick. That was wonderful. I would have lost my farm, I would have lost my pants. Leaving the farm then I wouldn't have anything.

PAETKAU - Why do you think the Conservatives lost the next election?

STEINGART - Oh that, I didn't bother with but I was 100% Conservative that time because they were the only ones that helped us.

PAETKAU - Yah, in the Prairies I think they did quite a bit.

STEINGART - Yah, this was in Manitoba what I'm talking about.

PAETKAU - How did you find generally the Canadians reception of you as immigrants and as Russian immigrants yet?

STEINGART - Why I think they loved us. Wherever I was I was treated very respectfully. I didn't speak the language too good which I still don't. I still have that accent and I'm going to keep that till I die. I couldn't speak French but the Frenchmen I lived among them and they were just good friends of mine. I remember one time we didn't have no money we had to have fuel and the Frenchmen would go into the bush , chop off the Poplar trees and bring them

home and cut them up and have firewood, So I told the wife I'm going to do the same thing. So I took my horses and my sled and my axe and I went to the bush to cut my Poplar wood. I was in Russia a school teacher, a secretary and I never had physical really going, so I couldn't, I filled up my sleigh full three high, the bunk 4 ft. wide, filled up the sleigh and I run the sleigh against the stump so I had to unload, tip the sleigh over and load it again and then I was pooped out. I brought the sleigh home, the wood home and the horses home. The wife was sitting crying because it was nearly midnight. Since then I told her if we have to live like that, mother, we better quit right now because I can't do that kind of work and I couldn't. So we left 1937, we sold out and went to Ontario . It was too hard out there, ofcourse they were just about through the depression then that was picking up a little bit and up here we had jobs and worked for only cheap wages, start 27¢ an hour but still we had income.

PAETKAU - How did it go in Alberta when you were farming there?

STEINGART - I wasn't farming. No, we were working for a fellow that had the farm there and he left for Florida. He was well-to-do and they left the farm with us and me and my brother-in-law we milked the cows, sold the cream and the milk and we lived on that. That's just for one winter we did that. From then on we moved to Manitoba and from Manitoba here.