



DEUTSCHE VEREINIGUNG VON WINNIPEG GERMAN SOCIETY OF WINNIPEG

121 CHARLES STREET, WINNIPEG, MB R2W 4A6
PHONE: 204-589-7724 / E-MAIL: GSWMB@SHAW.CA

HISTORICAL PROFILE OF THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF WINNIPEG

After the first German settlers had arrived some 150 years ago, there had been several attempts to establish German societies in Winnipeg. Most of them were short-lived, as many transient German settlers used Winnipeg only as a staging point to establish their homesteads elsewhere.

However, one such society must be mentioned here as its members were able to maintain and foster German culture and customs in their adopted land for more than 107 years in good as well turbulent times, including two clubhouse closures during the two World Wars.

The German Society of Winnipeg (as it is known today) was founded by nine German immigrants on January 9th, 1892.

The first By-Laws of the Society lists the following significant 'Purposes and Aims':

1. To support its members in emergencies;
2. To grant loans to new immigrants in need;
3. To organize legal protection for impoverished Germans;
4. To provide social events to cultivate German culture, customs, and language.

These By-Laws proved invaluable for the well-being of the Society.

The Society grew steadily through annual social events such as Stiftungsfest (foundation festival), and monthly dances during the winter months. In 1884 the Society was able to increase the weekly sick pay from \$3.00 to \$4.00, in 1885 a burial fund for members and their wives was established and soon after the Society paid for doctors' visits. From 1893 to 1902, the membership had increased from 61 to 118, and the Society's bank account from \$130.00 to \$2,200.00

In 1904 the Society was incorporated, land was bought at 61 Heaton Ave. and Argyle St. The Society commissioned German born Architect Johann Schwab (who came to Winnipeg in the late 1890's) to design the two-storey brick building. The building was built between 1904 and 1905, and still stands today at the same location converted to a commercial space.

In October of 1904 the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Daniel H. McMillan and the German Consul Wilhelm Hespeler laid the cornerstone for the Society's first own building. In his address, the Lieutenant Governor remarked, that every German who comes to Winnipeg is welcomed, as every German immigrant is a good citizen of this country.

During W.W.I the authorities severely restricted the use of the club, and the Society was forced to rent out the building to cover the ongoing costs. It was not until 1925 when the Society held its first meeting in its clubhouse.

During W.W.II the clubhouse was closed by order of the police, and the Society was forced to sell the building. It was not until 1952 when the Society purchased the building of the Hebrew Free School at 121 Charles Street and Flora Avenue and converted it to the facilities as we know them today.

On January 9th, 1992, the German Society celebrated its Centennial, exactly 100 years to the day. It was a four day, dignified bash, where every politician, from Germany to Ottawa, to the Manitoba Legislative and City Hall congratulated the membership on their accomplishments, and their valuable contributions to Manitoba's community.

The celebrations commenced in the clubhouse of the Society on January 9th. They continued on April 10th with a great concert at the Winnipeg Concert Hall, followed by a gala dinner on April 11th in the Hespeler Centre (formerly the Marlborough Inn, now the Ramada Marlborough Inn). The centennial wind-up took place at the clubhouse of the Society the following day, where the countless volunteers were honoured for their unselfish efforts at a volunteer appreciation party.

To mark this occasion, a 110-page hardcover Centennial Book was prepared by a volunteer committee, financed entirely by private funds from members and friends of the Society. It is definitely the best and probably the only source of the Society's 100-year history. Unfortunately, no funds were available to have this excellent piece of work translated into English, as the general public as well as students of German-Canadian history would undoubtedly want to know about the 100-year history of the Society.

Three characteristics of the Society kept it alive and growing despite many setbacks namely, wise board members who undauntedly kept looking toward the future, thousands of volunteers who preferred to be the silent majority, and the ability of members to form subgroups, "to do their own thing" in furthering German customs and supporting the Society.

Germans and German-speaking people from all corners of the world have chosen Manitoba as their new home for mostly two reasons namely, guaranteed freedom from oppression, and freedom to pursue their chosen goals in life.

The vast majority has also chosen to remain in Manitoba; and this came about for another good reason. Many arrived at a relatively young age, eager to work hard and built up a nest egg which to retire in their place of upbringing. Some eventually did just that, after having spent their most productive life span in Manitoba. However, almost all "returnees" came back to Manitoba within a year to spend their retirement in their country of choice. Why? Throughout their working years in Manitoba they had not realized that they had become very much part of the Manitoba fabric.

We would also like to tell the reader what we think of our new home. The UN has told us twice recently that Canada is the best place to live. And our visitors from the old country marvel at a Prairie sunset from the revolving Royal Crown restaurant, and recall the splendor of the Whiteshell Park, the friendly service at our checkout counters, and they say, "If I could, I'd be here tomorrow – permanently!" Obviously, we made the right choice many years ago!

So, who are we, having chosen Manitoba as the place to live?

In this brief outline we have touched on the history of Germany, and we have attempted to describe the contributions German speaking people have made to our community, the customs they have brought from their homeland and which are now part of our heritage, and their willingness and enthusiasm to become part of our community.

Considering the diversity of German speaking people this was not a simple task. It is, however, a beginning, and the reader, or the student of history, will find in this profile a list of contacts of the German-speaking community of Manitoba to further her interests or knowledge of this subject.

Introduction:

Every ethno-cultural group makes its presence visible by its culture, traditions, and also by its size.

According to the 1991 Canada Census the second largest ethnic group in Manitoba is the German-Canadian cultural group.

German Culture, traditions, and language contribute, therefore, significantly to Manitoba's ethnic mosaic. To appreciate the culture and traditions of any ethnic group one should have some knowledge about the history of its people. This profile, therefore, begins with a brief history of Germany and her accomplishments to society, followed by a treatise of German immigrants to Manitoba, and concluding with German costumes and traditions as practiced in Manitoba today.

Germans in Manitoba:

Germans and German-speaking people from all corners of the world have chosen Canada as their new home. In Manitoba, it was mostly a steady stream of immigrants, beginning with the mercenaries of Lord Selkirk in the early 1800's, followed by a wave of immigrants after WW I which lasted until the Great Depression, and resumed again after WW II, only to subside again to a trickle in the 70's and thereafter.

Regardless of the numbers of immigrants at any time, the vast majority chose Canada as their new home because of guaranteed freedom from oppression, and freedom to pursue their chosen goals in life.

Much of the following has been researched and documented in 1991 by Alexandra Dirk in her work for the German Canadian Congress (Manitoba) Inc.: "175 Years of Germans in Manitoba". Her work is very detailed and a pleasure to read.

1816 – 1826:

First mention of Germans and German-speaking Swiss settlers in Manitoba was made in 1816/17, when Lord Selkirk dispatched some 100 mercenaries of the de Meuron and the de Watteville regiments from Montreal after the Massacre at Seven Oaks (June 19, 1816) to protect and populate the Red River Settlement. These soldiers had originally been in Canadian service in the War of 1812. They served for pay, and outright land grants in the form of lots along the Red River and German Creek (Seine River), close to the Fort Douglas to defend it.

The hard working and disciplined life style of these soldier-settlers encouraged Lord Selkirk to send Captain de May to Switzerland to persuade an additional 200 people to join the original group. With highly exaggerated promises de May convinced some 175 Swiss to leave their homeland which had been ravaged by the Napoleonic Wars and famine.

After six months (November 1821) they arrived at Fort Douglas, via York Factory, to find that no accommodation had been provided for them, and that their expertise as teachers, watchmakers, and pastry chefs made them unsuitable to face the rigors of a Prairie winter, and life on the Prairies in general. While the de Meurons were only too happy to assist the newcomers, especially those with marriageable daughters, other misfortunes befell them: Another cold winter, an uncommon absence of bison's, failed crops, the death of Lord Selkirk, un-kept promises, and the devastating flood of 1826 had finally crushed their spirits.

By the summer of 1826 virtually all the later settlers had left the Red River settlement, and had settled in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana, thereby contributing to the development of other regions in North America. This is now part of history.

1852-1918:

In the following years more and more Germans settled in and around Winnipeg, and the German language began to appear in the trading shops. Bishop Anderson, principal of St. John's Collegiate School, wrote in 1852: *"... my senior scholar can read in Luther's own translation the German of the Gospel of St. John... and we combined thus the ancient with the modern tongues, and those of modern Europe with the two of our own land."*

The actions and political aspirations of two German families provided some interesting events for the future province. Viktor Mager whose parents hailed from Elsass- Lothringen (Germany) owned land at the side of today's St. Boniface Hospital. Colourful George Emmerling from Bavaria, a.k.a. "Dutch George" operated a small goods store for the settlers in the area and built the first hotel in 1885 (McIntyre Building). Emmerling married Viktor's sister, and Viktor married George's niece from Bamberg, Germany. -Enter Johann Christian Schultz, later Sir John and Lieutenant Governor for Manitoba (1896+), who established himself in Winnipeg in 1860 as a doctor, and became the editor of the "Nor'wester" newspaper. He crusaded for the joining of the future Manitoba to the Dominion of Canada which didn't sit too well with many settlers, including Dutch George who envisioned the joining of Rupertsland to the USA under such auspices as "free trade".

What may have been the first recorded bar room brawl in Western Canada's history took place between the two opposing and inebriated parties of Schulz and Dutch George. This first attempt as "annexation" came to an inglorious end when Dutch George quickly sold his hotel and beat a hasty retreat to the US, muttering: *"Uncle Sam would be coming soon anyway!"* History soon proved him wrong.

In the following years more and more Germans and German speaking immigrants settled in Manitoba, and to report on even a fraction of their contributions would be far beyond the scope of this review. However, a few events should be mentioned.

In 1874 George Rath, a vice president of Western Canada's first German Society, became quite famous when he successfully introduced a new method of delivering drinking water to Winnipeggers and outlying homes. Instead of using an oxcart with only one tap, Rath kept the water in beer kegs on the well-known horse drawn brewery wagons of his home country, and delivered the water to his customers through long hoses. "Rather good for Rath", commented the local papers.

Wilhelm Hespeler has probably done more than anybody else to attract German-speaking settlers to Manitoba, primarily Mennonites from the Palatinate (Germany) and Russia, as well as Austrians and Germans of other denominations. The first 70 Mennonite families arrived in July 1874, and by 1878 they, and those who had followed after them, had established some 40 villages whose names are of Mennonite, Austrian, and German origin. Lord Dufferin's wife wrote home after having visited these villages: *"What gain they are to this country!"*

Wilhelm Hespeler had many other interests. By 1872 he was the Commissioner of Immigration and Agriculture of Manitoba. In 1878 he restored the first German Society to a club with social functions from the choral society he had previously created. Aside from his extensive business interests (15 years as president of the Winnipeg General Hospital) he also held responsible positions in the political life of Winnipeg and Manitoba. In 1882 he was appointed as the first German Consul of Western Canada.

The 1881 census lists 66,000 Manitobans, 8,650 of which were German.

Although German courses had been offered at the University of Manitoba since the early '80s, German became an accredited subject in 1886, and was highly recommended for studies in the sciences.

On May 17, 1889:

The first German newspaper "Der Nordwesten" appeared under the direction of Pastor Schnieder and Consul Wilhelm Hespeler, and was greeted at length in the Free Press. In 1900 it had a circulation of 4000; by 1912 it had reached 25,000. Today, some 110 years later, the same weekly is still published in Winnipeg for all of Canada under the name: "Kanada Kurier". – Also on that day in 1889, the first German examination given at the University of Manitoba met with great success.

In 1890:

Some 12,000 Mennonites lived in southern Manitoba; 6,000 Germans in Manitoba, 1,600 of which in and around Winnipeg. In that period, Canada needed many more immigrants, and in the fall of 1890 delegations were sent to Europe to attract settlers. Among these delegates were three Germans from Western Canada namely Klaas Peters, Josef SchÄ¶nbrenner, and Johann Zinkhahn.

In 1906:

Sir Adam Beck, a nephew of Wilhelm Hespeler and a respected hydro chief from Ontario addressed to Winnipeg's business community about the inexhaustible water power in Manitoba.

In 1907:

The position of the Consul was passed on from Wilhelm Hespeler to Hugo Carstens who was still a founding member and president of one of the German societies in Winnipeg.

In 1913:

The University of Manitoba established separate departments for German and French. Student's enrolment in German were as follows:

1913: 22 students

1914: 88 students

1916: 25 students

1925: 69 students

1927/28: 300 students

1914:

The outbreak of hostilities in Europe brought an immediate heightening of pro-British feelings among members of the city's charter group. It made certain ethnic groups the target of attack. Germans who had until now been considered worthy immigrants, were now placed on the list of undesirables. During the course of the war the natural reaction of British Winnipeggers to the German "enemy" was fed by cruel but persistent propaganda.

By 1919:

The charter group was proclaiming that the term Anglo-Saxon was a misnomer and that the proper term should be "Anglo-Celtic". Thus the Winnipeg Telegram declared:

"All Scottish, Irish, and Welsh people and most English folk would do well to remember that they are not the descendants of an insignificant German tribe."

With the First World War the influx of German-speaking immigrants also ended.

By 1921:

More than 60% of the population north of the CPR tracks in Winnipeg was of German-speaking origin.

The Story of Little Britain 1927 – 1939:

Through the initiative of Fr. Kierdorf some 100 German immigrants from the Black forest and Westphalia came to Canada. The CP. steamer "Marlock" brought them to St. John, New Brunswick, where they were served a hot meal and put on a CPR train the same day. When they arrived in Winnipeg they cleared customs and travelled another 20 miles by train to a farm crossing north of Winnipeg which later became known as Little Britain.

Initially they lived in a large commune building (which had been built for them), and they worked very hard to clear and farm the land. Of strong religious backgrounds, their lives centered around the little Catholic Church of St. Margaret's. Their dairy production, shipping milk to Winnipeg, flourished.

In 1919 they founded a "Schützenverein" (Marksmen's Association), and ever since they have celebrated their well-known three-day "Schützenfest" (Riflemen's Meeting) in the Westphalian Tradition.

However, the depression of the "Dirty Thirties" took its toll. The grasshopper plague lasted for three years, and feed for the dairy cattle had to be bought. Little Britain had to fight for its very survival.

By 1936 each farmer had become independent, and, ironically, their lot improved at the outbreak of W.W.II. Today, many of the descendants still live in Little Britain.

From 1930's to the present:

The Great Depression of the "Dirty Thirties" caused a standstill of immigration which, of course, continued through WW II. More than 34,000 German prisoners of war were in detention camps at 25 sites in Canada by 1946. In October 1943 more than 400 prisoners were transferred from Medicine Hat to the Whitewater Lake POW Camp in the Riding Mountain National Park for woodcutting. Bill Waiser, professor of history and head of the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan, provides a detailed account of these prisoners in his book "Camp Prisoners."

German immigration resumed again in 1950, and between 1951 and 1957 alone almost 250,000 ethnic Germans arrived in Canada, some 15% of which came to Manitoba. Even though the war in Europe had been over for over 5 years, much hostility was still shown to these people. Many had only a few dollars, and were barely able to eak out an existence. Undaunted, some managed to do very well for themselves. Most of the men who came at this time were skilled trade's people, and many went into business for themselves. In addition to the many Mennonite enterprises of the 1920/s (for example, John J. Klassen, who established "Monarch Industries", a multimillion dollar manufacturing enterprise). The 50's and 60's produced many firms that were owned by German-Canadians.

Other German immigrants and their children, the New Canadians, played and play an active part in many fields of Manitoba's community. To name but a few, from the very beginning of Manitoba's history to the present time.

Prince Rupert of the Rhine (1619-1682), a German prince and nephew of Charles I, King of England, founded the Hudson Bay Company in 1670, and subsequently explored Canada's interior.

Wilhelm Hespeler (1830-1921) was John A. Mc Donald's special immigration agent, Commissioner of Immigration and Agriculture of Manitoba, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, and the Emperors first Consul of the German Empire.

Felix Paul Grove the German translator and author began his career in Manitoba (1909-1914) as Frederick Philip Grove. Around 1912 he taught languages and science subjects in villages from Winkler to Waldersee and environs.

Before WW I Grove published an extensive essay in the "Nord Westen" paper about child rearing questions of the day. He married a Mennonite teacher, Katherin Wiens, and both shared many employment positions. He wrote novels, short stories, and an autobiography, for which he received considerable rewards, including the Governor General Award.

Arnold Spohr was artistic director of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet for 30 years until 1988.

Henry Feldbrill conducted the Winnipeg Symphony Choir for about ten years, until 1965.

Victor Engbrecht who, until a few years ago, was the head of the Winnipeg Philharmonic Orchestra.

Erich Bergmann (1893-1958) came from Dresden, German, to Winnipeg and worked as a commercial artist. His paintings (water-colours and sketches) are displayed at international exhibitions. With the help of financial contributions from the German community in Winnipeg, and by an article in the German language newspaper (Nordwesten) by Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, the Winnipeg Art Gallery acquired a larger number of Erich Bergmann's paintings.

Ed Schreyer, a Canadian born to German parents, was only 22 years old when he was elected to the Provincial Legislature. He went on to become the leader of the Manitoba New Democratic Party, and in 1969 he became the Premier of the Province of Manitoba.

Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, (PhD Art History, University of Vienna) was the director of the Winnipeg Art Gallery for 20 years. Through his efforts he saw the Gallery through 400 exhibitions, made many acquisitions for the Gallery, and brought about the constructing of the new Gallery. He was the author of six books, and was Honorary Austrian Consul for Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Sonia Carmen Eckhardt-Grammatté the wife of Dr. Eckhardt, was one of Canada's outstanding composers. She was commissioned to compose the "Manitoba Symphony" for the Province's centennial year celebration. Having studied piano and violin in England and at the Paris Conservatory of Music, she had a successful career as a concert pianist and violinist. As a memorial, Brandon University sponsors the annual Eckhardt-Grammatté National Competition for the performance of Music at the Brandon Campus.

Elfriede Berger – Sculptress. Her works include sculptures of Wernher von Braun and Richard Wagner, as well as the centre piece of the founding wall at the Treffpunkt, and the Pan Am Plaque.
H. Eric Bergman- Winnipeg's famous wood engraver.

Hans Peter Lange – Architect, whose projects include 400 Stradbrook Ave. in Winnipeg, the office building of the RM. of St. Clements in East Selkirk, and the former CNR Training Centre in Gimli.

Bernd – Dieter Laengin – Journalist, photographer and historian. He wrote such books as "Plain & Amish", "Der Hutterer", "Deutsche Bilder", and "Unvergessene Heimat: Pommern und Ostpreussen".

Eva Monika Pop – She creates beautiful books for children on her farm in Erikson, Manitoba. Her parents are the renowned artists Jobst and Betti Kuch.

George Swington – Inuit art expert, painter, photographer, and art teacher.

Dieter Erich Wolf – Long time journalist for the German language 'Kanada Kurier' weekly (formerly 'Der Nordwesten'). In 1987 he established the Wolf Verlag publishing house.

There are so many, many more Canadians of German background whose achievements have greatly enriched the lives of their fellow Manitobans – and will continue to do so.

On November 2nd, 1985 a conference was held to organize the Manitoba branch of the German-Canadian Congress, and on April 25th, 1986 the German-Canadian Congress Manitoba Inc. was incorporated, with Mr. Abe Peters as President and Mr. Paul Kammerloch as Vice-president.

In that year Census Canada reported 192,000 people in Manitoba are of German speaking heritage, some 78,000 of which live in the City of Winnipeg. (A total of 2.5 million Canadians reported ethnic German roots.)

In Closing:

We hope the historical information presented here helps new members, current members and the general public understand and appreciate what the German culture and German Society has contributed to developing local communities, Winnipeg, Manitoba and Canada. All the while maintaining and promoting German heritage and culture, with the same drive and determination today to keep the German heritage alive while preserving, promoting and supporting the local communities.