ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

OF

RUSSIAN-MENNONITE IMMIGRANTS

OF THE 1920's (Ontario)

Interviewer: Henry Paetkau

Date of Interview: Wednesday, May 26, 1976 - 7:30-9:30 pm

Place of Interview: Residence of Interviewees Mr. Cornelius and Mrs. Agatha Nickel
6 Dietz Ave. N., Waterloo

Interview: The second portion of the interview relating to the experiences in Canada after immigration will be recorded at a later date. Relevant also to this interview are several manuscripts and documents which have been compiled by the interviewees and which will be preserved at Conrad Grebel Library and Archives. These are noted at the end of the interview.

CORNELIUS: I went to the public school there, small school, maybe 12 or 15 cubens altogether. And then I went to high school in W. Caldiwoy that is in the next tape a new part There I went to high school for two years until the Revolution broke out. The Revolution broke out in 1917 and we as students we were very excited about this revolution andthe teachers they taught us in a hurry; they taught us these revolutionary songs , of course until that nobody ever sang that, never heard of revolution in a song and where they got it I don't know. Anyway they taught us a revolutionary song and then they organized us and we marched with red flags and we were singing these songs and we marched to the station to hear these speakers. They came through that was the main line to Siberia from Moscow to Siberia and the convicts they came back on these trains oh very many trains came in every day and some very famous people on these trains sometimes. The train stopped for maybe a half hour or so and we were informed about it and then they stood on the back platform and spoke to us. Then of course we saluted and applauded and we sang these songs and had a great time. Then the revolution got so bad , the political prisioners, convicts, there came a lot of other convicts back too, regular criminals and they organized bands; they went from place to place to raise trouble. For instance my father was a businessman ; he had a farm and then he had an implement business, selling implements. He was one of their targets so they came to our place and they demanded this andthey demanded that then they finally gave him a house arrest. He broke this house arrest by himself and he went to the government himself

Makhno. He was acquainted with the govenor, he said he was his friend, I don't know if he really was his friend or not but anyway he was acquainted with him. The govenor freed him from this house arrest only a few weeks later he put him back again on this house arrest. They were very strict against him and so we quickly gathered everything together that we could and we escaped . Maybe I shouldn't say escaped , we went to the south, Belyounst Once we settled in Belyounst, you know where it is she showed it on the map there, that's not very far away from the colonies the Malishia Colonies, it's Belyounst is a , on the Sea of Asia. My father wanted to go into business, he bought a house and a great big bakery and everything , he wanted to go into business but we after staying there for a few weeks in Belyounst we didn't move into the house yet because it was occupied and we wouldn't get into it right away, then we got so tired of the city life because we were used to living on the farm that we decided not to stay there. So we moved to the Molotschna and we bought a house in Alexanderkrone, and there was a school there "handelsschule". It was like a high school --sedrousha--in Russia you called a high school sedrousha. It was a sedrousha but it has extra subjects and it went up a little higher than the high school...business. This handelsschule was a preparation for the ? school in ? ; that was a college, commercial college in ?
So I got my diploma there. That time the Germans occupied the Ukraine, you know about that. Well they occupied Ukraine and we thought everything would be O.K. now they would stay there forever. They came in the spring and moved out in the fall and they had problem with the Bandits andthey organized--before they went though they organized the Selbstschutz and I was too young to join I had two brothers who joined the Selbstschutz . When it was June and the girls were gone then our trouble started then the Bandits moved in and the Selbstschutz started to fight back and they moved back and forth; that was really very hard times. Then the Selbstschutz was defeated and we got ready to try to escape and we loaded everything on the wagons to go then they said it's too late, we can't go anymore because everything was cut off; all the roads were cut off so we stayed and home and wait. Then the Reds moved in with the Bandits. The Bandits at that time didn't have much chance yet. The Reds took the--the Communist government took over and they put hocrauna--what you call hocrauna--that's like a guard. To keep the population, not to protect us, well maybe too, but mostly to keep the population in order, so they wouldn't riot or do something against the government. Somewheres in that time my father sold the house because he wanted to go to America . We sold that house for 32,000 rubels then he went to the Crimea to the consulates in the capital of the Crimea. You know where the Crimea is?

PAETKAU - Yes.

NICKEL He couldn't get anything because everyone was just rushing to get out of Russia., you couldn't get anything. In fact my father nearly died; it took a very long time for him to get home and when he came home he said he had been in the hospital for so long because he had eaten spoiled fish and he was poisoned and he nearly died on it .Anyway he came home and he couldn't migrate. Then we had to sell or we sold the house for 32,000 . At that time inflation was very very bad and we had to buy a house, it's a ponstet, it's a farmstate, a house with barn and stable and everything together--? for $105,000 . Property was not even worth a quarter of what we sold the house at $32,000 That 1919. That was when she moved to Blumstein too and we bought this in Blumstein, that's where we lived then. That was 1919, early fall and then in the late fall the Makhno Bandits came over and they troubled us. That was the Mask... and burned down the Blumrod(?) and that was not too far away we could see the fire lights. And of course the next couple days we went there to clean up-- schrowhey ???? The Bandits at that time they came so very often ; they came and robbed the houses , they came and looked through everything and they never killed anybody in Blumstein but they robbed us clean. And of course we did hide as much as we possibly could in the straw and we went out into the fields and we dug holes and buried all kinds of things in the field or in the barn where,or straw we buried stuff there, we saved as much as we possibly could. Then the Whites came and freed us from the Makhnos In fact ? was a ?
that was Mennonite boys was fighting with the German officers, one of them was called ?
And my brother,...at that time only one brother he served with Schtrolbel and they came and they freed us but they were hot pressed by the Communists and by the Bandits -- the Communists and Bandits were together at that time sometimes they cut each other and sometimes they are together Then we moved. Because they were pressed by the Communists and by the Bandits we left the family,father and I--they wanted to kill my father,always they come and father was very outspoken against the Communists, and they wanted to kill him whenever they come, a chance you see. That's why father said, I and him and we had two very good horses, the wagon and everything and we went to the Crimea,this was right over Christmas--we started just a couple days before Christmas and this was a very very terrible road to go--it was soft. It wasn't frozen , the mud and sometimes we made only 5 miles a day becaue the mud stuck to the wheels and we couldn't make any headway. We went to Crimea at lived with father's brother. The White army reorganized in the Crimera, the Reds couldn't get int the Crimera because there was only one passage a blant passage,

very narrow and the deutschbonalone where my brother lived he was always stationed there to fight him off. The other place was quite watery but shallow water and not very wide, you had to watch that too. The White army reorganized and the typhoid epidemic started then. My brother died of typhus ; he came back from the army for a leave while we stayed with my uncle and he got typhus and he died. And I got typhus too but I got well because my brother he never had one doctor looking after him because the doctors had either time for themselves or there were hundreds of thousands of people that had typhus and they couldn't look after them. When I had typhus they had a doctor stationed at that Mennonite village where they lived and he came over every day and looked after me so I got well. Until spring around May then the White army broke out and drove the Reds back so we could come home again. They came back to over the Molotschna and that's where we came home again. The Reds hadn't done anything to the family at all, they hadn't even robbed them, they kept their cow and everything there was no trouble there at all. So we stayed home and the Whites fought the Reds back to a certain--not very far but maybe oh let's say 100 miles to the North--drove them back . But then the Reds got stronger and stronger, the Whites got weaker and weaker so the Reds came closer again . Then the took me, I had to go to Keen with a team of horses for one of the neighbours--he gave the team of horses and I had to take this team and work for the army and I was always in the fighting I never did actual fighting but I was in the fighting with the team. Sometimes we were on the run and sometimes the Reds were on the run. We kept back and forth all the time. I was there for42 days. The Reds they kept on pressing more and more and more and more until late fall, November, they drove the Whites back completely They drove them back to the Crimea and they thought they would hold the Crimea again but you couldn't, the Reds kept on pressing and they escaped, the English ships were stationed there on ? and some other places and they took as many people as they could and the others were all captured by the Russians, by the Communists. From then on we had a steady Russian Soviet government

PAETKAU - But you stayed back in Molotschna.

NICKEL - Yah we stayed in Molotschna, never moved from there until we migrated to Canada.

PAETKAU - I want to get back to the downfall of the Tsar. What was the attitude of the Mennonite people generally when the Tsar was defeated?

NICKEL - General, they were happy.

AGATHA - Papa, I think we loved the Tsar.

NICKEL - Yah we loved the Tsar but during the Tsar the land was appropriated--taken away. And the Mennonites were all supposed to be moved to ,that law was passed already, they didn't start to execute it. This was always like a alpendruch--German says alpendruch, you know what that means. Like when this law--(AGATHA)"Heavy weight on our shoulders all the time." Then this was something of a relief.But otherwise, before the war the Mennonite people were patriot to the Russian government and the Tsar No wonder, there was all the that they had and everything. But during the war they started to annoy the Mennonites by saying that they were spies. They were waiting for the Germans to come and they said the ?Zebilonds from Germany, they came and we took them and we gave them all kinds of information. In fact they had my father in a couple of times and accused him of being a spy. They searched houses for evidence, several houses were searched in the colonies for evidence that communicated with the Germans. That cooled the patriotism down quite a bit .

PAETKAU - Did the Tsar pass any other laws or do anything else against the Mennonites?

NICKEL - No, not that I know of. But I can't give you much information on that, the older people could give you more information but I was fairly young yet, at that time--?

PAETKAU - Were they happy then to see the new government come in?

NICKEL - Yes.

AGATHA - No, we were not happy. We were very sad.

CORNELIUS - Yes,we were not happy. Kerensky, that was not the Communist government . We didn't like the Communist government at all but Kerensky he seemed to be a strong leader . We thought he was a strong leader but it turned out to be that he wasn't. We thought he was a strong leader and the ? was working again before that we always had trouble with the Dooma. If the Dooma didn't do what that Tsar wanted.....wanted, they retired them. Now the Dooma had the speeches , we liked the speeches and we thought it was going to be alright

PAETKAU - Mrs. Nickel do you remember what happened in your village when they heard that the Tsar had been put to death?

AGATHA - Well we were very very sad. My parents in their living room they had large sized pictures of the Tsar in the arena and we always admired the Tsar and my father had given

money towards the war orphans then he got a beautiful picture, another one--those large ones my parents had boughten them and then they got large sized pictures from the Tsar as a token of appreciation for the money my father had given to the war orphans . So we loved the Tsar very much and I remember when we came home from school and then they said there is freedom and equality . I remember how the boys threw their caps in the air and they were shouting freedom, freedom and equality. I don't know, maybe this sounds a litte queer but I was sad because we just had taken in history, this Russian history where Russia was without the Tsar, that was from many years ago. And how the country went down. And I remember how I said to my friends--they looked at me and said, "Why aren't you happy?" And I said, "We will have the same terrible time like they had in Russia without the Tsar." TO me it was unthinkable to live without the Tsar. Well it turned out that way and I know , I couldn't understand the other children in the school that they were happy because my parents they loved the Tsar so much and I guess that had a lot to do with it. Then our teacher was very much for the Tsar. Then when this came up we were very sad about it. My father--I remember. Then we had to take the pictures of the Tsar down and then when the Communists came and/they saw a picture of the Tsar well that could mean death or something you know. So my father had to burn them. But this token that he got from the Tsar it was a medallion and I gave it to my daughter-in-law . It's in gold and silver and there was a small picture of the Tsar in the arena and their initials very beautiful, and with the crowned prince. And my father took those pictures out and burned them and this medallion he buried under ground and then before we left for Canada he dug it out and so it came to Canada. It's really a very nice momentum that we have. After the Tsar was dead those Anakists ? came not came those Swiss ? Bandits and then was when we still lived in Schilenfort ? where I were and that was a terrible terrible time. Some of the people had fled and some not and we stayed there. We fled for a little distance I think about 60 miles and then we say well Makhno has turned around and he is gone so let's go home. So we went home again and then all of a sudden Makhno was there again with all of his bandits and then there was no getting away and we stayed all winter with them. That was one of the most horrible winters in all my life. It was just a killing and murder and all the time. We had a phone and it was just-well if the phone rang we just say well, who is killed now. But people we didn't work we were just sitting and hardly anybody wanted to eat we were living in continuous fear . And there was no--it was such as--well we went to school. I went to high school but some days we went and there was nothing to heat the school anymore then we had it in the neighbour houses and there was just a few students left because many had fled too. Then we did the best we could, the teachers

did the best they could and find they had to give it up because there was so much heartache and so much murder going on. You see these were all wealthy people, they lived in their estates you know and they were killed most----well then at one time there was a family, there were a father and three sons they had the meal done and then with one bullet they shot through all those three heads you know. And oh, there was so much and we couldn't even conscentrate in school and there was just always nothing but murder and heartbreak and then just one funeral after another; bearly finished with--then they would dig out the dead people and if they had shoes on they would take their shoes off and clothes off. The gypsies they were terrible roaming the country too and they did--well everybody did just what they wanted to do. There was no order or nothing.

Just living in terror all the time?

It was, just terror. And then my mother she was always very very brave she did anything for us children ; she had saved our life so many times. I remember one night, well this happened quite often but I will just tell about one night- we were all in the evening papa says, well nobody is going to take the clothes off--I had a brother and he had fled to the Molotschna too and so it was just father and mother and the 5 girls. Then father said, "Tonight nobody is going to take the clothes off because we don't know what is going to happen." And that's what we did for many many nights; we didn't take our clothes off we went to bed completely clothed and always ready to run. And one night too, this is especially vivid in my mind; there was a terrible knock on the door--well with their boots and with their they banged on the door and then my mother quickly got up and she told us she says--you see we were all girls and it was very dangerous for us--and then she says you all stay in bed and she told father too, you stay in bed till you hear that they have settled down and then she went to the door. Very often they shot through the door. But she went and she opened the door and then in a very friendly voice she says, "Come on boys, come on, come in, you must be cold and hungry. Come I will give you something to eat. And they came swearing and cussing and very noisy. Then mama say "Please be a little quiet because the children will be afraid." and they said, oh they wanted the boss you know . And mama say"Well you just be alittle patient, it takes him always a little longer to dress than me." But she knew very well that papa was waiting for--and we had no light in our room where we were sleeping, were lying down--and then they wanted to come into the house and she says, "Oh no, you sit down here and I bring you something." And they always liked sausage, smoked raw sausages and onions and bread and butter, and that time we still had enough to eat and then she brought them it to eat and they usually had drinks along; ?

that home brew that they made themselves. It was a terrible smell that that stuff made but then she gave them to drink and to eat and then they were finally completely settled down and they were calm and then father heard that they were quiet and he went and he says, "Well boys how are you?" "Did my wife give you enough to eat?" And then he sat down and he talked to them very nice and just very fatherly and then that night I remember they left us without doing any harm; usually they came and went through the drawers and took everything , and took the pillows and everything but that one night , you know, I remember they didn't take anything they just left. But if--they came during the day and so unexpectedly too then they took almost everything; there was hardly anything left of laundry, sheets or pillowcases or pillows. They would take the nice pillow with the white pillowslips and lace on it and put them on their horses and then sit on their horses and drive away. Then they would take the feather ticks in their wagons and wrap themselves up--see this was in winter and then we would go---just anything and we were everytime after they left we thank God that we were still all alive and that nothing had happened to us. That's the way we lived all winter long you know, always.

PAETKAU - How did that effect the village , the people?

AGATHA - Well, it was just, well there was no life no know. There was just one day at a time and one hour at a time. If we could pull through/one this day then we thank God that our life was spared this time. Then we had, the neighbours they had fled and their house was just full of bandits. Then if they wanted something they just came and now give us some sausage, give us some bread, give us this, give us that, and where is it. And they woud go and take, well they wouldn't even ask for giving. We had it locked sometimes , well we had to give them the key and we wouldn't say a word; they would take anything, hams and meat whatever we had. There was never a protest just take/and it take it; we never protested. And then my father he was a ? in the kitchen and there was agirl she worked for this Botco (?) he was one of the bosses that worked with Makhno, he was under-Makhno was the leader of those bandits and then Botco was his helper but he had a big band with him too and they had a girl, she had--they occupied our house too of very rich men you know and he had fled and then they occupied the house and then they had the girl working for them . They had never molested here, she cooked for them and it was very very terrible for her but--then she didn't know how to get away from it and she had the boyfriend and she said she wanted to get married. And he said, I'm going to prepare the wedding for you, this Bopco said. Boptco that means father. He was a young man but we always called him father Then he says"I'm going to make a wedding for you." I remember then I was not in church that Sunday. Then my father came home and told us how they --my father sang in the choir was

a leader there. THen when Botko? came in he called everybody by the first name which was usually not done but he thought he was such a big chief and he could do it And he told my father, "What are you doing up there?" "You come down and sit beside me." Then he told my father, "Now you sing." And they had hardly any service that Sunday in church, they had just singing and singing and that kinda cooled him down you know. I think his conscience or something--you see they had killed so many people--and I think it bothered him and that kinda--he felt good when they were singing. When my parents came home from church they said they had almost just singing in church, and this girl is going to be married and he wanted to have the wedding for this girl in church so he came to see what the church was like . Then the soldiers came in, were with him and they had their guns on their shoulders and he said, "No, in church you don't bring your guns, you leave your guns outside the church." He had some kind/respect for God I/ think, or something anyway. Then this wedding started in the afternoon then . THen we went to the wedding and then everything--well we had to go because if we didn't go then we would be his enemy--we were considered his enemies then the whole family had to go. Then father he came to us and he says, "Children I am going to be killed today ." and then he says, "But don't do anything,that he doesn't notice. But they are going to take me away tonight." Then we couldn't keep it and we thought if they take papa away that's certain death. Then we went to the house where this Batko? was--my mother and I and some of my sisters It was very dangerous, they were all standing there, always heavily armed those other soldiers and boys around--they were just young boys. You could say they looked comical but to us they looked very fierce. They had those--stolen those coats and the tail coats from the rich people around and they wore them and they thought they looked very smart in them--with the tail coat and the gun and boots, it looked kinda funny and sometimes these were just young boys and they had coats that were much too big. Yes and then we went in and we told Botko? not to let papa go to the other village--they wanted to take him to another Russian village and we knew that if they take him away he never comes back alive. Then we said no--we begged him and I know how we took his hand and we begged him, please, please don't take papa away, don't. Then there was an old man and a young boy they took those two along and we said--and this Botko? he knew our father and our father was always a very gentle and kind person, so I guess, then he told that other bandit leader that took those other two men along, he wante d to take father along, and then he said Botka? he said, "No he is not going along." Then he left and he showed us the fist and he was very angry that Btoka? didn't let our father go along. Then this, that night we didn't sleep much because--when this other man--leader left he says, "I'm going to be back for you tomorrow." And he showed us the fist and so father says "I show them tomorrow is the date." So the next day we were just--well we couldn't

eat much, at night we didn't sleep, we were just praying and hoping that nothing would happen and then the next day, it was on the afternoon, right on the afternoon --father was sitting at the window and reading his Bible and then there came somebody, very heavy armed men came with carriages, stolen carriage and these very fast horses and came in and papa got up and he came to us and he says, "Children, this is the time, I am going." Then he kissed us goodby and he says , "Be good to mama." And that was farewell you know. Then we just stay there and run around in the house, we didn't know what to do. We couldn't do anything and we just saw papa was taken away and probably never see him again . It was in January, it was a very very cold day. Then about 2 hours later we saw--I looked at it first and then I saw paper coming up--our house was quite a distance from the street-- and he came walking up the walk , barefoot, without pants, without any clothes--well he had a shirt on and a vest but no pants or and his--and he was--blood was just running down in streams from his head, he was just covered with blood. Then I quick ran and got a blanket and covered papa up with the blanket and then he came into the house and then I wanted to lead him to bed, he could bearly walk anymore and then he says, "No, leave me alone." And then he knelt down at the chest there in our bedroom and thanked God, that God had spared his life and asked God to forgive those people what they had done to him. Then he went to bed and he stayed in bed I think for 2 months. He was so beaten and so bruised his arms, his whole body was just purple and blue and he had three great gashes in his head and the blood was streaming down. Then mama came and she washed his wounds and dressed it . We couldn't call the Doctor and anything and his hands were just like this you know. He was very sick for two months but he stayed alive. It was really a miracle that they hadn't killed him. And that old gentleman that they took along they had beaten him up and they thought he was killed , but he wasn't dead. And the young fellow--at first they took the young fellow and beat him with bear mats and boots until he died. And they took him on his leg and threw him out and this old gentleman had to sit and watch them do that. Then they said, "Now you lie down on the floor." Then they beat him up too very much and they thought he was dead and they dragged him out to the straw pile and when he got his conscious back he got up and he thought there was not very far away from there where our people living--then he went there and they opened up the door and took him in and he got then permission from our leader that was in our village--you see this was in a different village. Then they got permission to bring him home. And he recovered too. But my father said, and the way it happened, when they took him/down they took him into the barn and he said,"Now you have been a rich man". They really had nothing against him. At this young mans house they had

found some papers that my father had signed. My father,-I don't know why there was--but he had a little bit something to do with the government and then at one time he had to sign a paper for him. Now they said that was because his name was on it--he had down something wrong but they couldn't read enough to read what was written there . This young man he was killed and my father was just--beaten up very very much . He had to go into the barn and had to strip off his clothes. And on one side one was standing with the "sert" or this "inschweer" and the other one they had a whip and then they beat him one from one side and one from the other. And my father said he didn't make a noise at all but in this next house there lived this girl that got married there and her mother and she said he roared like an animal. She says it was just something terrible this roar that my father made; it didn't sound human at all. And father doesn't remember that he made any sound. After that they said, "you turn..."--first he had to lie on his stomach and they beat his back until it was completely-almost just cut to pieces and then, now they said you turn, you lie on your back and we give you a good beating on your stomach. And then they did that too. MY father had a strong heart and he could stand that; he was all black and blue at the front too, and his hands and everything and many places he was just cut right to the flesh you know. And then he had to run to the straw pile and then they said, "We are going to chop your head off." And then he said he knelt down and he thought they were going to chop his head off but they chopped him 3 times; he had 3 big gashes on his head. And then he fell down and when he got his consciousness back then they said, "Now you run." And they said, "We are going to come and kill you tomorrow." But then they never came and that's the way father came home then. Father told us all afterwards what happened. Then every night there was one of those guards , this ? ; they guarded our house. They were afraid that we would run a--try to escape, but there was no way for us to escape. Often they came then and sat beside papa's bed, almost every night, evening, the guard would come and then he sat--and he was smokingand drinking , he had all this and everybody--it was very hard for father but father couldn't do anything we had just to accept this. And he stayed for hours and hours and papa was so sick he could hardly stand it but we had just to accept it and/be thankful as long as nothing happened to us.

PAETKAU - Did your father have a business or did he have a farm?'

AGATHA - No, he was a landowner. He had 900 acres of land.

PAETKAU - And they had taken the land away?

AGATHA - Well we left everything. Then after that in spring we decided we are not going to go through another winter like this.

Then in spring they disappeared, they went back to the villages mostly. Then we had our crops a little bit of it--well the land wasn't all worked, just some of it was worked. Then we started that we wanted to get ready that we wanted to go to the colony. That's what we did and all summer long we had this in mind that we are going there ; next winter we won't be here and we are going to Molotschna colony. Then we had just 2 hay wagon loads full of furniture and 2 cows and 4 horses and then our family and most necessary things that we thought that we had to have; bedding and beds , and then what was left you know and we fled to Molotschna. That was 100 miles away and that took us--that was a trip with our horses/a whole day . My father before that he had rented two rooms and we moved into 2 rooms--at that time we were 8, grandma wasn't with us. Later our grandmother came with us; grandpa died and she came too. We lived in two rooms there.

PAETKAU - Were there any changes in the school, what they taught you after the government changed right away? What kind of changes?

AGATHA - M-m-m. You know the writing, it was changed.

CORNELIUS - Well that was what was the Revolution. They simplified the stowen?. The Russian alphabet has 36 letters and they took some off because they were not necessary . Some had a soft ending and some had a hard ending to the words. In Russia they called it ? , that was soft and "shourt" that means hard, that means the mark . And they took that hard mark out altogether you see and there's just the soft mark; they still use it. They simplified it and we were glad for it too because it made it much more simplier to spell. But otherwise---

AGATHA - But then we had new books too. I know we had--

CORNELIUS - I don't remember. But not political, we didn't have anything political.

AGATHA - No, no. no. But then I remember our arithmetic was different. It was very different.

CORNELIUS - Oh yes they came out with new books every once in a while anyway.

AGATHA - Yeh, but this was so different. There was---I don't know it was all. But there wasn't--you couldn't learn much under these conditions . It was very very hard to study at all. For me those were really lost years in school because there was this continued threat of death. Then they would come into the school all of a sudden they would come there into the classroom. It was just one horror after another . There was no....

PAETKAU - What were the feelings like between the Mennonite people and the Russian peasants who lived around them from this time?

CORNELIUS - Well the one thing maybe that you probably never heard yet is this that the peasants they worked for the Mennonites by the day, or mostly by the month or for the season. Then when the REvolution came then when we had the Revolution very many--then the Revolutionary government, they weren't the Communists yet this was a REvolutionary government, the Kerensky government. They gave out the decree that they could get the same--they worked too cheap for the Mennonites then you see--for all the landowners. And they could go back and demand the same wages--double wages you see from the people, the farmers you see. So that's what they did. Quite a few came and got it from them. But otherwise they it wasn't, they, the relationship wasn't too good between the Russians and the Mennonites because the Mennonites were rich and the peasants were poor. They were envious; the Russians were envious of the Mennonites and the Mennonites it's their fault too you know, they exploited, they had a chance to exploit,they did exploit the working man; working real cheap and ....

AGATHA - Well there were so many labourers they were coming and they wanted to work.

Well that was exploiting you see,

And then one says I do cheaper than the other you know. That's the way it was and naturally you hire the cheaper one. See that's the way it was. They wanted to work because...and you need much much more help than you need in Canada. Those Russians they were lazy you know. They didn't do much days work, you had to have much more labourers Like my mother had 3 girls in the kitchen and then she had, well 4 girls--Russians maids to help. Well I think here in Canada, well not now anymore but years ago you know when they really were working then 1 or 2 could have done what those 3 did. They didn't hurry very much in their work, they were quite slow you know and sometimes they were dependable and sometimes they weren't. But when my father later on when we were in Blumstein and then he went back to Schwenkville and then he stayed overnight with the Russian peasants in the village . They were so glad to see him and they gave him their best beds and everything and they had worked for my father before . They said, "Come back, come back. When you were here we were never hungry , and now we are hungry and we have nothing to eat , we are starved and please do come back and give us work that we can work for you, then we will have food again . And our house was completly demolished , not that they had, and everything was taken away . We had an orchard, I don't know how many acres, maybe 10 acres orchards and a garden, very beautiful everything.

with flowers and big trees. The weeds were higher than my father. They didn't look after it and they didn't do anything about it.

CORNELIUS - Because they didn't live there.

AGATHA - No, nobody lived there. It was just left--and the road, that was a nice road without grass, just low grass, papa said it was--you could only see the street, was just two wheels where one wagon went through. It was always desolate and the houses were in ruins and they had--if they would have done something with it you know. If they--there was a great big brick house, you know a solid brick house; the neighbour house was a very old house, it had been from a very old landlord that weren't of the Russian, our parents bought the land from. And that house was demolished too. And it was a beautiful house . Instead of living in it and do something what they couldn't take along they chopped to pieces. But if they would have made good use of it it would be so different. But it was such a senseless setup , and the high school, we had a very lovely high school there. It was a big solid brick building too . It was completely demolished and so many many families could have lived there. It was just sheer stupidity. It's amazing if people get in a rage what they do. But my father had very many friends amongst the peasants, very many. They loved him very much. They didn't kill my father when my father came back again. and didn't tell them. And they could have easily done it. But my father always was very gentle and very good so they had nothing against him.

PAETKAU - Did some of the peasants come back to get revenge?

AGATHA - No.

CORNELIUS - Not that I know. But they probably did in some places. This place where she lived you see they probably--anybody that were--you have told it before that people that were hard to their labourers you know , mean to the labourers, he came back to have them killed.

AGATHA - Yah there were some.

CORNELIUS - But that wasn't done very much. Where we lived in Blumstein, just maybe two miles away there was a great big Russian village where the peasants lived and the Koolocks too you know . It was a very big village. The Russian villages were very big , there's thousands of people living in one village. The relationship was quite good between the villages. The relationships that was not so good, could have been better, were between the workers themselves that worked there. Here they worked each as a family over there it was never done you see the workers were always ? they had a room in the stable .

AGATHA - No, no. in the kitchen.

CORNELIUS - Well some kitchen. But villages was always in the stable , next to the house . The stable was connected to the house and then in between there was a room for the men, slept and ate their meals. For instance in our place where I come from in Lamarr ? we had shoewashworkers; they weren't Russians they were "ShoowasH' in a different language, they were Christians too. They were Mongoleun race but they were Shoowash. My father was quite kind to them but he was very strict, they had to obey orders. During the summer time they always had one hour after dinner, after they finished they could lay down in the hay or the straw and have a nap you see one hour a day. The Saturday afternoon they never worked . They had a sauna bath between the neighbour and together we had a sauna bath between us. We lived may a quarter of a mile apart. There was a sauna bath and you heated it up and made proper the steam and they went all for a sauna bath , nice bath. My father wasn't hard on them, they always had a--but I know I have seen my father beat up some of the men , if they didn't behave right . If he found them sleeping instead of ploughing in the field you see he gave them a beating you see. One time I was a little boy when there was a tautau--whenever you write this down it's not tartar it's tautar, that's the right pronounciation you see because there's just one r in the tautar. He tried to attack father you see father had said something to him he didn't like and he wanted to attack him . And father he beat him up very properly . I witnessed that. He threw him down the steps from upstairs He threw him down the steps and father was a great big strong man . my father he was tall but very skinny, he looked weaker but he was very brave, he never was afraid of anybody. He beat him up and then he fired him right away . because he wouldn't keep him anymore.

AGATHA - I think the Russian villages what they liked about the Mennonites--if they were in trouble --poor , they would come to the Mennonites and beg. There were beggars going around almost continuously. . We would always give them something, always. Well it was in the Bible that you must not chase the beggar away and you have to have an open hand for the beggar. They benefited a lot from the Mennonites. I remember especially a peasant family , the mother she gave us her daughter; she had a lot of daughters. She came and she begged my mother; take my girls and teach them something so they will know what to do and how to do it. When the girls were small from 13 yrs. then my parents hired them and then they had to take care of the other younger children. Then as they grew up they would help in the kitchen and finally they would start to cook and my mother would teach them how to sew and to mend and how to knit and how to crochet . They would never go away empty handed, never. MY mother always had so much. I remember when one of the mothers--they usually came to visit their

daughters if they worked for us--then my mother gave them all kinds of things to take along, to eat and to dress and they always went away very happy . As far as I can remember it was a very good relationship, this Russian peasants . My father was upset sometimes, When they would come, all those beggars , heavy, strong men and they were just begging , but he would always give them usually a half dozen eggs and half a loaf of bread and it was always given in big quantities because we had a lot, we could give a lot. There was one fellow he had the whole family, his grandfather and wife and I think four children, and one child was born at our place . He was just begging year after year. He would just make his rounds & come not work . He was a GErman speaking fellow, his name was Pheedrick. Then he would come and we'd say who is that sitting in our barn, oh, Pheedrick is dah. Mommy says well I have to go and papa says you know that his wife is going to have a baby. Then mama went and helped the baby into the world. Then there was alot of Jews, There was a Jewish village quite a bit in the ? They would come too. They had all kings of things to sell and they sold it. They wouldn't ask can I stay overnight There was a Solomon redheaded, redbearded Jew and he would just come and I remember how my brother , Kibit says you know he has a horse that is sick , it has a disease--roughts--distemper, know what? And we said then our horses will get sick too. He would just go into the stable and put his horse there and tie it and feed it then he would set himself down in the dining room and wait for supper. Then he waited for Koscher and mamma would see to it that he would get his eggs and no lard would be in it and everything and he stayed overnight . Then when he wanted he would go away and I thank you very much and my father would buy some things from him yet and then he went away. Then the next Jew came. It was very interesting. I write in this book a lot of exactly how it always was. I think these beggars that was allowed by the Tsars government instead of making them work. That they were allowed just to beg and make their livelihood out of begging. ..... I could never understand that.

PAETKAU - Did things change then when Lenin came into power?

AGATHA - There was no more beggars.

CORNELIUS - You mean what change in...

PAETKAU - I guess after the Revolution, and once...

CORNELIUS - When the Communists came into power right away they started to send around this here--what did he call it--Russian guards Communist guards. Not guards that you means here that go on parade or something they were like a band maybe 60 people at a time. They went from place to place, from city to city to get all the intellectuals, mostly intellectuals in the--well at that time they didn't have the Koolocks; they didn't

call them Koolocks they were called Istol at this time. At that time we were just the rich exploiters and they shot them without any much court, just decided--there was an officer with a few men at one place and an officer and a few men at another place, next village and so on and they ---(AGATHA - The ministers were shot) and some ministers were shot. But then in Holpshadt that was in Loshna and there were 6 shot in one day wasn't it mom?

AGATHA - I don't know.

CORNELIUS - I think there was a couple teachers from the Kametzschool at that time. But they didn't kill very many people, just a few here and a few there.. They went from place to place, from city to city that's what they did but otherwise they didn't . But then it didn't take long and the civil war started. There was the White army and the White army was supplied by the English and the Americans and Canadians landed in Blobvaustou and the English landed in the White Sea there at the Hauldiz. During the civil war they changed France I think--well while I lived near Sandakrona and in Blumstein I think during that time, 2 years, changed about 6 or 7 times. Something like that; it's written down in here exactly how many times it changed from White to Red.

AGATHA - Sometimes we didn't even know which was the Red army and which was the White army. They changed so quickly . And all this shooting, the boom here and the boom there,

CORNELIUS - Yes they shot over the villags and into thevillages . Then inbetween the White army they threw bombs, they thought there were Reds in Alexanderkrone where we used to live first and then my sisters they lived after they got married .

AGATHA - And also got killed there.

CORNELIUS - They threw bombs down on Alexanderkrone. The White army threw bombs down on the White army--they thought they were Reds.

AGATHA - They were confused themselves.

CORNELIUS - At that time her uncle was killed, at that bomb attack. And where my sister lived there were 6 killed in the Goetzen family. They were standing on the street watching these airplanes and all of a sudden the bombs came down and killed 6 members of that family. And my cousin fromthese bombs he got a piece of sharp metal in his head and he was in the hospital and it healed very quickly ; probably too quickly and then later on he had to serve in the army again with the team. He was teamster at that time just like I was when I was teamster. He was standing close to a cannon

and he wasn't watching it but it fired. This noise shocked him so much that he got epileptic fits until he died later on --25-30 years later. They operated on him and couldn't help him. That was all from these bombs .

AGATHA - That was a terrible time but then when we were in Canada and we got all those letters what they gone through afterwards, the ones that were sent to Siberia, that is--

CORNELIUS - That was worse yet.

AGATHA - Our experience was really nothing compared to them. Like this aunt she wrote, she had 13 children and was sent to Siberia and was separated from her husband.

CORNELIUS - Not exactly Siberia, it was north, European Russia.

AGATHA - Yah. And he was sent to another camp and she stayed with the 13 children there and the last letter that she wrote she wrote, "I thank God for every child that he is taking." And she wrote that she had just 3 children left and she had just buried one naked . That was way up north and they had dug a hole in the snow with their hands and placed the girl there and she had two left. Then we have never heard anymore from her, I guess the whole family must have died. They had nothing to eat.

PAETKAU - Did any of the Mennonites take sides with the Whites or the Reds or any one of those bands when they were moving back and forth?

AGATHA - Oh yah.

CORNELIUS - Most of the Mennonites took sides with the Whites but in every village there was a few Reds. This was the poorer people and the ones that were exploited by the rich . That really did happen, I'm very positive on that. You know how this worked don't you? Well the villages, the farmer had maybe ten children , maybe 12 or maybe 8 whatever, but they had many children. When he died the farm could be divided up amongst the children . One stayed home, the oldest one or whatever it was, he inherited the farm . And he had to pay off his brothers and sisters Well maybe each sister or each brother was supposed to get a 1,000 rubels. That was paid off in time, maybe in 10 years or so was paid off. But this money didn't last long, these families that had.....they had absolutely nothing , no chanc e of making a living except working for the richer neighbours, maybe for their own brother-- day work--only in season. In the winter they didn't have anything to do and no earnings. In the season they made 1 rubel a day, that was usually the price then. You have

heard I guess of the Longfrawdka in Russia --where finally it went to the government to Petersburg. They had to go to see the Tsar and the ministers and all that and they had very very severe quarrels about it . Finally they made sister colony, no daughter colonies they called it. But there were still , this was happening all the time, this was continuous . And again and again they got the poor landless people there, Mennonites. Many of them turned Red.

AGATHA - That's why my grandparents settled in Schaferdt.? There was not enough land in the Molotschna and then they bought land in Schafert and then they did very very well there.

CORNELIUS - Then there were the farms; there were the 65 desjatin , that's about 200 acres or something. That was a full farm , a full hoschstelen. Then they had half farms and quarter farms. In the quarter farms they were just as bad off as the full farm--or landless practically because on 15 acres, 15 desjatin they couldn't make a living. On their land, these full farmers they had their land some of their land close by. Everybody had a field right next to the village, then everybody had a field farther up again and so on and so on. All this land was taken up by these full farmers, then the kleinworker (quarter farmers) they had their land sometimes 16 miles away . They couldn't work that land properly because it was too far away and then when they harvested the land they cut it probably to the side or something , they could make just one trip. Early in the morningthey had leave maybe 4 o'clock and load it up and come home in time by the night. They were almost as bad as the landless too .

AGATHA - But there was a very good system about the school and the hospitals and the doctors . The ones that had land they had to pay according to their acre, as much land as they had, that's how much tax they had to pay and that was for paying the doctors. And the landless then didn't have no land and they could go to the doc tor free. And they went to the school free . You were always taxed by your-- the Mennonitestaxed themselves by the amount of land they had.

CORNELIUS - I'm not sure it was completely free. They probably had a head tax too you know . Probably from their place where they lived in, the house that they lived in. I"m not sure.

AGATHA - One boy I remember my father put him through high school . And he was just a poor boy. I think it was from the landless, not very many went to high school. The public school I think that was free for them and high school maybe not.

CORNELIUS - High school wasn't free at all, everybody had to pay.

AGATHA - So I think the landless they could all go to public school It was not compulsory they could and it was free for them and the doctor was free too and hospital because you were always taxed by the land. If you had lots of land you had higher tax, if you had no land then it wasn't--well land was really the wealth of a person. That was one advantage that I think was very good.

CORNELIUS - A few Mennonites were shot by the Germans but the Germans occupied, when they came to occupy the Ukraine. The Germans shot everybody that was a Communist, no matter what, if he had done , whatever he had done. Whoever announced or told him that this man is a Communist he was shot without any question.

AGATHA - Life was just nothing, just nothing.

CORNELIUS - They had to dig their own grave first and then they shot them and they rolled in the grave and they were buried like that.

AGATHA - Then later on then the Red ones did it to the other ones. Did the same. Life wasn't worth anything. Killing was just going on all the time, THen I remember my brother he had fled to the Colony while we were still in Schenckfordt then there came a woman, she had worked for us and she told mama,she says"I have a secret to tell you." And then she told mama , "I saw your son." My mother was worried we didn't know where Jacob was. Then she says "I saw your son and he is very thin and ragged and he begged me to ask you for food",and she says, "Im doing this all very secretly." So my mother gave her whatever she could find and she was so greatful to that woman that she would bring this to her son . Then later on when our brother came there was not a word of truth to it. She had just thrown it all for herself. My mother she was so glad now that she knew her son was alive and gave all kinds of good things and she had just taken advantage of it. We never looked her up or anything but my brother said he had never been in that Russian village, and hiding. So there was so much cheating and lying going on, it was just terrible. You couldn't trust one another . One time when we were that terrible time in winter in Schenkville there was a-- one of the bandits came and he told my mother he says I am going to tell you a secret, and he says, that night everybody will be killed in your family. He says that's all planned, how we will do it and everything . But don't tell it to anybody , everybody is going to be killed. It will be just like in France, like that Bartemayimus ? that's the way it's going to be here too; it's all planned. I don't know, it never came to pass, now was this a lie or was this just something to frighten us or what but there was all the time rumors and rumors going on you just couldn't--and then the White ones are here they are coming tomorrow they will be here, then we heard the cannons

shooting and all this , then now they are coming, well maybe those are the White army . And then next somebody would come and say no it's the Red army that is coming up. Sometimes you were in between , you were not with the White not with the Red, we didn't know what. So you can imagine we just didn't have any--everything was just so senseless, or so useless to do something or to, as long as we had our daily bread for days we wouldn't cook a meal or anything . Well if we had just . something a little hot, cereal, coffee to drink and a little piece of bread--nobody was hungry any more. You lived in continuous fear, you never knew what it....

PAETKAU - Was there any hope for anything? Did you long for the old government again or ?

AGATHA - Oh yes. I know when we lived as refugees in the Molotschna oh my father he always hoped and hoped we would get back and we will get back and/some days even here in Canada so often when the Germans fought against Russia then papa says"Now we are going to go home again and everything will be just the same like it used to be." He was always hoping but the last years not anymore. He was 92 years old when he died but always up till well not quite up till then but he was always hoping to get back to Russia and buy back our old land again and people have been there and say they don't use the land as it used to be. And that's why they always have/those crop failures, it's not worked right,/and it's not looked after.

PAETKAU - What did the Mennonites say about those who went into the White army? I guess they didn't have much choice, eh?

Oh yes they had choice but they weren't as nonresistant as they were supposed to be for Mennonites . They're more nonresistant to the old faith , to the old creed now than they were at that time. They didn't excommunicate them from taking up arms and fighting, even the Selbstschutz you see, the Mennonites themselves organized--well of course they were organized by the German army but the Brizen(?) corporation and the blessing of the Mennonite leaders in the Colony.

AGATHA - But it's very hard. . . I think we shouldn't judge them.
Cornelius - No, we just state the facts The circumstances were that way . I wonder what we would do if we would be put in the same condition like we used to be in Russia. I wonder how people would stand up now.

CORNELIUS - There were some Mennonites that refused to take up arms. There were some MEnnonites ministers especially among the Brethren Mennonites that resisted this and they preached against it but there weren't many others that supported it, they thought they could keep the bandits off until the established government would take over, the Communists for instance or the Whites, whatever. But it didn't work out that way. well, still I think it did help some

because the Communists helped get the bandits together then the bandits couldn't do everything just the way they wanted to at least for a while.

PAETKAU - What you're talking about now and what you mentioned before about not trusting anybody, I guess there's a whole different kind of morality, eh? in a situation like this, when there's just terror all around.

AGATHA - Oh yes.

PAETKAU You can't live by just the same old ideals that we usually talk about.

No, no, no. Then especially when the famine was on, people started to be dishonest and look after themselves and didn't care about their next neighbour; like it used to be. People they looked more for themselves. Everything was taken away, the grain and everything , then other people they were fortunate enough they had hidden some and it hadn't been found and they would eat properly and their neighbour would die of starvation.

CORNELIUS - And people who would never have done it before would go out in their neighbours field at night and dug the potatoes up for themselves. It's plain stealing but they would have never done it before.

No. Well if you see your children crying for bread and there is nothing to give well you do almost anything. I know my parents they went begging too. Well when we lived in Bluschtalia we had nothing, well our cow she was so weak--we had only one cow and she couldn't even stand up anymore. She didn't give milk or anything. There was just hardly anything to eat , no potatoes, no nothing. Then flour, there wasn't any flour. We mixed everything together what we could find, what we could sweep up behind rafters and out---and that we would sweep together and put it through a coffee grinder--there was all kinds- and with our hands we tried to clean it out a little bit so that the dirt from the rats and mice wouldn't be there and then we would grind it and put a little water in it and mix it and put it in the oven and eat it. It had no nourishment whatsoever and it tasted terrible. Our neighbours horse what died--well it was close to death and then before it died they quickly cut the throat and then they gave us meat and then we ate that meat. Then my father each morning he would take the scale out and then he would cut a piece of this so called bread and put it one the scale and then we girls would get half a slice, and my brother--well the men they always needed more, they got a whole slice. And every morning my father stood and the tears were running down his cheeks and he

says, "Children I would like to give you something but I haven't." Then we would just hold our hankerchiefs out and he would place that in our handkerchiefs and that was our food for the whole day. There was nothing more. Then we had some grain or something that was roasted, then we poured boiling water and that was our coffee, we had no milk to put in it. Well we had salt, and we put a little bit salt on our bread then we drank this and that was for morning, noon and night. Then the hungry children would come to the window, they could just peek in through the window that you could just see their eyes then they would always say, "A mouthful, a mouthful ?" Then one was just past, then the next one came. That's the way it went . Then we took our--well we had hardly anything left but what we thought what would maybe bring a loaf of bread then we'd take it to the Russian village to the market and buy something that would be a little better bread than ours, that would be worth eating, then maybe we would get the bread for something--some kind of clothes or something if we were lucky to get something to eat. Then my parents went to the other village to their friends and asked for flour then they gave us someflour , then they came home and we had a little flour to eat.

PAETKAU - Did things change anything after the Revolution was over and the war was over?

OORNELIUS - Yes, well that was a year of famine that she was talking about.

PAETKAU - '21? '22? Would that have been?

C@RNELIUS - The crop failed in '21 , then until '22 in spring . Then the Russian government they gave us corn to plant , probably about a bushel for each farmer. MY father, we had kept a 5 ruble gold piece always for emergencies. With this 5 ruble we bought about a bushel of millet. That was in Outnow, that was two villages farther down . And I carried this home, it was not a bushel I think it was 40 pounds.. I remember because I was very weak I hadn't eaten verywell. I carried it home and we sowed that and from the government we got corn and so we had a fair crop the next year , the famine was over by that time. Of course what saved many people from starvation death was this help from America. First the Hollanders came then the help from America. We personally were fortunate we had/in 1916 my father he had gone from Gwaumara? where we lived yet he had gone to Finland. Finland was neutral, it was not in the war and he bought the steamer there for to thresh. He invested money, oh I guess about 30,000 rubles he invested in the/bank Finnish . Father saw this Revolution coming so to be on the safe side he invested in Finland. Then when the Hollanders came with their help to feed the people;

this man the Hollander, father asked him and he was willing to lift some of this money in Finland and then bring it back to father. This money it came in American dollars. He first got it in gulden because he was a Hollander and that was a change in dollars so we got about maybe $200-$300. That was only part ofit. With this money we could buy all kinds of things; the American dollar was very very high in value at that time. With one dollar you could buy all kinds of things--food and clothing and all that. Later on 1923 my father went to Moscow and from Moscow he could get the rest of the money from Finland but at that time it had shrunk to about $1200 but he got it in dollars. Most of this money he went out to a Mennonite storekeeper; in the next village he lived and he went out to MOscow to buy all kinds of material, cloth, needles and thread and all kinds of stuff like that and he brought it back and he--other money was worse because inflation was so bad. He took eggs for it or grain or any kind of produce then he took this product to Moscow, sold it in Moscow and brought back another load. But they borrowed this money from dad at 5% a month that was 60% a year. This % that was 1923 mind you, that was, at that time we had a very good crop , in 1923 everybody and a bumper crop so we could live quite well on this interest alnne, we could buy shoes and clothes and had a suit made and so on.

PAETKAU - Were you working during this time, during these years.

CORNELIUS - Well we never had any land then but we bought this homestead We never had any land but we always rented land. My two brothers had died in the war; one was a typist and the other just as a people with the Reds; the Reds had captured them from the Whites. He served with the Whites and then he was captured and he never came back. I was the oldest at home and I was always looking after it. We could rent land very very cheaply because most of the farmers couldn't even work the land ; they didn't have any horses and they couldn't even do that. We rented maybe 20 acres or so and we planted this and we planted that. Oh we had more than that we had probably 30-40 acres. In 1923 was a bumper crop all over the whole district and I know my father he shipped a carload of oats. We had a very very good set of oats, it must have brought almost 100 bushels to the acres, it was tremendously good. He filled a carload of oats,not only with his own but we bought some more oats from the neighbours and he took it to Moscow and sold it in Moscow. That's when he got that money changed too --from Finland. So when we immigrated to Canada we paid our own fare we didn't have reiseschuld.

AGATHA - There were just very few families could do that. Our family didn't.

CORNELIUS - Not many people had money. But we had money because of this Finland money.

PAETKAU - When did people start talking about immigrating?

CORNELIUS - I told you about my father wanting to immigrate in 1918 but you couldn't, nobody could at that time. Since then the people kept on talking about immigrating but they didn't know where and they kept on looking at the encyclopedias, one of our relatives had an encyclopedia and my father always went there and oh, Mexico is wonderful land.

AGATHA - And Australia, and any country.

CORNELIUS - Paraguay, Brazil and so on, always speculating on immigrating then finally the strong organizatons they sent men to Canada to look for land and they arranged with the Canadian government--that took years to do but still they got that going. Before that some peoplethought they could go to the Caucasuses and some people got away. They went through the Caucasus from one of the cities to Turkey. From Turkey they kept on going to Canada or the United States. Of course they were writing and everybody heard about this . Then everybody, oh there must have been a few hundred gone to this place but by that time the government closed that city completely so they couldn't go So they stayed there for months then they got malaria thensome people came back and they brought malaria back into the Colony. Have you heard about the malaria epidemic? Almost everybody had it. It was terrible. People were -- do you know how malaria works? Every 3rd day you get an attack. You're 2 days free then the 3rd day you got it. Usually it was this way anyway. My sister got it , my mother got it. My father didn't and I didn't . Practically everybody had it . Then they had all kinds of remedies for it , home remedies you know. One tried this and one tried that and all that. My chum that I migrated to Canada with from the same village he had malaria while he was on the trip and he didn't want to let the doctors know . He was examined in so many places; we went first to Moscow he was examined and then sometimes it happened that heu didn't have malaria between the third day when the examination was then he was lucky you see. But when he came to Quebec here he had an attack right then and oh he was so miserable and he had such a terrible headache and his fever was so high and his --when he opened his mouth his teeth were clapping . He had stayed in Lotveneer? for two weeks because of immigration problem. Then we took up English lessons, him and I . So he knew a little bit of English and the doctor asked him "How are your teeth?" He had real strong teeth and big wide mouth and he kept his mouth closed and he says 32, 32. The doctor just laughed and let him go . But if he had opened the mouth & would have saw that and would have known that he had malaria, So he got away. But I got malaria after I got here. I never had it in Russia and came here to Foonk-- you are aware that I worked at Foonk.? my first place of

woodwork and I worked very hard , I heard that you had to work very very hard here in America , much harder than in Russia so I really did my very very best , and probably worked too hard or had infection in Russia already Well anyway I got malaria in autumn there, in Saskatchewan at that place in Foonks. I went to the doctor in Rosturn? and he gave me quinine, and he said drink a lot of milk and no work at all, just rest. That's what I did, stayed at home with my relative and I never had it again. I only had three spells of it .

PAETKAU - Who were the organizers of the immigration in Russia ? Who were the leaders that were trying to work at that?

CORNELIUS - Beleun may yantz ? There were more leaders but he was ahead of them. His signature was enough for a passport. They gave?out a passport and gave his signature that was good enough . He was that much trusted by the government. Dowreturns?from here and Beleun may yantz from there,they were the cog in the wheel.

PAETKAU - What did you have to do to get a passport?

(Mrs. Nickel showed Henry some pictures of these two above named men Plus Leaming ton Church.)

CORNELIUS - I got a passport before the rest of the family went. I was supposed to be mobilized for the army. Without taking me off the register,we were training for Selbnischultzes ? You were trained military training for farm boys ; we lived at home and twice a week we had to go to the next village where there was an instructor and he trained us in marching and shooting but then of course we didn't shoot. They would give us military training. Iwas supposed to take off the register if we wanted to go away but I just skipped away. I went to--I had to pay $22.00 --American dollars that my father had . Iwent to the office where Beleun Mayyantz was and applied for a passport and two days later I got a passport, he had his signature on it and that was all that I needed. I went to Moscow and got in touch with the CPR and they shipped us to Lodveeau where we stayed two weeks and then to England and from there to..

PAETKAU - What year was this?

CORNELIUS - 1924. I started out in March and got here in June.

PAETKAU - Who traveled with you?

CORNELIUS - Well my chum that I started out with he was Deitrich Hildebrandt. He is living in the west now. While we were waiting in Moscow --well in Moscow we had to wait 5 days . Easter came and then all the offices were closed and then the first of May. I said I started outin March, that doesn't make sense. Well anyway there were two holidays so we couldn't make much headway then some others joined us. You probably know

these people that came up --Patreeun Epp--Obrum Epp. He was in Virgil, she was minister, Henry Epp is his son. The Epps adopted sister that was Tina , that was my wife's brother . Henry Nickel is my brother you see . Did you know my brother in Vineland?

AGATHA - You said my wife's brother---your brother's wife.

CORNELIUS - Well anyway. The Epp family and then the Unruhs children they were missionary Unruh's children from Alrum(?), they came along too. They joined us in Moscow then the whole bunch we were 17 people together.

PAETKAU - So you were on private passes?

Yes. All these people had paid their passes.

CORNELIUS - The family came later, the rest of my brothers and sisters, and parents.

AGATHA - I came then at that time too--our family.

PAETKAU - Where did you have medical inspection then?

CORNELIUS - Moscow. The rest of them they all had their medical inspection in the colonies; at home. If they didn't pass they just had to stay home then. But I took the chance of medical inspection in Moscow. Then of course we had medical inspectionsall over, in Litheeum and on the boat and then again in Quebec .

AGATHA - It was really something.

PAETKAU - It was most interesting and informative spending an evening with Mr.& Mrs. Cornelius Nickel . I was very pleasantly surprised at the outset when they began showing me some of their own collections of reminiscences, invaluable documents were shown to me which I have taken along and hope to have preserved in the archives in microfilm form at least. One is a chapter on the events and experiences in my lifetime by Mrs. Agatha Nickel nee Wiens, a 49 page document of reminiscences. She also mentioned another one to me which I will be picking up from their son Alfred. Then there was a family history of the Wiebe and Nickel families, compiled and written by Cornelius Nickel, translated into English by Ernest H. Nickel and including also some chapters on Russian history and a numbef of photographs. Thirdly most invaluable collection of memories and reminiscences by Cornelius Nickel written I believe subsequent to his retirement in 1971. Beginning of their arrival inCanada 1924 and then tracing those early years in quite some detail and later years more brevity including numerous photographs, statistics as well as articles from papers,

letters to the editor and so on. I was overwhelmed with their interest in and concern for preserving their story and passing it onto their children. Their knowledge about Russian Mennonite history was immense . They seemed to have read most of the books that have been written about the Russian colonies. The evening was spent talking about their Russian experience. Mrs. Nickel was more or her reminiscences rather, were more about the experiences of horror and terror under the Makhno raids and bands which she experienced personally. It seemed to be a very deep experience for her and yet one which she was willing and able to share admirably. Mr. Nickel perhaps had not experienced the extent of the atrocity in his own family and hence his perspective was somewhat different . There were both very free to share , to answer my questions and I felt impelled to allow them to continue their own presentation as they felt motivated though at times it may have digressed into areas which were not of my immediate concern, which felt maybe significant at some other point . Their perspectives were different as I indicated and this is brought out most clearly in the attitude toward the Tsar. Let me just add here that in subsequent conversation over a cup of tea when we got back to this issue Mrs. Nickel reaffirmed their love for the Tsar and Mr. Nickel said we loved the Tsar because we knew nothing about him. In other words it was out of ignorance of perhaps lack of knowledge of his real policies and what he was doing to others in the country that Mennonites remained so devoted and loyal to him for so long. But he said that the Tsar was a weakling and his own attitude was quite clear from the conversation earlier.

Part II of Interview #3

Date : June 8, 1976; 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Place: Mr. & Mrs. Cornelius Nickel

Interviewer: Henry Paetkau

The first tape in this series concerned their war and revolutionary experiences in Russia. The second tape deals with their experiences on immigrating to Canada and the early years here in Canada.

PAETKAU - I'd like to ask you more about your immigration out of Russia. Last time I think we got as far as you were leaving . Do you remember the places you had to stop for medical inspection and so on?

CORNELIUS - Yes.

PAETKAU - What kinds of procedures did you have to go through there?

CORNELIUS - I wouldn't call it any procedures, we just had a doctor there and a CPR officer and we had an inspection. It only took them, if I remember right, about 15 minutes.

AGATHA - But Papa.....

Then of course we went to Debow from Moscow, and in Moscow we stayed 5 days because there was a holiday while we were there. The offices were all closed then we left for Deebow and then in Deebow we had another medical examination. We stayed in Deebow for 2 weeks because all of a sudden they got information in Deebow. It was a great big camp, well I guess you wouldn't call it a camp, it was a great big buildings. At that time when I was there there were 2,000 people most of them were Jews, very few others besides Jews. They left for America. They couldn't move on because Americans wouldn't let them in. We couldn't go on because all of a sudden they sent out from Canada information or instructions not to let anybody more in. I don't know why but that's the way it was so we stayed there for 2 weeks. In Deebow again they fumigated all our belongings. You call it fumigated?

PAETKAU - Sterilized.

CORNELIUS - Yes.

AGATHA - Disinfect.

CORNELIUS - Yes.

AGATHA - She spoke in High German.....

CORNELIUS - Then on the ship again they inspected again--we had medical examinations on the ship before we landed in Quebec They found a dead louse on one of our companions . I forget now exactly who it was; I think maybe it was one of the Epp kids. On their shirt they found that louse. We really didn't believe--we thought they had planted that louse there so they would get credit for being so observant for seeing such things to prove that they earned their bread and butter. They had to go through next the comb, hair and all that to make sure that no ..?

AGATHA - It was a good thing we did.

PAETKAU - Were there a lot of sick people when you came over Mrs. Nickel?

AGATHA - Not very many.

PAETKAU - They didn't detain very many?

AGATHA - No. They did a few. There was a family....she came over with some of the children, they had 13 children, and he stayed in .....and then he came over and it wasn't very long that he died. It was very touching how they tried to pay their fare; they had no money either and this poor widow how she tried to pay it. My husband he was lucky they had money, they could pay and we didn't. We didn't even, well we barely had enough money to go to, to bring us to the border. It was very very hard for my father when we came and he was always so consciencous and the first thing we have to do is to pay resi..? . . and always that's the way it was. After he died my sister found a piece of paper where he writes about the razishuze(?) how hard it was for him and then he wanted to pay the razishuze and he had money and he sent it to the board . They had one pig and they thought now this pig we will butcher for ourselves this year because they had hardly any meat at all so they sent money to the board and they wrote back $23.00 we need more. Then my father said well then we sell the pig and they got $23.00 for the pig. My father had made a promise to God, if you help me pay this year the razishuze then from now on I will give 1/10th to you. My father had always been very very generous but this now he would be starting to really count the money and that's what he did. And he had to give up the pig yet and he sold it and got $23.00 andthen he sent it and theywrote back. He wrote it on a special piece of paper we found in his Bible. For him it was really something that we had no more razishuze and every time we wanted something . no.... (German)

but always razishuze. Then finally it was paid. I was married and we had to pay it when we were married and my father he, well I had worked a little bit , well it was 6 months we were in Canada after I got married. Then my father divided the money you see there was my grandmother who couldn't earn any money and my youngest sister and my mother either and then it had to be divided amongst us children . My part was $120.00 .

CORNELIUS - I think so. But then we got from Coffman the money lend at 4%. Here at razishuze we had to pay 6%, the CPR. We borrowed I think it was $75.00 was our share that we lent from Coffman. And we paid off the razishuze. Coffman A. or Coffman too was kind that way to the immigrants, he was a very very hard man to his own employees. He cut the wages during depression time and was very hard. To the immigrants for one thing he lend money I think $20,000 altogether to help pay off the razishuze. Everybody in Ontario got a pair of rubber boots from him. Do you know this?

PAETKAU - No.

AGATHA - That was really something. We had to go to the plant and we got our rubbers.

CORNELIUS - No, we got ours in Vineland, didn't we?

AGATHA - Well, I don't know. I got mine here, I was still here when I got mine.

CORNELIUS - Oh yes, you were in Wellesley.

AGATHA - We were in...and work. ..We only had those sandals, those wooden homemade sandals. Then papa says we have a little bit money and my brother-in-law he went to the store and bought us each a pair of shoes. He just measured length of our foot and then he came up with shoes and these shoes looked so beautiful but oh did they hurt our feet. I remember on the boat we were lying there, we had our shoes on and our feet up high we couldn't walk in them but (chuckle, chuckle) we had nice shoes. Then we took them off again and we couldn't wear them and finally then later on I wore them, I was married and I had them here on the farm yet.

CORNELIUS - The shoes stretched and your feet shrunk.

AGATHA - Yes, and my feet got used to it I guess. but I'll never forget it.

We were always a jolly family and we laughed and joked about this--our feet, who could walk the best in the new shoes and it was all kinds of fun but it was really something. Just measuring the shoes the length and not the width and then our feet weren't used to it and our feet weren't used to it / we were most of the time barefooted. When we came to Wellesley I was so sick on the boat, ugh, I thought I would die. Then my uncles and my aunts came He was our leader on the boat and he said, "Noch ist kein Mensch an Seekrankheit gestorben." And I said, "Ich werd die Erste sein die daran stirbt."
I was so sick. At home everybody had malaria in the family and I didn't and now on the boat I was the sickest. I couldn't keep a single, solitary thing down; everything came up. It was just terrible.

PAETKAU - How did they treat you on the boat?

Oh very nice. Some of our people they didn't be very nice ; what I thought was kinda rude. As soon as we crossed the border, went through the red gate and then they had a great big kettles full of soup and then they dished them out. You see we had starved but then that year that we left we had plenty to eat in Russia . Then, well it was mostly water and it didn't taste good at all; it was a funny, funny taste. But those people meant well and they had cooked kettles and kettles --you could see they were peasants and on the open field. Well at first when the train stopped we had service and we sang "Nun danket Alli Gott." We were crying and hugging laughing and all kinds of things; the emotion needs we just got out, was very very dangerous and so we got out. It was funny. Oh yes that soup it didn't taste good. We had to bring out own dishes.
There were some people who tasted it and they poured it out so that the poor people could see it. I think that was very bad taste; they meant so well. We kept our soup and took it on the train and then when we were way off we poured it out. It was just not adequate but I think that was the best that people had. Then papa says they did what they could for us, and we have to show appreciation even if we can't eat it.
There were many comical things that happened.
CBL we were in box cars and there was no toilet and then the train would always stop in the middle of the field and then all the people rushed out and behind bushes and behind a little grass and wherever--well it was impossible to hide--one would sit there and one there and there and then the train all of a sudden he wanted to go andthe people were running after the train and the man was holding the pants and running and everybody tried to grab the next

AGATHA _ person and pull them in; there was no ladder or anything. And I know that our father wasn't here well he was there, behind the train some place and now the train left and papa wasn't here--well where will he be, will we ever find him again. Well you couldn't get from one box car to another so we had to wait until the next stop and then papa came, oh were we happy. On the last car they pulled him in. We were all like a big family, it was marvelous. The funniest thing, oh there were so many things that happened. We were six families I think in our box car. There was my father and my mother and the rest were all widows with children. And they all knew us from back in Schenckfield and they wanted to be with my parents and papa looked after all those widows. And everything was so worn; the clothes were really worn off and the bedding too and then my cousin he slept and then in the morning his sister she said, "Oh yah, was hast du getan?" And then he had ripped the feather tick. It was so weak and he ripped it and he emptied the feathers and everything was full of feathers; everybody and everything and he was just sitting there and having his fun. He was a very jolly person and just laughing and lookingat theothers and his sister had her hair all full of feathers and everybody. There was no way you could sew that feather tick, it was just so weak it would just tear. Oh it was really something we had such a big laugh over it., In spite of all this our hearts were heavy, there were so many comical things that happened--well I think it was because we were young and nothing looked so serious then. But when we came out of Russia that was really something. When we got there we were quarantined and we had to strip all our clothes off, everything and that was just just terrible. The women were all separate and then the men and then we were pushed in a room and there was steam and water and then we had to clean ourselves and our clothes were all taken and I guess fumicated and then when we got out we got our clothes. Then there was really crying and all kinds of things going on--babies and everything bite us and we were such a big crowd of people, embarrassed as we were--we were very modest you know and now to expose ourselves completely that was just something horrible. Then we came to Reega, I think it was on a small boat through the Keear Canal and then to Antworken and there we changed into a larger boat. When we went through the Keear Canal that was just marvelous. They had just had rain and for the last time I heard the nightingales; they were singing in the trees and it was just so very, very beautiful. We all had to stay together so that we had to board the boat as soon as possible . And just one person from each family could go and that's where our brother-in-law bought us our shoes that we were so proud of.

AGATHA - Well we were seasick and that was really quite bad. The mothers were sick and the little children were running around and laughing and the sick mothers had to run after the children. We were lucky , my sisters were grown up, we were 13 or so and it wasn't so bad because we didn't have any small children. Our family and 9 other families before we got back they said they found some pimples on my father's back and there was a little island and the boat came in and it took 10 families to the island for disinfection. All we did, we stayed there one night and then we were on quarantine there and then the next morning we went and we came to Quebec and then the train just had left to go to ONTario. It was so nice, the people treated us so marvelous. Then we went on the train and in Montreal, Quebec they gave us each a testament, well just ST. John. Well then everything went just beautiful.

PAETKAU - Who was there to meet you?

AGATHA - I don't know. They spoke German. Then we were put in a train . Those 9-10 families that were put to the island, there were no children, just grown ups. So I don't know were we really sick or did we just have.....Well my father he just had pimples and he had them all his life and I think he had them when he died. So that was really nothing. And we came here to Waterloo and we came to Erb St. and then the people had all left and they had lunch for us and that was our first sandwiches that we got. We never had sandwiches before and these Mennonites had prepared nice sandwiches for us. Then we walked from Erb St. yah, the train stopped at Erb st. where it crosses Erb St., well it was a trolley at that time. The man that was, MR. Steinman, he was over the Russian refugees and he had to see that we all got a place to work and so he was there. And his son told us that when his father came he was so terribly excited to come. Well they didn't know what we looked like or what we were and then he went into the restaurant for lunch because we didn't come for such a long time The rest were here but since we were on that island we were a couple hours later. Then he went to the restaurant and had his lunch there and then he wanted to pay and he had not a penny in his pocket, he forgot his billfold at home. Then he said the next time I come back to Waterloo I pay you. "Yes that's what they all say but they never do"and he went outside and he saw one of his friends and he says "Give me 25¢" and he went and paid him. We were in 2 cars here, by then it was very dark, it was night. Then we drove from here in the car to Wellesley and they had prepared for us an old house. The Mennonites had really done a wonderful, wonderful thing. In

the kitchen was a long table and that table was just loaded with goodies--cakes, bread and pie and cookies and meat, summer sausage, and pickles and canned stuff. and it was just loaded. And we came and we thought it was like Paradise, and the people were so nice, so nice. There was a girl and she was a little younger than I , and "Oh, she said, "I thought you would be black, and you are white." Our family we were fair haired . And right away she says, "Oh, mama I want those two girls to come and sleep with me." Then they took us to their house and we slept; she slept in the center with my sister on one side and me on the other and this was so strange with me because at home you were taught to be careful with whom you sleep so you won't catch a disease--usually it was lice and here this girl she wasn't even afraid of us, it didn't even enter her mind that we could have a disease or that she could catch something from us. It was so very touching you know. I'll never forget that, that was so marvelous. Then for breakfast when we got up we could hardly understand the Pennsylvania Dutch but it didn't take us long then we understood. And the breakfast she had: fried potatoes and eggs and cookies and pie and porridge and I don't know what all and we just couldn't grasp all this. And they were so nice to us, they were really marvelous. I can never thank them enough . And that made me decide that as long as I am able to help the poor , to do what I can for the poor because they were so good and we were strangers. And they really looked after us.

PAETKAU - Did they ask you about Russia, about your experiences there?

AGATHA - Yes, they were very interested. To them it seemed so remote they just couldn't grasp this. It was a though they just couldn't understand us. Still they were very, very nice. They liked our singing, we sang and sang and sang.

PAETKAU - Did you go to church with them too?

AGATHA - Oh yes. We couldn't understand, it was a Pennsylvania language that the minister spoke too. Then later on we understood, it was just at the beginning that it was kinda hard. But they were so nice. And then they watched each other and that was so comical that they thought---I was workingat one place and then I helped with the bringing in the grain, loading and then she said, "Nein, Agacha, Du gehst nicht

mehr aufden Wagen." I said, "Why." And she said, "A neighbour has seen it, and she says you are working too hard and that isn't right." She said she would do it. And I said , "No." Well she was expecting a baby you can't do it. And she said, "No, the neighbours are getting angry because you are doing work that you shouldn't do. Well we only got $2.00 a week so it wasn't very much and then she took me to church and then the next I knew she said, "I am going to buy you a dress ." I guess I wasn't nice enough for her. Well with $2.00 and when we came home on Saturday we gave those $2.00 to papa and papa put this to the Reiseschuld; everything was for Reiseschuld. And we were not going to buy anything and we went barefooted and we were so very careful that we wouldn't use any money. Then she said I can't take you to church like this I am going to buy you a dress. And I'll never forget she bought me a green checkered dress, no it was a blue one. Then I wore it to church and someone probably told her that wasn't good enough and I got a white blouse. It was terrible with green check. Our neighbour she thought we weren't paid enough . I guess there was a little bit something I don't know what but we heard later on that they hired and didn't pay enough wages. We had to work hard and $2.00 wasn't enough. At that time when a girl worked in the house she got $10.00 a week and we got only $2.00. Now last year when I talked to the lady that I worked for then she said, "Agatha, Du hast mir viel gelehrt. Ich hab dir das nicht gesagt." "You were much smarter in doing housework than I am. But I never let on that you knew more than I did." And I always thought that maybe I wasn't good enough or she would have told me. But I guess they didn't want to spoil us so I tried my very best to please them and I always had thought maybe I'm not working hard enough , maybe I'm not doing well enough. Now after 50 years she's saying, "Still I'm doing things the way you did. So it's quite interesting . But they were good to us, very good to us. I can't say anything , the pay wasn't much that's true but other than that they were very very good to us.

PAETKAU - Mr. Nickel do you remember how you felt when you arrived in Canada? In a strange country what were you're feelings at first?

CORNELIUS - Well I don't know. I felt the great expanse of Canada. When we traveled from Montreal to the West we kept going and going and going on the train and there was practically no end to it. This was an immigration train , I think it was called colonization trains. Have you heard of these things?

you could cook your own meals there. There was a little stove on the end of the car , burn with wood and sometimes coal and you could make your own tea there and in Montreal we got a big chunck for our company --we were 17 of us. We got so many loaves of bread (this was all in a cardboard box) cheese bologna. Not much else. We had our own kettles along to make tea and we ate there. We finally came to Saskatoon and we had to wait there for the train to Rawston, several hours; 5-6 hours or something. What struck me there first . I met a young man on the street, he was a Mennonite . He had come the year before, he was from the Old Colony Mennonites. He was about my age and he showed me around . He said, and we were just walking around on the streets, very busy section, and he said, "Let's go in here, in this business." Well I hesitated, I thought this was something like in Russia when as soon as you came into a business , in a store one of the clerks would walk up to you and ask what he could do for you and I didn't have any money to spend anyway. "No, he said, "Anybody can go in here without anybody coming and asking you what you want." We went in there and he said everything that's in this store you can buy for 5,10 or 15¢. "Well, I said, "That's strange, suppose someone wants to buy a suit of clothes or something." I didn't say anything, I was too embarassed to ask such a question. I didn't know you would only have restricted things that you would sell for 5,10 or 15¢. We went past one counter after another and nobody even hardly looked at us. They didn't even pay much attention to us and finally this young man he bought 2 chocolate bars and gave me one to eat. and I thought this was wonderful this was the first chocolate bar I had ever eaten in my life you see I never had such a thing in Russia --with nuts in you know and all that. So finally we came to Rawston and I went to these Klauses. First at David Toews he was my mother's cousin . Mrs. Klause she had died already but she used to be David's sister, a cousin to my mom too. So I stayed there for about a week . These Klauses were a very nice family and there was nothing but boys and one of their oldest boys was married .

AGATHA - Well that's Walter Klaassen's parents?

CORNELIUS - Grandparents. She had a little baby , first baby I think that was Walter Klaassen. These boys were teenagers up to 20 yrs. I don't know how many, 5-6 when they wanted to go away they cranked--they had a Ford --they had to jack up the back wheel on the Ford

to crank it. They cranked and cranked and cranked then finally they got it going. Once they got it going then they let the wheel down, othewise they couldn't crank it. It was one of these very old kinds. I heard them say (they talked German most of the time and in between they talked English too but of course I couldn't understand it) bet your knife. So I got curious about this, they said this quite often so I got curous about this what does it mean--bet your life. Then old Mr. Klassen I asked him what does it mean , "Well he said, "The boys, the English, the other people they say bet your life." So that wasn't nice, it wasn't very Christian . So instead of life they said knife, so they got away with it, words were grammatical. Then they phoned around for me to get a job and that's where I got my first job at Fulks, John Fulks. What impressed me in Saskatchewan so much at that time was this great big farmers, a half a section of land or a whole section of land and still they were poor and didn't have any money. Where I come from in Russia, land was wealth and they estimated a man's wealth by the amount of acres he had but here the amount of land didn't mean a thing. John Fulk was always in debt he couldn't --he told me then--he wanted to have this great big tractor. I guess he borrowed it from his brother-in-law or something and he ploughed bush land. He had chopped a bush off a couple of years before and there was stumps about 6-8 inches in diameter and we ploughed this land with a great big tractor, it was a great big fly wheel on it, not tracks like you see now crawling around. There was a great big fly wheel around and I kept on cranking this--I had to turn the fly wheel to start it --and a great big plough and we ploughed this bush land , we broke it up. Then I carried an axe and I followed behind him and whenever one of the stumps didn't cut off, when the plough didn't get the stump completely cut off I had to cut off the roots. Sometimes the plough turned up the stump with the roots and I followed right close behind and it wasn't cut off completely and then flop back up as soon it flopped back up my leg got caught and John had to stop his tractor and free me from this stump that was caught. He told me then to buy the gas or kerosene whatever he used for his tractor. And to have his tractors repaired , he had trouble getting credit for it. The meals were quite frugal and lacking, I don't remember eating much meat. But every Sunday we got a chocolate pudding and that chocolate pudding it tasted something wonderful. Oh, when we got to Klaassens that very first meal I don't know what we got there but for desert we got rhubarb pie and I think there couldn't be anything better than rhubarb pie in the whole world.

We never had such a thing as pie like they make here. We had all kinds of other deserts in Russia but never had the exact pie. This rhubarb pie tasted wonderful. But I soon found out we were not expected to take 2 or 3 pieces of pie . But I was tempted to ask for more pie but I didn't and I'm glad I didn't ask because it would have been embarassing. Here at Funks the meals were quite poor. I don't think we had meat more than two or three times a week. He just couldn't afford to buy it. He had small kids in the house , 4-5 children . What struck me too was these buildings. He didn't have a tree in the yard or a shrub or flower or anything at all, it was just tall grass right up to the door and a path through it from the door to the barn. The people didn't do anything to beautify the home or to make it more comfortable to have a windbreak or something Nothing. No fruit trees, nothing. And I seen so many farms like this and John Funk was one of them. Then another place --well at John Funks I got malaria fever, I told you that the last time. Well because it was so very very dry and they didn't expect much crop and they didn't expect to earn much and I wanted to make a lot of money (al l these Russian Mennonites they wanted to make a lot of money) Then I didn't go back anymore after I got away to cure my malaria. Then I went to Flowing Well, that's further south and they had a good crop there. They had the highest yield that year --well I went there, first to Herbert and they had a Bible study meeting or something there and they announced there was an immigrant who would like to work and I went along with Jacob, John, Herbert too to Flowing Well and he said I could stay for $1.00 a day. So I stayed there and it was a very very nice family and that place there, the farmers had more, well this Jake and his father they had trees planted around the house , windbreaks, strawberries and raspberries and a few fruit trees too. They had more of this, they beautified the place and Jake Preet was a very nice man and the work there with his son, Richard , he was a bit younger than I, not much, and we ploughed the fields for $1.00 a day until harvest started. Before harvest started I worked for Pete Preet, that's his brother. That again was a farm that was absolutely no tree, no shrub, no nothing. I worked there for the same price until harvest time. Then to stook the sheaves, we got $3.00 a day. Then when threshing started , Frederick, another brother he owned the great big threshing outfit that you saw pictures of in the book, then I got $5.00 a day and I thought it was big money. But before we started

CORNELIUS - threshing ,Arthur Unruh and I we always worked together , Unruh was one of the missionary children that I came across from Canada he worked there too. And our stooking was all done and there was 3 days left before threshing time so we went out to the neighbours we went from place to place to stook the sheaves for all the farmers that hadn't done theirs. We came to one place first and we stooked there for one day ,no just half a day and we got it all done. They were amazed that we worked so hard. And they paid us I guess $3.00 a day too. Then we were done and we went to another place, we just went across the field and we came to a farmer and he didn't have anything, any stooking done on his place, nothing, all cut and the sheaves were just lying there in the field . Went to the farmer and wondered if he wanted to have this done. Yes he said, "How much money do you want me to pay you?" Well we said, "How much do you pay?" Well you can either take by the hour, day or you can stook by the acre. Well Ok we said we'll do it by the acre. So we got on a little rise where we could see the whole farm right around we could see all the fields and he said that's 20 acres, 15 acres, that 30 acres, etc. And we said we want 10¢ an acre for that and we want 25¢ an acre for that and so on and so on. And we agreed to that andhe said O.K. go ahead. So this young guy we worked andwe worked. We got up in the early morning, around 4:00 and we worked till breakfast and 7:00 breakfast and the meals it was just impossible to eat those meals at that place--Hout was his name--it smelled. She butchered a chicken and the woman she put something in there that just smelled awful, just the smell overwhelmed you. Then we drank so much water and the only thing that we did really enjoy and we did eat inbetween the morning and the afternoon they brought us coffee, cookies, cake, sandwiches and stuff and we filled our stomaches with that. Then we worked late at night as long as we could see and we only had a couple hours sleep and then the next day we went out again and did the same thing, then we got diarrhea, oh did we have diarrhea, both of us. It was terrible, we were so weak we could hardly work. But then we made $8.00, this was piecework that's why we worked so late, so early and so hard, and we made $8.00 a day. But then of course he didn't have any money to pay us so he paid us after we threshed and then we finally got paid. We had to go twice before we got paid.

PAETKAU - How did these people react to you as immigrants? How did they treat you?

CORNELIUS - Very nice. There was absolutely nothing to complain about. Of course sometimes we did something that we shouldn't have done for instance at Pete's place I was collecting stones on a wagon and the horse, I was told too that you have to watch the horses , when you stop and go away to collect stones on the field you have to draw them back and tie the reins so they couldn't run away. I got a little careless and then a swarm of these flying ants which were very very bad at this time. There came a big swarm of them like a big cloud and they settled on the horses , and under the cap we always carried a kerchief to cover the neck so they wouldn't fall down your back and bite you . They sat on the horses and the horses got panicky and they ran away on me and I couldn't --they ran away and they got to the first gate, they had these barbed wire fences barbed wire gates and they got through the gate and they tried to get through the other gate but it was closed , So they stepped right on the gate and they fell down and they made a big mess and they tore the windmill, it was right next to thewindmill and the wagon tore a piece of the windmill off so it wasn't safe anymore--it was supposed to pump water but they didn't have any water and it was useless anyway. The horses weren't injured at all, they were tangled up in this barbed wire but they weren't injured so not much damage was done except this windmill. During the harvest a couple of weeks later a great big windstorm came up . In fact the grain was cut, maybe 2/3rds of all the grain was cut already and only 1/ 3 left but they lost a lot of wheat from the heads because the wind beat it out . Then the windmill started shaking and we were afraid it would fall onto the barn and ruin the roof on the barn . I climbed up and tied a rope through it and there was half a dozen fellows and we pulled and pulled itdown out of the way. But that windmill it was so weak because my wagon had hit it. The people were very nice to us . There was absolutely no discrimination or anything. Of course we always did our duty, we worked hard.

PAETKAU - These people all spoke German so you could communicate.

CORNELIUS - They spoke Plattdeutsch. These were Mennonite Brethren at Flowing Well.

PAETKAU - You mentioned last time that you had studied some English along the way out of Russia.

CORNELIUS - Yes that was in Reebough (?) That was where we stayed two weeks and we learned during these two weeks we had maybe daily lessons, probably 10 lessons altogether until we went off. This gave us a few,-we could

make out, we could communicate a little better.

PAETKAU - So how did you learn it here?

CORNELIUS - Well just by communicating with people. After we left from the West we came back here, we worked in Vineland and had to talk English and then we got married and then we worked in Winona and always worked with people . Winona we worked for E.D. Smiths and he had got most of his people, his working men on the--he had a great big farm, 600 acres of land, farm land and nursery--and they were most English immigrants. He got them over fromEngland and that's where we got most of our English . That's where my wife she too learned English there in the factory --E.D. Smith's canning factory.

AGATHA - I learned most of my English from my neighbours and from my children. I didn't have a chance to take lessons or anything like that. Then when the children went to school that's when I really first learned English . We didn't want the children to first speak English we wanted them to speak German like our oldest one he knew just German. When he went to school he only knew, could say yes and no, that was the only English he could say when he started to school. And then we always spoke German to them and then later on when the second one went to school then they started to talk English together and we always put our foot down, no you are going to speak German and then when the third one went to school then it was, then we couldn't do nothing any more they talked English when they came home from school . But to us they spoke German and we spoke German to them and sometimes when they were readingthe reader I listened to them and that's the way I picked up my English then and then later on as they grew older then they started to talk more English and I went to my neighbours and then especially in the hospital that's where I had to learn my English . I was in the hospital quite a bit and that's where I picked up quite a bit of English.

CORNELIUS - We had papers that we got "Der Bote" and "Rundschau" and all these and the"North Western" from Winnipeg and all these papers they always emphasized stay German . Don't loose your language and don't start talking English with your children . Well still now around church there's many people they know good English and they don't go to the English sermon service, they want to stay German. They have the Deutschverein and so on. It's alright, sure it's good but we just couldn't do it with our children they started talking English and we wanted to communicate with them so we did.

AGATHA - Yes, but Ernie when he went to university he said that many times how much it helped him that he used the German language . You see he took up geology and the best geology books at that time they were in German and that helped him so much.

CORNLEIUS - Well in his course it was compulsory to have German

AGATHA - He wanted to read no matter what it was. While he went to school and learned the English then he came home and put his book on the sewing machine and I had to read what this was and that was and he learned German; to read just as he did the English . And he still writes German letters off and on .

PAETKAU - Did you feel loneliness, homesickness?

AGATHA & CORNELIUS - Yes, very much.

AGATHA - Well my father always talked about going back to Russia. And when Hitler was marching into Russia then he always used to say, "Now we are going home." "Children pretty soon you are going home and we will be home again." And for a long long time we were very very homesick.

CORNELIUS - I was very homesick too but we never thought of going back. And many Mennonites that I met they would have gone back if they would have had the money . They didn't have the money and the chance to go back but they really were so homesick that they wanted to go back. I know quite a few of them like that . I never even considered that, of going back . I was homesick for the conditions, for my friends in Voolich where I used to live . Of course we wrote letters back and forth, a few anyway.

PAETKAU - Were these people have a real tough time here that they wanted to go back?

CORNELIUS - Yes everybody had a tough time, I don't know of anybody that didn't have. But they were just not,--even if they had a good time I think they were homesick anyway. I was still young and was homesick, you can imagine a person of 50-60 years. A strange country, a strange language , on the streets you couldn't understand what the people talked, they couldn't communicate with these people and they didn't feel at home. It's peculiar that even in Paraguay, people who had been there for 10 years or maybe 15 then they came to Canada and they were so homesick they went back to (end of tape)

AGATHA - My parents were far away. I think if they would have been closer I wouldn't have been so homesick. Then we lived on a farm and that was a very very hard life for us when we lived here; Strausburg on a farm . We didn't have money to make the down payment and we had all the Reiseschuld yet and my Reiseschuld yet.

CORNELIUS - We bought about 1928, 1929, the depression time, the worst time . We couldn't have started at any worse time than that.

PAETKAU - You mentioned earlier these people were M.B.'S out West. What were their relations like between the Kirchengemeinde (General Conference) and the M.B.'s?

CORNELIUS - I don't know. We didn't get in any contact with other Mennonite churches. I don't know--they never talked about it, they didn't belittle us because we were the General Conference Mennonites didn't belittle us or anything like that. We went to their churches and participated. They--I wouldn't call them good Christians except this Jake Peter where I stayed. Pete Peter was a younger man and Jake was older. I worked at Pete Peter and was in the house for maybe a month before we started threshing. For instance he had two little girls they were oh maybe the oldest one was 7 and the youngest maybe 5. He had his sister living there with him and keeping house and looking after the children. In the morning for instance he would have religious--he'd read the Kalendarblättchen

AGATHA - Morning devotions.

CORNELIUS - Morning devotion, yes...before breakfast, before we started eating . Then he was a very jolly fellow, kinda chubby and jolly and he started telling all kinds of dirty jokes and that really surprised me. He told these dirty jokes that you would only expect to be told on the streets somewhere in the work gang. And here was his sister sitting there and the little children and he probably thought the children wouldn't catch onto it but I'm sure they did. That's a kind of life I really couldn't grasp it, I couldn't understand it. It really surprised me that it was like that. Not only with Pete Pete but the rest of them, with the whole community except Jake Pete. Jake Pete, I have the highest regard for Jake Pete. But the others were that way. The girls, the two they went to the evening service in the church, special and then they came up, they stood up and declared themselves for they were saved by Christ and the Holy Ghost were over them and all that and they declared themselves and how wonderful it is to be a child of Christ and then they

CORNELIUS (cont'd) -

went home the girls and the boys they gather, they went to the cars and had the greatest time you know playing around. Hypocrites you see. I had never experienced anything like that before. In the old country if somebody declared themselves to be a good Christian he would live it. If they openly declared themselves to be--I know they were hypocrites there too you see--they said too O.K. I'm a Mennonite and a Christian and then he cheat somebody or something like that but openly declaring themselves to be a child of God and then right 15 minutes later doing all things what they shouldn't have done.

PAETKAU - How would you compare the religious life here to the religious life in Russia?

CORNELIUS - In Russia I would say it was more reticent--is that the right word for it?

AGATHA -

.....

CORNELIUS - No, no I mean they didn't come out openly with their religious confessions like they do here in Canada you see. I think we are so strongly influenced here by the American variety of evangelism . People come out more for God and Christ and the Holy Ghost and all that even if you don't mean it. It's expected of them I guess. In Russia we didn't come out openly with it we--people that were really Christians in Russia they would live it instead of proclaiming it. I thinks that right, wasn't it mom?

AGATHA - Yah that was very very emphasized--don't talk about it, let people see it. That was when I was in church too. It was always let people see it, not your talking it.

CORNELIUS - Evangelism, we didn't have much evangelism until Hoover came. These American--you know when we talk about Herbert Hoover you know what they mean? That's Hoover what came over to distribute food there in Russia and he was an evangelist by profession. And he evangelized that's why he had such a tremendous success there amongst the Mennonites because people never had anything before like that. Such a powerful, forceful preaching you see and stand up and declare for yourself God. And he hollered and he smashed his fists on the pulpit and threw his Bible down with a crash you know and something like that you know to get the people really excited you see.

AGATHA - But you know we were really hungry after all this.

CORNELIUS - Well sure. Hungry for what?

AGATHA - For the Word of God. Because you see we went through this famine you know and I think that brought us all closer to God.

CORNELIUS - Well I don't think that has got much to do with it. We were never used to this kind of--then I still remember when we were still in Vineland, we were a few months in Vineland you see, and then there was a Pentecostal Church there and they had a special and they went around and invited everybody to come to the services. And the--some of the Mennonites went and of course it was all English and we didn't understand English you know. But a little girl she was 8 years old. I know this little girl but I've forgotten the name of it but this little girl 8 years old she didn't know any English at all and when she heard this evangelist, especially Pentecostal yet, he was just raving about all this, religion and all that, and so loud and clapped his hands and this little girl she started crying. Right away they rushed up to her and you will be, are you saved? are you saved? and of course she didn't say anything. She couldn't understand what they said to her and she nodded her head. And "Oh, praise the Lord, this girl is saved", and all that kind of stuff you see. This girl was just emotionally upset you see. She was crying because of all this commotion you see . Of course Hoover wasn't quite as bad as that. But still his way--he had to mention that there was very many people that got converted to Christ through Hoover you see. Then we had in our church it was not well should--in night, almost once or twice a week at least they had people coming--they had these meetings, evening meetings, religious meetings. I remember I went to some of these meetings and I remember this complete, ridiculous nonsense that they came up with at these meetings. One, especially Fishau, Schönau that's ....east of us where we lived. We lived in Blumstein. One of these came down and he started. He got up in the pulpit and he says --a delegation had come from Lichtenau,that's where the church was, to ask him to preach that evening. And he says,"Nope I couldn't come. I made arrangements with all kinds of--had a program there, I couldn't possibly make it." Then the Lord he told me, "Jakob, du must gehn nach Licthenau und dort sollst du predigen heute Abend." So had God spoken to him you see like that. Well then he couldn't do it then-- he couldn't help it he had to come here you see, that's why I'm here now you see. Something like that, the ridiculous things he came out with. So, well they had adopted this kind--they were quick in learning these things from Hoover you see. We never had anything like that in Russia before.

PAETKAU - The churches here then, the immigrant churches that were organized in Waterloo, in Vineland and so on were they much the same as your churches in Russia then?

CORNELIUS - Yes, very much the same.

PAETKAU - The same kind of service?

CORNELIUS - The same kind of service. I know, Mennonites are more or less conservative and we were as conservative as we came over, we stayed conservative awhile. We changed very little. For instance Leamington church is even now much more conservative, much more like the Mennonites of Russia. In Russia the women sat on one side and the men on the other side. Only very very slowly in this church in Waterloo did this change that they mixed up inbetween. But Leamington still has got it, well they just bearly started now, very few started mixing in but not very many yet you see. Then for instance this collection plate going around we had that after the service. That's the way it was started here after the service.

AGATHA - But in Russia we never had collection plates.

CORNELIUS - But still we had--I just want to point out how conservative we were you see. When the last song was sung in the church then the collection plate went around and then the people would put in their 5 and 10¢ you see. Then this went on here in this church for maybe 20 years and then we had this Henry Epp, H.P. Epp, he's now in Vineland and he was our minister here. And he wanted to make it a little more modern, bring in new little changes slowly into this here (unintelligible) And he came out with an announcement that from now on we will have the collection plate start before the sermon, at the first part of the service. So we did that for maybe half a dozen, or dozen times or so, for quite a while. Then when he was away then they called a "Bruderschaft" all of a sudden here in our church and they said that's not, no way of doing it, we have been doing this for so many years, we have been having the collection at the end of the service and we should have that again. And it was proposed and of course a few big mouths got up and to talk about it and to say why because---one of the reasons was then by--we give our collection by what we hear in the sermon, if the sermon is good then we give good collections, if the sermon isn't so good we give less. That was one of the reasons. Then we decided--well I didn't vote for it anyway. I voted against this proposal. When the minister came back it was established and that we would have the collection again--over turn his decision that he had made. It was very very embarassing. It was very poor policy of

CORNELIUS (cont'd) doing that, after the ministers trying so hard to make it, to put a little bit, bring it up to modern times a little bit. That's just to show you how conservative we were you see and how slow it changes. Some churches are even now some more advanced more progressive others are more conservative. Leamington's very very and I think maybe the west sometimes even worse.

AGATHA - Well see in Russia we never had a collection plate passed around, never. It was always in the church at the door, either side of the door was a box that's where people put their money in and nobody knew how much it was or who gave it. It was put in there with no name or nothing. They emptied out every week or so. I don't know, how did we look after the church, was it again in Russia, you see the caretaker had to be paid. The minister didn't get paid, but the caretake did get paid.

CORNELIUS - I think maybe they had a ....

AGATHA - From the land?

CORNELIUS - Yes I think from the land too. I think there was taxes for it.

AGATHA - Then people would go to work and make wood and things like that free.

CORNELIUS - About progressive and conservative services in the Mennonite church. I like this, I was at least once at this here Rockway Mennonite Church. There the ministers give the sermon and then they concluded and they passed copy around you know, they get copy and they sit there and discuss what they had said. I think that is really very good. I think that is marvelous to have something like that. I know the Unitarian Church they have this too.

AGATHA - Well papa we shouldn't criticize like that. I think they want something what we experienced not....

PAETKAU - I am interested in how this affected the religious life of the people too; like these experiences and like you say some of the changes. How do you think it effected their faith? What kind of an impact did it have on their faith?

CORNELIUS - I don't think it made much more difference.

AGATHA - Mmm. I think so.

CORNELIUS - No I don't think it did much difference. In our church here we have very much the same kind of sermons that we had in Russia except that we have more educated people now. In Russia, a prominent farmer was likely to be chosen as the minister, lay minister, they were all lay ministers anyway, or a teacher. Very often teacher were chosen

CORNELIUS (cont'd) for the ministry. Well then they were educated but they didn't have any ministerial education as far as like they have here you see--speech therapies or speech education or voice culture and all that. We had good ministers, very good ministers in Russia and some of them very very poor. They just read off--in my youth when I was young, my childhood we had a minister in Besentschuk where I was brought up. And we came together in the school we didn't have a church, we came together in the school for our Sunday mornings. He just read, he had a book and he read off this here sermon that was supposed to be for that certain Sunday for that--this book was for 52 Sundays and each Sunday had a certain sermon and he brought this every year again the same, same thing again. I could remember, easy remember the things he had said the year before and then it came back the same subject.

AGATHA - But those sermons you know. We got the book from your mother and they were eight pages long.

CORNELIUS - Yes, yes, they were long. It took at least a whole hour just to read it. Then this minister, in this same book there was always this prayers too that he read off. They were all printed out and then this prayers was always mentioned that God may save the King, the Tsar and the Tsarina and the name of the Tsar and the name of the Tsarina and the Crown Prince and all these princes. It was all that God may protect them and give them wisdom to reign the country right and all that. Then the Tsar had advocated you see and he was in prison. And then he kept still on reading the same because it was in the book. He didn't change that, he didn't just skip it you see he just kept on reading it again because it was in the book. That's the kind of minister we had there.

AGATHA - Yah but that was not very....you didn't have a church like we were in a church....

CORNELIUS - Well what's the difference if it was a church or a schoolhouse.

AGATHA - I know. Yes. But he wasn't really a minister. Wasn't he a teacher or something?

CORNELIUS - No, no, he was a farmer, a lay minister.

AGATHA - Yah. Well, see that was such a small community there, just nine families. That isn't much. Well the other where they had the real churches built they had different ministers too you know.

CORNELIUS - Yes, but then in Blumstein this Loewen, he wasn't much better.

AGATHA - Yes, but then there were nice, well....

CORNELIUS - I said we had good ministers too. The one, Epp, he came from Berdyansk. We told you the last time where Berdynask is on the sea coast. He had been a teacher in a--and a publisher of a religious Mennonite paper too. And he was in our church for a long while. He was there, in fact he saved our church. That was after Hoover the M.B.'s tried to take over you see. All these people that were converted to the M.B. church, the Baptists and all that. Then this Epp he saved our church. He was well educated,he was a very well speaker and a good personality. He kept the congregation together so they wouldn't fall apart completely.

PAETKAU - But the ministers didn't get a special theological training or anything like that?

CORNELIUS - I don't know of anybody that ever got theological training.

PAETKAU - What about here when you lived in Vineland. Was the church organized there already, was there a group meeting there? Mennonite.

CORNELIUS - Yes, there was a Mennonite group. Were we in Vineland when Jacob Weins was elected minister? We were in Vineland yet?

AGATHA - Well you see we had church service after that service was over. Then we...

CORNELIUS - Coffman's church.

AGATHA - Then we got, we were just a small group there too.

CORNELIUS - But then Wiéns was elected when we were still in Vineland.

AGATHA - Yes, he was in Vineland and then he was elected our minister.

CORNELIUS - As a lay minister too . He didn't have any training.

AGATHA - But he had.....

CORNELIUS - You know about this Wiens, do you?

AGATHA - Bernhard Wiens. He died in Vancouver. He was the eldest in.....

PAETKAU - J. B. Wiens.

AGATHA - Yes, but he was an educated man. He had been a teacher in Russia. So he was....

CORNELIUS - But he didn't have any speaking abilities when he first started. It was quite embarassing for him . I guess he went through hell practically . He used to stand up and speak and he didn't know--he didn't have any abilities but he developed himself quite nicely .

AGATHA - Oh yes.

CORNELIUS - He was very good. I like him.

AGATHA - He was---that's why I think we should be patient with the young people. Like I have seen how this J. B. Wiens , how he worked himself up and what became of him in his later years. That he was really--you have to give him credit you know, this young people. The way they try and really succeed with God's help. I think it's marvelous.

PAETKAU - Then did you go to this church here once you moved to Kitchener?

AGATHA - Well it wasn't a church what we had. What was it-- theatre building or what?

CORNELIUS - Yes, but we weren't here then.

AGATHA - Yes I have been there too.

CORNELIUS - Well then I don't remember.

AGATHA - Yah. yah.

CORNELIUS - Well anyway as soon as this church was organized. it was boughten first from the United church and we belonged right away to this church.

AGATHA - And I remember . In your little book, isn't it written down, we paid $5.00 was it "Kirchensteuer" a year?

CORNELIUS - M-mm.

AGATHA - And we thought that was terrible. We could hardly pay those $5.00. We lived on the farm then and it was oh, just--I know that he came to the farm with some men and they wondered how much would we be able to give. And then I think you gave $5.00 and oh that really cut us.

CORNELIUS - I really don't remember that,

AGATHA - Well you have your book you should read that over. And this was really something. And then he has written down in his book, "Kirchensteuer' bezahlt für ein Jahr $5.00, and that was really something. For many months we didn't even make $5.00 a week you know, sometimes it was $1.00 and sometimes $1.30 and that's the way it was. It was very hard. But as the time went on it went a little better but those first years they were very hard. We had no insurance, no nothing and then I had to have an operation and the hospital bill had to be paid and everything had to be paid and just so very very little money you know. But it was a very very hard week, (unintelligible) And one year we couldn't even pay the taxes on the farm; I think it was $30.00 and we just couldn't--

CORNELIUS - Oh yes we paid the taxes but we didn't pay the interest on a loan,

AGATHA - Or was it that. Yah, the interest we couldn't pay. And then our third child, Lisa, she had a tumor in her face . And we went to the doctor and he saw it and he said she was just a baby and he said he has to take her to Toronto and a Rotary Club will take care of her. He said you won't be able to pay for that. And then the Rotary Club took care of her and she was treated and completely cured. The tumor went away. And I still to this day think it's so marvelous that we have those organizations here that look after those poor children and help them.

PAETKAU - Do you remember Jacob Janzen? Do you remember about him? What kind of a leader was he in the church?

CORNELIUS - Yes. A very great leader in our opinion.

AGATHA - Oh yah.

CORNELIUS - He was--he had a very good education for one thing and he was very good speaker and he was a very good organizer. He organized these churches, he united them. In Russia they were different congregation, different shades of Mennonites. And he organized--there were the Mennonites that had the very strict rules for excommunicating for things and others they were more liberal you see and that's where our name comes United Mennonite Church because he united them all; there's no difference now between these churches.

AGATHA - There was a group that they had this footwashing and different things.

CORNELIUS -Yes. There were different shades of Mennonites, and he united them. It's not that he united only---

AGATHA - But not the Brethren, it was just the Kirchengemeinde that he united.

CORNELIUS -Yes. The different shades; there was not so much difference anyway just a little bit. But I have the highest regards for Jake Janzen. He wrote some--even when we were still in Russia we had some of his plays like the "Schultebott" and "De Bildung". Are you acquainted with them?

PAETKAU - Yes.

CORNELIUS -And then he was a young man and he published--he brought it out, and they were performed there in highschools and so on, these plays. Another thing when the Selbstschutz was on, maybe not then but a little later when he was--when they had their Mennonite brigade there fighting against the Reds he was a Chaplain in the army, you see, he lived with them. They looked after the young man and helped them as much as he could in their troubles and their---he did that where I don't think of anybody else that would have done it you see. He was a--I have the highest regard for him.

PAETKAU - What did people say about the fact that he wrote plays and....?

CORNELIUS -Oh there were many many people that didn't like that at all. And the articles that he wrote here when he was in Canada and the Bote in the Rundschau . Maybe the Rundschau didn't even print his articles (unintelligible). And he was attacked quite often by people that thoughts, oh a minister shouldn't say that, a minister shouldn't write that. I know he was more progressive than very very many other Mennonites. He was ready to take--to--well--progressive is the right word for it you know--they--for--just to be not only tradition but just for traditions sake you see. He was for traditions but that has a meaning , if it was helpful or if it was fun or good you see but not just for traditions sake he wouldn't stick to a tradition. And he started off with renovations in the service here too more or less, more than Leamington or other churches you see.

PAETKAU - He was also quite an educator wasn't he?

CORNELIUS - Well he had been a teacher in Russia. In what way do you mean this educator?

PAETKAU - Did he have "Bibelkurses" or things like that?

AGATHA - Yes. He wrote books, he wrote the Sunday School books you know.

CORNELIUS - Yes he wrote books but I don't know if he had courses here.

AGATHA - Oh yes, well you know with the young people before he had----

CORNELIUS - The "Katechismus Klassen". Well any minister would do that.

AGATHA - No but one time I think, didn't he have religious "Unternicht"?

CORNELIUS - Well I don't know. I don't know about that.

AGATHA - You see we were on the farm and our children were small at that time when they started you know (unintelligible) We didn't have a car, we couldn't come to church often then we went to the English service there where we lived, in that church. And took Ernie when he could speak English then he went there to Sunday School with those Mennonites the Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonites. And so we went there to church. I know I couldn't understand much but still it was going to church and that's what meant so much you know. Then finally I----

CORNELIUS - Then also he was author of several books you know under general difference. I read the books in fact we have quite a few, not quite a few maybe five or six or so books of his.

PAETKAU - But he was well thought of by the people?

CORNELIUS - By most of them yes.

AGATHA - Oh yes.

CORNELIUS - There were a few, always a few who didn't like his progressiveness. Especially he was attacked in the boat when he wrote something. For instance I remember he had little stories sometimes. "Pate Upon a Poost" was one of them, stories on the boat you see, and it was fiction and everybody knew it was fiction. But people said, "Oh that lies. Fiction is lies. How can a minister come out; a minister and he's an "Aeltester" yet and he come out with lies like that?"
Well isn't that ridiculous? It was meant to be fiction.

AGATHA - Well if he used a familiar name; he liked to write about the Mennonites then if he used a name that the people knew was familiar then they thought that was really that person with that name and it wasn't at all. Then that's why--well that was just ignorance. Some people were just ignorant they didn't know any better.

CORNELIUS - The sad thing about this was that we couldn't--our congregation couldn't afford to give him a descent salary. You see that was very very sad. Well from Russia we weren't used to even offer a minister money you see a salary. We thought well he's a minister let him preach that's all that's to it and if he needs some money to live well let him find a job besides you see. Well I guess he wasn't able--he didn't have time to even look for another job besides you see and he was getting older too.

AGATHA - Well the conference paid him some.

CORNELIUS - Gradually after a while the conference started to give him something and then I guess the congegation too paid I think, if I'm not wrong, I think they paid as high as $600.00 one year to him. I think that's the most he ever got from a congregation, a year.

AGATHA - I was thinking we were all so poor.

CORNELIUS - We were poor and we weren't used to paying ministers.

PAETKAU - Were there other lay ministers in the church as well?

CORNELIUS - Yes, we had others too. There was Braun, John Braun. And there was Isaak Dyck from New Hamburg. And then of course Jacob Wiens he was lay minister; he never got a cent. I don't think he every got paid for a year. I don't think so.

AGATHA - He was working.

CORNELIUS - Yes. He had a job.

AGATHA - Yes this being a minister that was elected a minister in Russia that was an honour; that was really an honour to be elected as a minister. And then he was just like a missionary. A missionary well he went, didn't get paid or not much and this was just---

CORNELIUS - They didn't give much--they didn't do much, the ministers maybe preached once a month or so that was all they did; the lay minister. We had always just like Leamington they have a dozen ministers there. That's the way we had in Russia you see.

AGATHA - They only pay I think the "Aeltester". But it was always if somebody was elected as minister well he was-well that was a very honoured position.

CORNELIUS - And, as much as I know, only well-to-do farmers were elected ministers or teachers .

AGATHA - Well nobody else could afford it. The poorer ones couldn't afford it.

CORNELIUS - Oh yes they could afford it even much better but they wouldn't have any prestige. You know, minister had to have prestige. And the poor man couldn't even afford to send the rich man because he didn't have anything to do. They had time on their hands.

AGATHA - Yeah but no, well he had to earn living for his family.

CORNELIUS - Yeah but most of the time he didn't earn, he didn't work because there was no work. There was only seasonable work.

AGATHA - But see they had to--family things--so often had such large--poor people usually had such very large families.

CORNELIUS - That's why they had more time on their hands than the rich guy who had 12 cows to milk.

AGATHA - Yeah but then it was---

CORNELIUS - Well it was just naturally you see they always--because it was a position of honour they got the most honourable man they could get. That's just natural.

AGATHA - But then in Russia those people that were poor; that is one thing that I have to share amongst our Mennonites; how clean they were. You could go into their house and it was so clean and so neat that we --I know that we went to visit them the young people and I was a young girl and how clean they had their houses and everything. The big family and they worked very hard and their place looked so neat didn't it?

CORNELIUS - Oh yes. Well it was a characteristic of the Mennonites; it's not only the poor were that way but they all were.

AGATHA - Yeah. I mean even if they were poor they didn't let their place go to--they kept it in good order and had it nice and the children were clean and very rarely that there would come a dirty child to school. Well that would be just terrible if somebody would come to school dirty and so they would always try---

CORNELIUS - But you couldn't say that about the Strebnicks (?).

AGATHA - Well that was an exception. See there was (unintelligible) how nice did they have--

CORNELIUS - Oh yes I know, I know they were nice. But then there were exceptions too.

AGATHA - And they were--there were exceptions that people were dirty just as there always are. But I think as a whole they were hard working and clean, most of them. It was not very often that they were dirty and filthy. We were always taught not to make any difference between the rich and the poor. We went to the poor people in their houses and I was astonished how clean; earthen floors and a thatched roof but everything was so clean and so nice and the children they were so well behaved and it was remarkable.

PAETKAU - Going from religion to politics did you follow the political scence in Canada at all in your first years?

Yes.

PAETKAU - What was your impression of that and your attitude toward it?

CORNELIUS - To tell you the truth all Mennonites at the start they were all for Liberals because the Liberal became in and we were told this by all the Canadian Mennonites that if it wouldn't have been for the Liberal Government if they wouldn't have come in, Premier MacKenzie King then we wouldn't have come to Canada at all you see. So we were very strong Liberal. That has changed to a little degree. I am still Liberal federally but I voted Conservative for Provincial Government. But I followed politics not ardently but I always read the daily papers and followed it as good as I could. Right now I am disgusted with the whole, with Canada, completely disgusted. I think we are going to the dogs. With crime taking--increasing so very strongly and everybody is crying for more liberty and more liberty and I think we have got too much liberty. I've been advocating dictatorship for the last couple of years already you see, dictatorship something, like Socrates he recommends benevolent dictatorship and if it is at all possible to have benevolent dictatorship I'm all for it; something like Indira Ghandi got now in India, nothing anything like Stalin or Hitler was. That was terrible. But this is strikes. Canada is ruining---ruining their overseas market and still we have strikes--full of strikes. Right now in Canada we have postal strikes and we have shipping strikes and we have air strikes and strikes all over and it's

ruined the country and we don't do anything about it. The government is not strong enough to do anything about it and I don't think I will vote Liberal anymore. I think I will vote for,I don't know what. For one think I am very very strong for capital punishment and I am for strict law and order and as far as capital punishment is concerned I am even for--I don't mean hanging--they always say Oh, how terrible is hanging and this murder. Well it isn't murder it's execution. But I am all for a needle in the arm and put him out of the way. They're a nusiance and they're dangerous, they're a cancer to society. Get them out of the way and let us live on to be a good country. And I think it's a deterrent. They all say capital punishment is not a deterrent; it is a deterrent. A person that is put out of the way can't do it possibly again, like they do it always now. They get away with everything now--take hostages, rioting and for one thing I am all for labour camps . I am for concentration camps like they had in Russia or in Germany. Get these punks that don't want to work and do damage you know, what you call this when you make damages in schools?

AGATHA - Vandalism.

CORNELIUS - Vandalism. Make them work! Ship them way up north where they have lots of bush and give them a crosscut saw or a swedish saw and make them cut cord wood and so much a--not only 6 or 7 or 8 hours out of a day, make them work 10 or 12 hours a day. And if they don't produce enough lumber give them less to eat. Just the way we did in Russia that would be the best deterrent for crime here in Canada and it would be good and healthy for these young guys; these folks that don't want to work and just live off the government--live off the few--it's getting less and less now that people---the tax payers get less and less. The young people that earn a living they have to pay taxes for the--not only for the oldsters --I heard just last number somebody said there was 26,000 people here in this district here over 65 that gets pension you see. It has to come from--somebody got to pay for it. Then all these punks that don't want to work you see, get them to pay for it you see. I am very--I'm disgusted. I think the European countries, let's say the Northwest European countries are way way ahead of us. They have Germany, France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, they are way ahead of us with their social system and with their law and order and with their--Look what the "Wintschaftswunder" that Germany went through you see. That's because the people are self disciplined. And if they are not self disciplined they get disciplined from above. But discipline it is.

PAETKAU - Do you think Mennonites should get more involved in politics or be more aware of these things?

CORNELIUS - I think so. I think they should get more involved. Let their view--well they get involved, right now I don't know if they get involved. For instance the Mennonites they have wrote a letter to President-- to Trudeau and advocating that capital punishment should be abolished because it isn't right, should be rehabilitated--people, shouldn't execute them. I think that's wrong, I think they should--should use your brains and see that the country's going to the dogs the way it is now. The Greeks were uncomparably wiser than the western countries ever were . And they didn't execute their criminals because of a deterrent-- well yes for a deterrent yes but not because of revenge. Now they said, Oh if you execute persons for revenge you see, revenge is against God's law and all that. They executed them because it was good for the country. That's what they did and that's what we should do too. We should have tough laws and enforce the laws too. People get away with everything, they can ruin teachers, in Toronto, 6 weeks on strike and they, I'll bet you there's houses of students that had to take their year over again because of that. Well it's ridiculous to allow things like that.

PAETKAU - Where the Mennonites in Russia able to govern and run their own villages effectively?

CORNELIUS - Yes. M-m. Very effectively. They had strict--they kept law and order too. Not, if--in fact if they did something that's not quite nice for Mennonites to do but they hired Cossacks or these Caucasian tribes, _____(?) and so on for to police their villages. To keep them in order you see. And we had jails there too. Well the jails were never--I don't--I never heard that a Mennonite was put into jail but in the olden days when my father was still young there were young punks that did all kinds of things that they shouldn't do; they were taken and given lashes you see, by the Schultze.

AGATHA - By the village authorities.

CORNELIUS - But the administration couldn't have been other than good because it was very successful. With all the arrangments that we had; we had schools, institutions and hospitals and doctors was all run by this here organization of the colonies. Insurance too.

AGATHA - The parents and the teachers they worked together. They had one goal to really bring up good people you know, raise a good generation. And the parents and teacher

AGATHA - stuck together and that made it; everybody looked up to the teacher, a teacher that was a good person. There was--what the teacher said that goes and parents were always--and that helped--

CORNELIUS - They had prestige. The teacher was a person of honour, and they had prestige. In Europe it's the same thing, it's still the same thing now I think. In their village the top man is a Mayor and the next one is a teacher or the pastor. But the teacher is one of the higher class people and they had respect for them.

And it was always. When we were in class and the teacher came in we bowed to the teacher and then we said, "Guten Morgen" and we bowed to the teacher and we honoured our teacher. And the teacher behaved honourably.

CORNELIUS - Sometimes yes or most of the time.

AGATHA - Well if he didn't then he wasn't hired anymore. But most of them were very honourable people.

CORNELIUS - Any pupil if he didn't respect the teacher he got his back hand pounded.

AGATHA - Yes he sure got respect pounded in then. Yeah that was--and we would never talk back to the teacher or anything. Oh the teacher was--then if we would come home and would tell the parents something about our teacher that we thought wasn't exactly right then we got reprimanded so badly well you don't talk about your teacher, what the teacher says is good. And I think even the parents sometimes didn't completely agree but they would never tell us that the teacher wasn't right. The teacher was right and there was no question about it. And I think that's why it worked so effectively because they worked hand-in-hand the parents with the teacher. Well the teacher was Mennonite and he had the same belief like our parents had and I think that's why--it was a wonderful way of bringing up the young people. We knew this is it and that's the way it goes and that was ordnung.

PAETKAU - I spent another very interesting two hours with the Nickels as they reminisced about their emigration to Canada and their early years here. Much more detailed information about their early life in Canada can be found in Mr. Nickels personal reminiscences which are on file on microfilm in Conrad Grebel Archives. Mrs. Nickel's own account, chapter 8 of the family history and perhaps chapter 9 which I hope to obtain shortly also gives some information about her experiences. The book to which Mrs. Nickel was referring about the translation early in the interview was a copy of Martyrs Mirror which is in their possession and is apparently the first German translation from the Dutch published in America. Another interesting book in their collection is a publication of some of the works of Menno Simons. Published in 1853. A further document that was given to me to look at was a document called, "What a Heritage". It's written by Mrs. Harry Keyes nee Annie Schultz, and it deals with the trek through Russia of Epp and some of that group. This is a story of a part of that group and the experiences on that trek. I may add again that I felt very comfortable interviewing the Nickels. I enjoyed my time with them and that some of the experiences which they related are contained in their reminiscences but that much of the material on tape is not and that a great deal more information can be found in those reminiscences.