

## Lot 14

Diedrich S. Friesen – 1849-1901  
Katharina Friesen

Jakob S. Friesen – 1850-1921

Diedrich S. Friesen and his wife, Katharina settled on lot 14 while his brother Johann and his wife Anna (Barkman) took lot 4. The brothers came as part of the larger Jakob K. Friesen clan. Two years after arriving in the village, Diedrich handed over his plot to brother Jacob (who appears on documents as the original owner) and moved to Blumenfeld. Diedrich, a literate man who had already taught school on the Borosenko Colony in South Russia, returned to Steinbach in 1880 to teach school in the new school house had just been constructed. After four years of teaching Diedrich left, only to return in 1897 to serve as an assistant to teacher Gerhard E. Kornelsen until 1901. Tragically, Diedrich died at age 52 of brain paralysis—just a few months after he completed a term of teaching in 1901.

## Lot 15

Cornelius Goossen – 1839-1916  
Katharina Barkman – 1851-1912

Cornelius Goossen with his wife Katharina and two children took up lot 15 next door to Katharina’s father, Jakob M. Barkman—the leader of the immigration group. They had three children in all—Kornelius, Katherina and Peter. The family, of course, was grief-stricken when Katharina’s father drowned at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in Winnipeg in the spring of 1875. In 1882 or 1883, the Goossens sold half their farm (which would be around 80 acres) and continued to farm the remainder for another 17 years. In 1900 the rest of the land was sold to Heinrich Sobering.

## Lot 16

Jakob Barkman – 1824-1875  
Katharina Thiessen 1829-1889

As a minister and deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of people in the *Kleine Gemeinde*, Mr. Barkman was the leader of the 18 families who immigrated to Manitoba in 1874. Not only did he lead the village church—he instituted services immediately after arrival—he also took care of financial and land matters on the homesteads. Only a month after settlement, the little daughter of the Barkmans died. Another tragedy followed in spring when Jakob drowned while crossing the Red River while on a trip to obtain supplies in Winnipeg. The entire community was grief-stricken to lose their conscientious leader. One of his sons, John G. Barkman, later served as mayor for 25 years. After Jakob’s death, Katharina married Cornelius W. Loewen who moved in from Gruenfeld (Kleefeld).

## Lot 17

Heinrich R. Brandt – 1838-1909  
Katharina Warkentin – 1850-1888

Brandt moved to Manitoba with his second wife Katharina and five children. The family made its home on lot 17. Mr. Brandt was skilled in carpentry and worked in the trade as long as his eyesight permitted. His wife died in 1888 and he married for the third time. Brandt died in 1909 at the age of 71.

## Lot 18

Gerhard Warkentin – 1848-1900

Warkentin arrived in the village as a 26-year old widower with two young children, and settled on lot 18. His wife Anna (Enns) had died earlier in the spring of 1874. He remarried two years later, then sold his Steinbach property to Wilhelm Giesbrecht for \$700 and moved to *Jantzied* (the other side of the Red River) or the West Reserve. Life took a tragic turn for Warkentin—after a few years at Rosenhof, he moved to Nebraska where he was committed to an “insane asylum” and died there at the age of 52.

## Lot 19

Cornelius Fast – 1840-1927  
Helena Defehr – 1850-1893

The Fast family—which included seven children—received lot 19 where they built their home. Like most of the other original settlers, their first home was partially built into the ground which saved on costs of material and made for good insulation. Mr. Fast became spokesman for the group when it came to relating to their English neighbours in the new land. He was also a gifted carpenter who not only built his own house, but helped some of his neighbours build theirs. In 1876, the Fasts moved to the West Reserve (across the river) where Cornelius became a school teacher, doing carpentry work on the side. In 1906, the Fasts moved back to the East Reserve and Cornelius took up carpenter work again.

## Lot 20

Klaas B. Friesen – 1838-1922  
Maria Defehr – 1842-1916

Klaas Friesen, a man of 36, his wife, Maria and two sons, Cornelius and Klaas settled on the lot where today, the former Penner Chevrolet Oldsmobile has been converted into a mini mall. In 1889 the Friesens built their first wood frame house according to early typical Mennonite style combining house and barn. In 1909, they sold the home to Gerhard W. Reimer, who lived in it for a year when he sold it to teacher G.G. Kornelsen. About this time the lot was divided with the Kornelsens occupying the old house on the westerly part and the Friesens living in a new dwelling on the easterly part. When it became too difficult for Friesen to farm, he sold his land to the village association. The wood frame house was demolished in 1960 when it was still in fairly good condition, and with it went an example of early Mennonite architecture.

This brochure was compiled by Doris Penner under the auspices of  
Steinbach Heritage Committee.



# Steinbach’s First Settlers

## Introduction

In September 1874, an entourage of 18 families from South Russia (presently Ukraine) stepped off a boat at Mennonite Land-ing Site at the junction of the Red and Rat Rivers. This group along with other members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* (“small church”) left their homeland because the Russian government was threatening to discontinue the practice of military exemption for Mennonites (along with other reasons such as scarcity of land). Led by Rev. Jacob Bark-man, they made their way east on lumbering ox carts, and came to a stop at the edge of a creek where they pitched their tents. This was the beginning of Steinbach, named after the “*stony brook*” which flowed at their feet as well as after their village in Russia.

The first hard winter they lived in thatched-roofed log shacks (*sarai*) or sod homes dug into the ground (*semlin*), then got into the serious business of building the village. Each family received a six-acre lot along a road running parallel to the creek—which allowed each home access to water and reliable drainage—as well as 160 acres for a homestead in accordance with the Dominion Lands Act. This land was pooled and divided so each farmer received equal parts of good and inferior land.

The first log school house was constructed in 1875 in the centre of the village with a more permanent structure erected in 1880. The school also served as a place of worship for 32 years.

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The first winter was very cramped in the “dugout hut” Franz and Margaretha shared with neighbours Heinrich Fast—the families each had three children. The Kroekers were entitled to two lots because they owned a “double farm”—the equivalent of two quarter sections of land. The year after they arrived in Steinbach, they built a spacious house which also accommodated the church services of the *Kleine Gemeinde* (literally “small church”) for many years. When Mr. Kroeker died in 1905, his widow moved in with her daughter, Sarah, who was the wife of *Aeltester* (bishop) Peter R. Dueck. Their house was used as a private school for a few years, then occupied by Cor-nelius Fasts. Kroeker Avenue is named after the couple.

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As other settlers did, Mr. Fast brought tools such as a scythe from Russia with which he cleared a small plot and cut grass to build a small temporary hut into the ground, joining hands with neighbours, the Franz Kroekers. The Fasts also managed to make a little frozen hay in a coulee south of the village and ploughed three acres in readiness for the next spring. After nine years of life in the village, they sold their farm to the Kroekers and moved onto Hudson Bay land at the southern outskirts of the village.

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### Lot 4

Johann S. Friesen – 1853-1937

Anna Barkman – 1854-1923

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