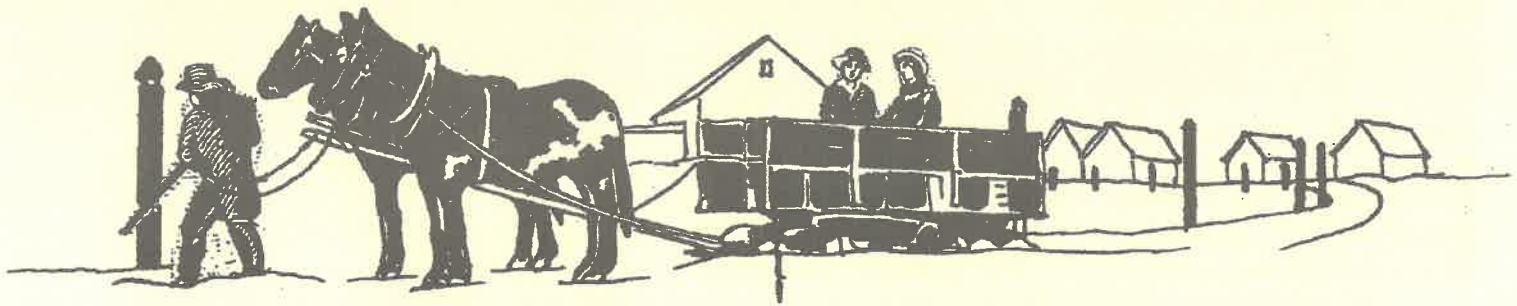


Early villages, railroads and trailways of the Mennonite West Reserve.

Credits: Map - Chris Werner, Wpg., Text - Conrad Stoesz and Lawrence Klippenstein, Wpg; Artwork - Olga (Klassen) Krahn, (OK Signs and Art), Altona; Photos - Mennonite Heritage Centre or taken from Mennonite publications; posts supplied by Canadian Lumber (Morden, Winkler, and Altona); with mounting by Ens Farms Limited (Reinland); lecterns - built by Bill Rempel (Winkler). **Cover Photos:** Left: The Red River at Fort Dufferin, centre: A threshing scene on the West Reserve, right: Unveiling the Art Friesen painting; "A Pioneer of the Post Road" at Emerson in March, 1999.

©2015 by Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. Revised fourth edition.

Printed in Canada by Southman Commercial Printing, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada #5737



The Mennonite West Reserve POST ROAD MEMORIAL TRAIL Tour

The Post Road of the Mennonite West Reserve

The Post Road was an important lifeline for Mennonites of the West Reserve. During night travel or blizzards, travellers easily became disoriented, and risked getting lost because the open prairie had no landmarks to guide them.

In May of 1878 the first settlement leader, Isaak Mueller, sent a letter to all village mayors. It called for the marking of a road with posts from Emerson and across the reserve to Mountain City, located several miles southwest of Morden.

The recently constructed Memorial Trail has twelve memorial sites to mark the general course of the Post Road. Each location is marked with replica posts and an informational lectern highlighting unique features of the locality.

1. FORT DUFFERIN



An 1874 sketch of Fort Dufferin on the Red River. Photo: Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

Our tour begins at Fort Dufferin, just north of Emerson, which was then the trading centre of the region. To get to Fort Dufferin, travel south on Highway #75, from Winnipeg toward Emerson. One mile before Emerson, at the intersection of P.R. 243, you will see a turn-off going east. You will also notice Prairie Oak campground signs, which will take you almost all the way to Fort Dufferin. Turn east and follow the road until you come to a "T" in the road. Turn north and go past the campground about one mile. Fort Dufferin, marked by several historic cairns, will be on the east side of the road.

The Fort was named after the third Governor General of Canada, the Earl of Dufferin. It was established by the Boundary Trail Commission in 1872. In 1874 the Northwest Mounted Police began their ride west from Fort Dufferin to bring law and order to western Canada. Both of these trails or routes were somewhat different from what became the Mennonite Post Road. This road favoured the villages along the way.

Bringing the first Mennonite families to the West Reserve were riverboats that docked at Fort Dufferin from July 1875 on. It was here where the Mennonites organized themselves, confirming their church leader, the *Aeltester* (Bishop) Johann Wiebe, and appointing a settlement director (*Obervorsteher*), Isaak Mueller.

During their six week stay at the Fort, a number of people died and were buried somewhere nearby in unmarked graves. They also began to prepare village land allotments at this time.

In late summer the families set out to establish their new homes. They built sod houses dug into the ground using minimal amounts of wood, and also broke some land before winter. The winter was harsh, but they survived.

2. THE POST ROAD MEMORIAL SIGN



An artist's idea of the early Post Road running through the village of Reinland (1883). Photo: Courtesy of Felix Kuehn, Winnipeg.

From Fort Dufferin travel south on Manchester to King Street, then turn right and go west until you come to Highway #75.

A large sign has been erected at this intersection. It shows a family in a sleigh following the post-marked road. (See cover of this brochure.) The sign was painted by Olga (Klassen) Krahn (OK Signs & Art) of Altona, with construction materials donated by the Town of Emerson.

3. EDENBURG



The General Conference Mennonite Church sessions of 1909 were held in the Edenburg, Manitoba church building Photo: Courtesy Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Continue west along P.R. #243 to the lectern which is located at the Edenburg village cemetery on the left side of the road. The village was settled by Mennonites who had come to the West Reserve from the East Reserve to find better land.

Edenburg had many prominent residents. Minister Heinrich Wiebe was one of the eleven delegates sent from Russia in 1873 to "spy out" the land and assess the possibility of a large scale emmigration to Canada. He died in 1897 and was buried at the old Edenburg cemetery, somewhat southeast of the present one. His head stone has since been moved to the junction of Hwy #30 and P.R. #243, now called "Cairn Corner".

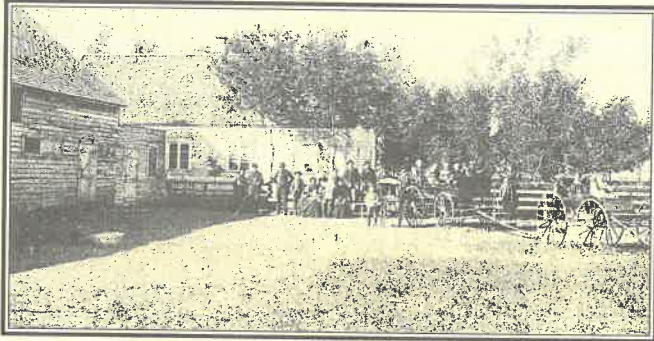
A Side Trip to Neubergthal

From Edenburg one can leave the Post Road and travel four miles north to the village of Neubergthal, which Parks Canada has designated a National Historic Site. The typical

Mennonite house-barns and tall trees lining the street give the village a certain "sense of space". For guided tours of a village in its original setting, call Karen Martens at (204) 324-1567.

Along the way to our next stop notice the flat landscape and open fields.

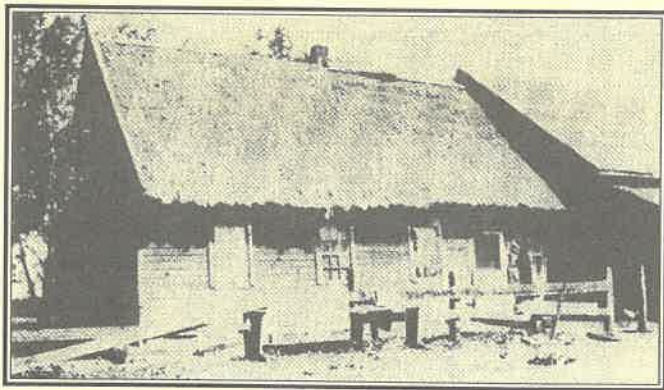
4. NEUANLAGE



The David Schellenberg farm, a famous stopping place along the Post Road. Ca. 1900.

Continuing west, the next stop along the Post Road was the village of Neuanlage. The lectern here is located next to several other cairns on the corner of P.R. #243 and Hwy #30. Neuanlage was also established by Mennonites from the East Reserve such as the Franz Kliever family, looking for better agricultural land. The David Schellenberg family was well-known in the wider community which opened its homes to travellers along the Post Road. At times as many as fourteen persons slept on the floor at night. The headstone of the senior David Schellenberg was moved to "Cairn Corner" by the descendants.

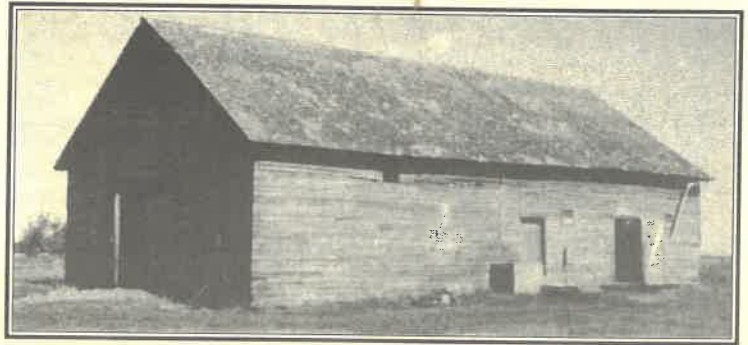
5. NEUHORST



The Isaak Mueller home in Neuhorst. It was Mueller who organized the erection of a line of posts from Emerson to the Pembina Hills to guide travellers. After his career as settlement director (*Obervorsteher*), he settled down to farming in Neuhorst. His thatched roof house stood in the village until 1959.

Continuing west and crossing Hwy #30 along the grid system, the next point of interest is the village of Neuhorst. The lectern can be found at the north end of the village on the south side of the Post Road, next to the creek. This was the home village of Isaak Mueller, one of the most prominent leaders of the West Reserve, and people sometimes referred to him as *Kaiser* (King) Mueller.

6. BROWN'S GRAND CENTRAL HOTEL



The last remaining building on the hotel premises was dismantled in 1974. Photo Courtesy of Red River Valley Echo, Nov. 25, 1970 p.4.

From Neuhorst go west until the next mile road and north half a mile until you see the next posts and lectern. Brown's Grand Central Hotel is your next stop on the Post Road tour. Located on a "school land" section not available for homesteading, was the parcel of land Mr. William Brown bought from a certain Mr. Stevenson. Here he established a first class livery stable and hotel for the many guests travelling the Post Road. He soon had a large English-speaking clientele.

7. SCHOENWIESE

From Neuhorst and Brown's Hotel onward, the Post Road did not follow the grid system of the municipality. Designed to be the main conduit for goods to and from the main economic point, the road wove its way through some important villages along the way. To recreate the western portion of the Post Road, the current road system is being utilized.

From Brown's Hotel go north to P.R.# 243. Then turn left where the next community along the road is the village of Schoenwiese. Here the lectern is located on the former school grounds.

Schoenwiese was one of the largest villages in the West Reserve with 171 persons listed in the 1880 census.

8. REINLAND



Western Canada's oldest Mennonite church building was dedicated on September 17, 1876. The photo shows the building before it was remodelled in the mid-1940's. It has served as Community Centre at Reinland Inc. since 1969. Photo: Courtesy G.G.H. Ens, Reinland.

From Schoenwiese go back to P.R. #243 then west right into the village of Reinland. The lectern is located at the Community Centre, formerly the Reinland Mennonite (Old Colony) Church. The community was one of the most important villages in the early years. It became the home of the first church building erected by the pioneers.

Notice the plaque listing the *Aeltesten* (bishops) who served here, as well as the plaque identifying the role Aeltester Johann Wiebe played in the community and the church. Wiebe lived in the village of Rosengart, two miles south of Reinland. A cairn recalling his ministry is located in the Rosengart cemetery where he was buried. Wilhelm Rempel, an important early teacher and community leader, lived in Reinland.

Beginning in 1922 a large number of Reinland Mennonite Church members moved to Mexico. They believed they could no longer trust the Canadian government after it took away their right to have their own schools.

However, a new influx of Mennonites escaping the Russian Revolution and Civil War in the 1920's took up residence in many of these villages. The G. G. Ens family was among the newcomers. Their classic house-barn has been designated as a Municipal Heritage Site by the R.M. of Stanley and is now part of the Community Centre at Reinland Inc. Tours can be arranged by calling 204-325-4494 or 204-325-4658 or 204-325-5123.

The bridge at the west end of the village crosses Buffalo Creek. The Post Road ran a few hundred feet north of the present bridge.



The Heritage Homestead museum in Reinland. Its last occupants were Jacob. F. and Maria Ens. Photo: Courtesy Henry G. Ens, Reinland.

9. HOCHFELD

From Reinland continue west on P.R. #243 until you reach Hwy #32. Turn north and watch for the Hochfeld sign. Turn west into the village of Hochfeld. You will find the lectern at the Hochfeld school. The village name means "high field". Villagers often boasted of having the earliest seeded fields in spring.

Hochfeld was home to blacksmith Peter Elias, who was an avid contributor to local and other newspapers of the time. He also wrote extensive memoirs which have been partly translated and published.

10. OSTERWICK

Go north through the village of Hochfeld until the next mile road and turn west. This is P.R. #201. Continue west for three miles until you get to Osterwick. The lectern is located at the community centre (formerly the school).

As the Post Road continues west, the Pembina Hills become more and more apparent and trees become more common.

In 1922, Victoria Hayward wrote in "Romantic Canada" how the houses were set back from the road with trees camouflaging the houses.

She also wrote about the village herdsman: "The piper starts from one end of the village, blowing the horn or bugle, as he goes down the length of the street... When he

has passed the entire length he turns around, and the cows come out of the first gate, the second, the third, as fast as the rats followed the Piper of Hamelin long ago".

11. WALDHEIM



A Peters Family poses for a photo by the Waldheim House at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum during their family reunion at Steinbach in 2000. Photo: Courtesy of "Preserving Our Heritage", October 2000, p.1.

From Osterwick go west for two miles, then north for three miles. This is where the village of Waldheim used to be. The lectern is located on the west side of the cemetery. This village was settled in 1878 by 24 families, mostly from the Fuerstenland colony of south Russia. The village broke up between 1883 and 1885.

An original log house built by Julius Dyck was moved to the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach several decades ago. The collapsed remnants of the Peter Hoepfner (1825-1907) homestead, and the cemetery are visible remains of the Waldheim community.

12. MOUNTAIN CITY

From Waldheim continue west for four miles, then turn north one mile on P.R.#432 and then again west for one half mile. The lectern is located at the existing cairn.

The last stop on our Post Road tour is what was once called Mountain City. It lay just west of the western border of the West Reserve area. Mountain City was established by English speaking settlers between 1875 and 1877. At its height it was the county seat of South Dufferin County. After the railroad bypassed the community in 1882, it faded away as the residents moved to the new railroad town of Morden or other nearby localities.

People from across western Manitoba made paths and roads that connected with the Post Road in order to get to Emerson, but the Post Road proper ended here.

The Closing of the Post Road

The Post Road was the most important route of the West Reserve in its time, allowing farmers to bring their goods to market and come home with other necessities of life. The eastern portion of the Post Road still follows the original route as it was established along the grid system.

After the government began to make regular roads in the area, these came increasingly into use since they were better maintained. First the small paths were put to the plow, and then most of the Post Road itself was given over to crop production. By 1930 virtually all traces of the original Post Road had disappeared completely.

Sponsorship: The Post Road Memorial Trail was a 125th West Reserve Anniversary project of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. **Heritage Posting** is the official newsletter of the Society.

If you would like to become a member of, or make a donation to MMHS, please write to MMHS, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4, tel. (204) 888-6781 or

MMHS, 1310 Taylor Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6, tel. (204) 669-6575.

You can visit our web site at www.mmhs.org