“She brought it to Canada in 1926”: Intergenerational Preservation and the (Re)invention of Russländer Identity

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Between 1966 and 2018, over five hundred objects, once owned by *Russländer* immigrants, were donated to the Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) in Steinbach, Manitoba and became artifacts in the museum’s collection.[1] The Russländer, a term translating literally to ‘the Russians’ and used to describe the Mennonites who migrated from Soviet Ukraine to Canada in the 1920s, had survived years of war, revolution, hunger, and violence. By the time they had secured an opportunity to leave, they had very few belongings to bring along with them. The objects they did bring had been protected through revolution and war, were packed into chests and baskets to be brought overseas, survived the journey, became part of new immigrant homes in Canada, were held onto by children and grandchildren, and, finally, were offered to MHV where they were accepted by the curators into the artefact collection. Their survival for over a century may seem miraculous. However, these items had been intentionally and carefully preserved by Russländer immigrants and their children and grandchildren for decades as memories of life in the Russian Empire before the revolution,

their survival through war and famine, and the creation of 'home' in Canada.

In this study I explore the significance of the Russländer artefacts to the family members who donated them to MHV. Using the oral histories collected by MHV curators at the time of donation reveals the meaning and value that the donors placed on these objects, and how that meaning changed over time, from one generation to the next. I discuss how these objects, through intergenerational preservation, created a transnational memory for the Russländer and their descendants, and helped weave family narratives of survival and migration. Some of these objects held deep sentimental value, while others were functional, part of daily routines, and necessary for everyday physical survival. Other items took on special meaning because they had been passed down through generations of families, some dating to the late eighteenth century. The provenance, meaning, and even the original method of acquisition for many other objects is simply unknown. Despite their original function and meaning, these objects, most of which are not considered 'ethnic' objects, have become ethnic symbols through the stories and memories embedded with them.

The shift of meaning and function of an object to one that embodies ethnic and family history is discussed by Laurie Bertram in her study of Icelandic material culture. Bertram argues that for descendants, objects of migration come to "serve as spaces dedicated to the identification and preservation of cultural identity and family memory."[2] The stories associated with these objects "illuminates their role in constructing larger familial and ethnic identities, rather than simply commemorating deceased family members."[3] Similarly, in an unpublished work discussing Imperial Russian porcelain brought by Mennonites from Russia to Canada in the late nineteenth century, Susan Fisher discusses how objects are embedded with memory, and emotions such as loss and longing. She argues that for immigrant descendants, porcelain objects became "tangible connections to their ancestral pasts," and physically embedded with transnational memory through the process of "intergenerational preservation."[4]

The process of embedding memory and meaning within immigrant objects gave descendants a means with which to reinvent their ethnic identity. Scholars of immigration and ethnicity have argued that ethnicity and ethnic identities are not primordial or unchanging, but rather constantly renegotiated. Kathleen Neils Conzen and others contend that it is "a process of construction or invention which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies pre-existing communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memo-

ries."[5] The Russländer experience and trauma of the Russian Revolution and civil war united this group, constructing their identity apart from the Russian Mennonites who migrated in the 1870s and 1940s. Additionally, as Marcus Lee Hansen argued almost a century ago, identities continued to be re-invented with successive generations, whose deepening assimilation into mainstream society called for a different approach to ethnic identity.[6] As descendants began to depart from practiced ethnic culture, they created an identity through the practice of 'symbolic ethnicity,' defined by sociologist Herbert Gans as "the temporary and periodic expression of feelings about or toward the ethnic group or culture through material and non-material symbols."[7] Furthermore, he states that objects themselves can be used as symbols to express ethnic feeling, such as "family heirlooms, nostalgic writing, museum exhibitions, and, perhaps most often, ethnic foodstuffs."[8] The process of re-telling Russländer immigrant narratives embedded the stories within the physical objects that were passed down from one generation to the next. Through the process of remembering these stories, descendants of Russländer immigrants redefined their ethnic identities symbolically through material culture.

Examining the material culture of an ethnic group reveals aspects of identity and community that other sources cannot. The belief that Mennonites are a community whose focus is on the spiritual more than the material has meant that scholars of Mennonite history have typically focused on the church, culture, society, and family, few have examined the material world of Mennonites.[9] This paper does not argue against the notion that the Mennonites held their faith above material things, however it does argue that their interaction with material culture was a part of daily routines and important life events, and thus played a significant role in their lives.[10] In fact, these objects can help us understand the Mennonite world in its entirety. Material culture historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich suggests that objects can be used to provide insight into the lives of their owners, and, furthermore, broader social, economic, and cultural contexts in which they were produced and used.[11] Furthermore, material culture can act as an embodiment of emotion, as discussed by Nicole Eustace and others who have argued that "joys and sorrows can be expressed in how clothing is made, worn, and preserved, or destroyed."[12]

But material objects are not static things either. According to material culture scholar Judy Attfield, objects are "wild," constantly shifting in significance and meaning throughout their life cycle.[13] Similarly, each stage in an object's "life cycle" adds to its significance and its story. Anthropologist Igor Kopytoff has theo-

rized that every "thing," or physical object, has its own biography. The biography informs us where the object came from, who made it and owned it, what is or was the object's role (and how it has changed), and the different periods of an object's life cycle. Notably, an object's biography reveals how its use changes with age throughout its life cycle.[14] When deciding whether or not to accept an object into the collection, MHV curators request as much historical and contextual information about the item and the individuals and families to whom it belonged, or its "biography." Although some objects are significant to the collection for their manufacture or function, most are accepted into the collection for the stories attached to them. Potential donors sometimes provide genealogies, photographs, unpublished memoirs, and other forms of documentary material to enhance the contextual history of an object. However, more commonly, historical background is collected through oral history. The notes taken during these conversations become oral histories of the objects, and reveal their significance to the donor and the object's previous owners. The stories associated with the objects have been passed down to one or two generations, and through this process the object becomes a physical symbol of family history.[15]

Although these items were passed down to descendants of the Russländer immigrants as treasured artefacts, they were of course originally acquired by the immigrants as objects with a variety of meanings. Many were given as gifts. Some gifts were given to couples as engagement or wedding gifts, and oftentimes such gifts were household items like Mennonite-made wall clocks and sets of porcelain teacups and saucers. Others were gifts received at Christmas, or on no special occasion by an individual's close kin or friends.. Other material items had not been gifts, but were simply tools of everyday life in New Russia, such as cooking or baking ware, clothing, or personal accoutrements like jewellery and handbags.

The function of Russländer artefacts changed from the time of migration to the point of donation. When the objects were packed for the journey to Canada, the Russländer selected those that would be most necessary to establishing their new life in Canada, whether that be for physical survival, creating home in a new country, or as reminders of their old life in a Russia before the Revolution. Years later, the role of many of the objects had shifted as they were passed on to children and grandchildren. The oral histories that describe the 'biographies' of these objects reveal how they had turned from objects of physical survival to objects of

identity for Russländer descendants and ways to perpetuate family narratives, history and identity.

Upon preparing for immigration, the Russländer packed their possessions into trunks, suitcases, and baskets. These objects served a sole purpose for the Russländer: to carry their belongings across a continent and an ocean to their new home in Canada. At that moment in their life cycle the artefacts were purely functional, a necessity for migration. However, for their children they became physical reminders of their parent's courageous flight from the Soviet Union and the journey to a new world, and even more, a symbol of ethnicity. These feelings and this viewpoint are expressed in the oral histories associated with the artefacts.

Yet most of the oral histories are simple descriptions of the artefacts. For example, one donor stated that the wicker chest she donated "belonged to Katharina Bartel. Most of her belongings were brought to Canada from Russia in this wicker chest in 1925."[16] The donor of another chest wrote that it "carried all the family's worldly possessions upon exit from Russia. Brought over by the Peter Dyck family who arrived in Canada on December 24, 1925."[17] One of the suitcases in the collection is described as "originally owned by John and Elizabeth Dyck who lived in the Crimea (Russia). In 1929 they took the suitcase and moved from Karassan Village to Moscow, then to Germany, where they stayed for a few months… Eventually they made their way to Winkler, Manitoba."[18] Despite the simplicity of these artefact descriptions, their significance lies in their role in their family's migration, particularly their escape from the Soviet Union. These pieces of luggage were likely used by the family once they were in Canada, but emphasizing its role in the migration narrative shifts its meaning from a practical object to one that became a physical symbol of their ancestor's courageous flight from the Soviet Union and the journey to a new world.

Similarly, passports and medical certificates became mementos of the Russländer journey to Canada. As the documentation that permitted or prevented Mennonites from leaving the Soviet Union or entering Canada, these items were central in the immigration narrative. One passport is described as belonging to "Isaac (Ike) Krahn… used when the family emigrated from the Orenberg Colony in Russia to Canada in 1926."[19] A medical certificate, donated by the same donor, also belonged to Isaac Krahn (figure 1, next page). According to the donor, it was:

used when the family immigrated to Canada in 1926. Isaac's father, Jacob George, almost didn't pass his medical exam, as he'd lost his left index finger in a threshing machine accident. However, the doctor who signed his medical inspection form indicated that he would still be able to make a living, so he passed.[20]

More than a symbol of a journey from one country to another, the medical certificate and the stories associated with it became a reminder for Isaac's descendants that the family's fate could have been much different. Many individuals were disqualified from migrating due to illness and disability, resulting in temporary or permanent separation from their families. Emphasizing this story reveals the relief that the family must have felt when Jacob was finally given permission to enter Canada together with them. The certificate, and what it represented, became part of the family's migration story, passed down to each generation as a reminder of how narrowly they had been granted entry to Canada.

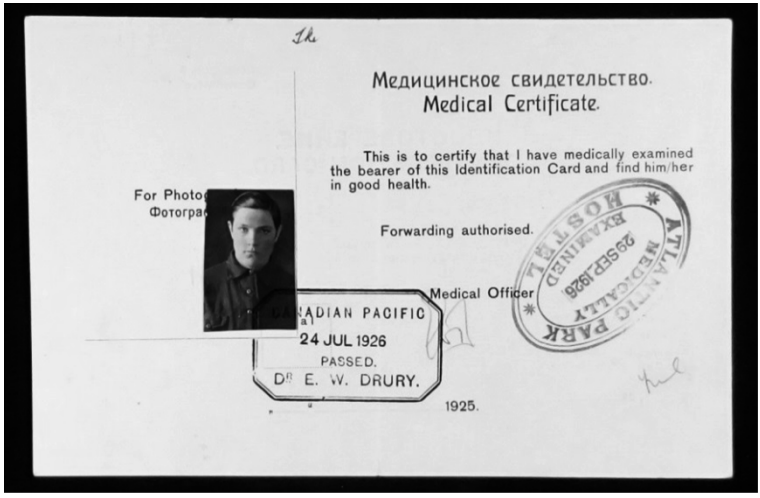

Figure 1. Isaak Krahn's medical certificate. Paper, ink. 19.10 x 12.50 cm. MHV 2016.5.7

Other items appear to be unconnected with the migration narrative until linked with the oral history. The Russländer collection has five handmade wooden cradles. These cradles were typical in Mennonite homes, but held a particular significance in migration narratives. All the cradles are tied to the migration experience. For example, one donor's history of the cradle notes that it "held three month old Jacob H. Reimer when his family migrated to Canada

from Ruckenau, Molotchna in 1924."[21] All of the cradles in the collection come with a similar story which shifted the cradle from an everyday object to one that played a central role in the family's migration to Canada as the item that carried the family from one 'home' to the next. The cradles were symbols of hope of a better life for the children of the Russländer, of families staying together and surviving together. Furthermore, two of the cradles are described as having been used by the children and grandchildren later born in Canada. They were not just practical pieces of furniture, but family heirlooms that connected generations and (quite literally) carried the family's history.

Some objects connect even more tangibly to a family's history. Portraits, autograph books, genealogies, and photograph albums were more visual mementos of relatives, and a departure from everyday tools. Seeing images of family members and their writing generated a quick connection to ancestors. Human hair may be the most tangible of these mementos. One collection of hair appears as the material for a watch fob, or chain, made of twisted or braided hair from the donor's grandmother. Likely created as a memento for her husband, the chain was passed down for two generations as a reminder of the hair's original owner. Another example are fifteen locks of hair attached to a sheet of paper. The hair belonged to the donor and her siblings, and other relatives. The first locks were collected in Russia, and the practice continued when the family grew after migrating to Canada. The continued tradition of creating mementos of the children's early life produced a connection between Russian- and Canadian-born family members, and a tangible biological link to their ancestors.[22]

The ancestral connection to other artefacts in the Russländer collection spanned not only generations, but centuries. Here the symbolic value the donors may have placed on an artefact had already been created in Russia. Among these artefacts are texts, some sacred others secular. One is a love note presented to Agnethcke Quirings in 1794 from Johan Bartel von Mewson as a wedding present just prior to their own migration from West Prussia to New Russia (figure 2, next page). The love letter, or *Liebesbrief*, is an example of *Fraktur* art, a type of manuscript illumination that became common among Mennonites by the early 1700s. The letter contains eight romantic poems and is decorated with images of birds, fruits, and flowers. One verse reads "You are my morning and evening star. My eyes adore the sight of you. No flame or embers burn so hot as a secret love that is undeclared."[23] Another declares "You are my treasure and my sun, I am the sun's flower which turns its face to you, you will always be mine."[24]

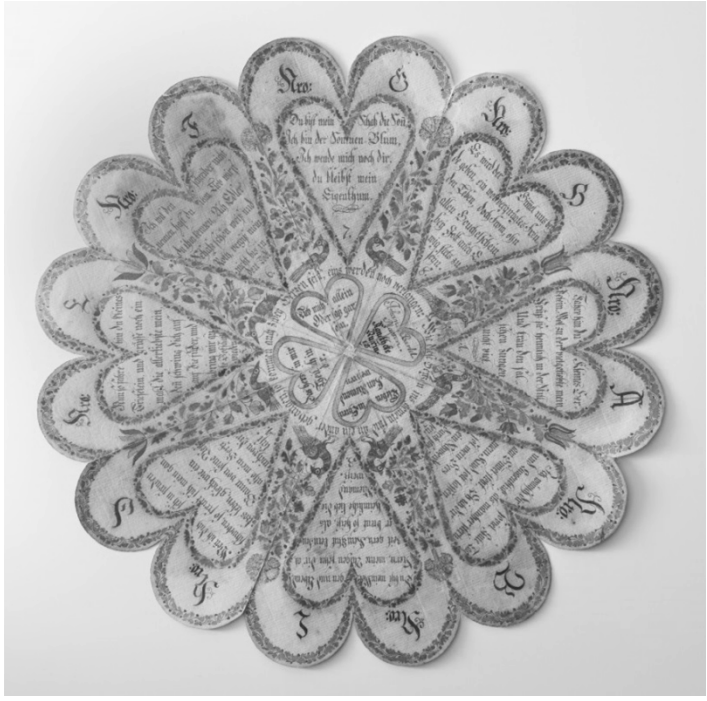

Figure 2. Liebesbrief. Paper, ink. 55 x 57 cm. MHV 1966.7000.1444.[25]

The poem was passed down for five generations before the Russian Revolution. After anarchists and Bolshevik soldiers had left the village of Wiesenfeld in ruins, descendant Elisabeth Klassen Martens salvaged the letter and brought it with her in Canada in 1927. Today it is loaned to MHV, and has been in the family for six generations spanning over two hundred years.[26]

Other items that were kept in the family for generations and brought to Canada in the 1920s include a wedding veil worn by the donor's great-great-grandmother at her wedding in 1848, a bedspread received as a wedding gift in 1814, and a dowry chest said to have been presented to a young woman in 1871.[27] The donor of the dowry chest added the emotional note that the young woman, her great grandmother, Sara (Dick) Driedger, had died only a few years after her marriage, leaving the chest to her husband and young son. In 1926, Sara's only son, Johann, and his family "packed up their belongings in this chest and left their beloved [Petershagen], Russia, to come to Canada."[28]

The Liebesbrief, chest, and others listed above are particularly strong examples of the desire for intergenerational preservation. Donor's ancestors ensured the safe-keeping of these items, sometimes for centuries, and through migration, war, and revolution. Laurie Bertram refers to this process of embedding family history into an object as an "embodiment of lineage."[29] Bertram's study of Icelandic migration trunks is similar to this study on Russländer artefacts in their role as symbols of family history and experience for immigrant communities, and a way to identify their heritage outside of Canada. Bertram argues that these objects, "far from accessorizing a simple genealogical chart… help to express and engage with family history through the creation of dynamic and multi-faceted historical landscapes."[30] Furthermore, Bertram argues that material culture such as heirlooms are essential in maintaining the memory of "otherwise absent and abstract family members and experiences."[31] The objects were a connection to ancestors, and created an identity for descendants through the stories embedded in family heirlooms, despite the years and countries separating them from the original owners.

Handmade items provided another connection to ancestors. Many of the artefacts in the Russländer collection were handmade in Russia, either by a Russländer immigrant, or by someone they were close to. For example, the nephew of Aganetha Siemens donated a braided belt made from the silk of silkworms which Aganetha had raised and spun herself. According to the donor, "from the silk she wove her brother Jacob [the donor's father] this belt. It was brought to Canada and passed on to me by her brother shortly before he died. It is an example of some of the imaginative ways in which our youth of 1900 made gifts for their parents and family."[32] The donor likely treasured the belt because of its connection to his father. However, the description of its production and the handiwork done by his aunt was the emphasis of the narrative, suggesting part of its significance was its connection to its maker.

The trauma and loss most families experienced during the Russian Revolution and following civil war is also represented in the Russländer collection. These objects are physical memories of persecution, revolution, death, and survival that have become part of the family narrative for Russländer descendants. After the revolution, Mennonite villages and homes were raided and occupied by marauding anarchists and Bolshevik soldiers. The raids became prominent, if not central, in the family stories passed down to Russländer descendants. In his Master's thesis, Sean Patterson compares Mennonite and Makhnovist narratives of their experi-

ences during the Russian Civil War. Patterson observes that Mennonite narratives predominantly highlight the martyrdom of their communities, and those who died 'innocent' and pacifist deaths. According to Patterson, the Mennonites saw the Makhnovist army as "a force of irrational violence," with no ideological motivations.[33] Furthermore, in these narratives Makhno was held personally responsible for all the massacres and suffering the Mennonites endured during the war.

Figure 3. Katharina Dick's slippers. Leather. 10 x 24 cm. MHV 2015.14.1

These narratives are embedded within family artefacts. David and Katherina Dick owned and lived on the Apanlee Estate in the Molotschna Colony. The family was very wealthy and deeply involved in the Mennonite community, patronizing schools, orphanages, and hospitals. In October, 1919, the home was invaded by anarchists, who targeted wealthy estate owners. Some of the family members escaped, but five, including David and Katherina, remained behind. The anarchists demanded money, but when David insisted they had none, he and Katherina were both shot and killed.[34] Their children, adults at the time of David and Katherina's deaths, migrated to Canada a few years later and brought with

them some of their parents' clothing. According to the oral history, some of this clothing was "worn by Katherina Dick at the time of her murder in 1919."[35] This narrative aligns with Patterson's analysis of Mennonite narratives as chronicles of martyrdom. David and Katherina's story was featured in a book entitled *Mennonite Martyrs: People who Suffered for their Faith, 1920-1940*, as well as the documentary film *...and When They Shall Ask*.[36]

Additionally, a pair of simple black leather slippers not only became a symbol of martyrdom, but a physical symbol of place (figure 3, previous page). The slippers are noted by the donor as "still encrusted with the soil from [Katherina's] estate."[37] The slippers were a tangible connection to place for the descendants of David and Katherina. In *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*, Frances Swyripa argues that ethnic identities can be shaped by physical and emotional connections to land.[38] For David and Katherina's descendants, the soil on the slippers created a connection not only to deceased family members, but to a physical place they had never seen. Furthermore, they created a transnational link to family members who descendants would never know. These items of clothing gave David and Katherina's children and grandchildren a way to connect to their family history and create an identity for themselves through the experiences of their ancestors. The clothing embodied the trauma experienced by the family and perpetuated the family's narrative through the oral history attached to the objects.

For some, revolution and post-revolution experiences were physically marked on their possessions. For example, one family's Mennonite-made wall clock bears the physical marks of their experience. These wall clocks were a staple in many Mennonite homes. They featured a beautifully decorated face made of sheet metal and a pendulum and weights made of brass. As Arthur Kroeger has noted from his extensive research of these clocks, they were often given to new couples as a wedding gift, and then handed down for generations.[39] They became family heirlooms, and physical touchstones of heritage. According to one oral history, "the scratches on the clock date back to the time of the Revolution in Russia left by soldiers with their swords."[40] This one moment had become physically embedded into the clock, and embedded into the family's narrative and identity. Although the clock had been damaged by the soldiers' swords, the family had avoided extreme violence, and the clock remains a reminder of their survival.

The preservation of memory of place is present in other artefacts, too. One of these is a clay roof tile, "taken from a pile of rubble that was the H.H. Willms flour mill" in Halbstadt, New

Russia. It is unclear how or if the donor or the original owner of the tile was related to H.H. Willms, however, it suggests a strong emotional tie to place. The tile is fairly heavy and fragile, making it awkward to pack and travel with, signifying its importance as a symbol of memory of place to its owner. Another artefact of place, perhaps more abstract, is a jar containing bean seeds (figure 4). The seeds were brought by Anna Penner to Canada when she migrated with her husband in 1926. The seeds in the collection are not the original seeds, but 'descendants' of the original. The donor, a descendant of Anna, recalled the history of these seeds:

> Anna kept the beans growing and harvest[ed] some for seed each year throughout her lifetime. She passed the seeds from these beans to her youngest daughter… [who] passed on the seeds from [those] beans to her oldest son… Eighty years later, in 2006, these beans continue to grow on a farm near Rosa, Manitoba.[41]

Figure 4. Oma Anna's beans. Beans, glass. 13 x 8 cm. MHV 2006.11.2

Saving seeds from their garden in Russia, taking them along the journey, and transplanting them in a new home was a common practice for Mennonite women. In her study of Mennonite relationships with plants and gardens, Susan Fisher states that there are stories "of cuttings from a yellow rosebush brought over from Russia and confiscated by immigration officials, of seeds sewn into the

hems of dresses and hidden in corsets, of dolls stuffed with beans or wheat."[42] This practice was not only a means of feeding a family in a new country, but it created a connection between the old home and the new, corresponding with Fisher's concept of "transnational memory," of the homeland. The bean seeds were physical memories of place that were transplanted, and memories were preserved as they continued to grow generations later.

Some of the objects in the Russländer collection represent the era before revolution, the height of Mennonite success in New Russia. Handwritten songbooks hold memories of cultural interests and religious celebration, a school uniform jacket speaks to the emphasis on education in the Mennonite colonies, and a belt worn by a wealthy family's chauffer when they attended church or visited friends and relatives.[43] Although the majority of Mennonites in New Russia were not wealthy estate owners, it was those who had the most who experienced the greatest material loss by the end of the Revolution. Significantly a number of the object biographies are accompanied by lengthy accounts of loss.

Take the donor's account of Maria (Toews) Heese's wedding gown, for example. The oral history accompanying this donation relate the family history, one marked by Maria's marriage to Wilhelm Johann Heese in 1892 and their residence in the city of Ekaterinoslav, where Wilhelm owned a flour mill. Their success allowed them to participate in elite social circles, wearing the finest fashions and attending the city's opera on a regular basis. Their home had running water and electricity, nannies cared for the children and maids were hired to do the housework. The family lost everything during the revolution and civil war, and Wilhelm died of typhus in 1920, leaving Maria with two children to care for. They fled to Germany where they spent two years as refugees in Lager Lechfeld, and finally arrived in Canada in 1923, with other family accompanying them. In 1926 the family purchased a farm near Grunthal, Manitoba, and settled into a two-room log house. In the oral history taken at the time of donation, the donor expressed this loss, stating:

> the lady who had been part of the social elite was now milking cows in a mud and manure changed barn by kerosene lantern light. And yet, my father told me she never complained, although I wonder how many tears were shed in the silence of the night. Through all this grandmother still held onto some of the things in her past. This beautiful apricot coloured silk taffeta and lace dress is one of them.[44]

Although Maria had very few personal possessions to bring with her to Canada, one item she kept safe throughout the journey was a formal gown (figure 5). For Maria, the gown was a reminder of the life she once had, and a connection to a world she knew no longer existed. For her descendants, the gown became a touchstone of family history, embedded with the story of the family's wealth and loss, perseverance and survival, and adjustment to life in Canada. Furthermore, the dress became a symbol of Maria's own struggle for her descendants. For them, her experience was one of heroism, of survival and adaptation to a completely foreign life, and the dress functioned as a physical memory of her valour.

Figure 5. Heese dress. Lace, silk. 150 x45 cm. MHV 2003.46.1[45]

After arriving in Canada, some Russländer immigrants found comfort in possessions that had come to symbolize home for them. These objects continued to represent home for their children and grandchildren, but the stories associated with the object created another layer of significance for these generations. The MHV Russländer collection has five Mennonite-made wall clocks. As previously noted, these clocks were family heirlooms, passed down for generations. They were also a staple in migrants' luggage as

they journeyed from one country to another in search of a new home.

For many families, a house only became a home when the clock was hung on the wall. This follows Royden Loewen's study of written texts as markers of time. He argues that the concept of telling time, through texts such as diaries and letters, created order in the uprootedness of the migrant experience.[46] In this case, the clock was not just a marker of time, but a marker of stability and safety. Once the clock was hung, a family could once again feel at home, no matter where that home was.

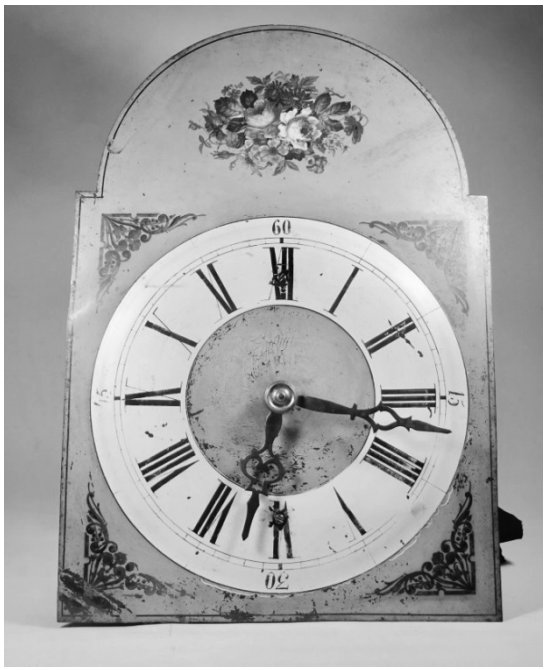

Figure 6. Peter and Aganetha Reimer's Kroeger clock. Tin, brass, lead. 32 x 46.8 cm. MHV 2012.24.1

For example, Peter and Aganetha Reimer brought their clock, which they had received as a wedding gift, with them to Canada when the migrated in 1924 (figure 6, previous page). Over the years, it was passed down to their daughter where it "always hung on the wall in the dining room of the house on the farm."[47] The donor recalls that "at night the ticking of the clock could be heard throughout the whole house and it would also chime the hours every day."[48] Over the years the clock became part of the family's

daily rhythm, as the children rewound the clock every day. Its chimes and ticking were sounds of comfort, and memories of the old homeland. The clock had shifted from a wedding gift to a treasured piece of family history that carried with it stories of escape and survival in a new home.

For the descendants of Kornelius Isaac and Elizabeth Loewen, it was a tablecloth that came to represent family, home, and survival. Brought to Canada in 1926, the tablecloth was saved for use on Sundays or when guests came to the home. In his recollection, the donor noted that his parents had struggled during their first years in Canada. He notes, "as children we were never really aware of the hardships that seemed to plague our parents. It was the years of the big depression."[49] Through those hard years, the family moved to three different provinces to find stability, finally settling in Abbotsford, British Columbia. To cope with their struggle, the donor notes "the family gather[ed] around the table, with this tablecloth spread, and scriptures were read and prayers and tears were shed as we asked for better times."[50] The donor recalled that "when friends gathered there was much singing and laughter as stories were recalled of the journeys made by the Mennonites in their travels looking for 'HOME'." The practical function of the tablecloth was as a decorative piece saved for guests and special occasions. Its function shifted in the early years of adapting to life in Canada, bringing family and friends together as they struggled to find their way in the depression era. For Kornelius and Elizabeth's descendants, the tablecloth became a symbol of home, family, faith, and survival.

The emotional value of these artefacts and disinterest of the next generation has given potential donors anxiety about the final life stage of these objects, concerned that they will end up without someone caring about what they mean, and thrown away. In Fisher's research into inherited porcelain, the owner of a teapot (although not in MHV's collection) experiences anxiety over the fate of the teapot after she dies, as her daughters have no interest or attachment to the object.[51] As she became aware of the likely fate of her family heirloom, one donor who donated a brass mortar and pestle commented that "with the scattering of family, although everyone would like the mortar and pestle, I am afraid it might soon have no meaning except as an antique. I promised my mother that I would never sell them, and can think of no better place than your Museum[sic] for their safe keeping."[52]

Mennonite Heritage Village now holds these family treasures in perpetuity. Whether they were priceless heirlooms or common, everyday objects, they are the keepers of family history. For some

donors, children and grandchildren have taken little interest in inheriting these objects, and they donate out of concern for their future. For others, they see the museum as the best place for their safe-keeping and preservation. However, donation does not signal the end of ethnicity for these objects. The process of donating is in itself a way of re-creating ethnicity. Selecting an object, bringing it to the museum, and telling the stories it evokes is a process of re-membering, and becomes the next stage in creating ethnicity, a process which continues as artefacts are exhibited in museum display and are researched and written about by historians. As one donor stated upon donating a traditional Mennonite chest: "it is time for it to find its rest at the Mennonite Heritage Village. We have cherished this chest for many years… I'm sure it would have many stories to tell if only it could speak." The donors of these items can and do speak, and the stories they tell continue to preserve these symbols of family heritage, memory, and identity.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank the Mennonite Heritage Village for allowing access to their artifact collection, donor files, and other materials used in this paper.

[2] Laurie K. Bertram, "New Icelandic Ethnoscapes : Material, Visual, and Oral Terrains of Cultural Expression in Icelandic-Canadian History, 1875-Present" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 121.

[3] Bertram, 139.

[4] Susan Fisher, "Imperial Porcelain on the Prairie": Modernity, Love, and Longing in Rural Mennonite Manitoba, 1876-1930," Artifacts in Agraria Symposium, University of Guelph, ON. October 17-18, 2015, 7.

[5] Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12, no. 1 (1992): 4, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27501011.

[6] Peter Kivisto, Dag Blanck, and Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center, *American Immigrants and Their Generations: Studies and Commentaries on the Hansen Thesis After Fifty Years* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

[7] Herbert J. Gans,. "Reflections on Symbolic Ethnicity: A Response to Y. Anagnostou," *Ethnicities* 9, no. 1 (2009): 123, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23889910.

[8] Herbert J. Gans, "Another Look at Symbolic Ethnicity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 9 (2017): 1411, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1308527.

[9] Examples of scholarship of Mennonite material culture are Reinhild Janzen and John M Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1992); Melvin Gingerich, *Mennonite Attire through Four Centuries,* Publications of the Pennsylvania German Society,

Vol. 4 (Breinigsville, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Society, 1970); Roland M. Sawatzky, *The Control of Social Space in Mennonite Housebarns of Manitoba, 1874-1940* (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2004).

[10] Material culture is defined by Melville Herskovits as "the totality of artifacts in a culture, the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, to delight our fancy and to create symbols of meaning," paraphrased in Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture Studies and Social History Research," *Journal of Social History* 16, no. 4 (1983): 12, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3786995.

[11] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York. Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

[12] Leora Auslander, Amy Bentley, Leor Halevi, N. H. Otto Sibum, and Christopher Witmore, "AHR Conversation: Historians and the Study of Material Culture," *The American Historical Review* 24, no. 5 (2009): 1356.

[13] Judy Attfield, *Wild Things: The Material Culture of Everyday Life* (New York: Berg, 2000), 76.

[14] Igor Kopytoff, "Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process" in Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66-67.

[15] The detail of these histories is dependent on how much information the curator requests. In the past, some curators requested more information than others. Additionally, detail is also dependent on what the donor knows about the object's history. Thus, some of the artifacts are lacking in contextual and historical background. Additionally, the objects in the Russländer collection were, for the most part, donated by family members. Often these were children or grandchildren of the first generation of Russländer immigrants, but sometimes donations were made by extended family members. Some items were donated by first-generation immigrants themselves. Occasionally an item was a gift to a non-relative, and donated by the receiver. In some cases, sets of objects originally belonged to a single individual but were divided up amongst family members over the years, and were then donated to the museum by separate donors. Finally, some objects belonged to immigrants from the same family, but became separated over the years before being reunited in the museum's collection.

[16] Mennonite Heritage Village (hereafter MHV), Steinbach, MB, 2009.8.2, donor file.

[17] MHV 2005.15.3, donor file.

[18] MHV 2005.7.1, donor file.

[19] MHV 2016.13.2, donor file.

[20] MHV 2016.5.7, donor file.

[21] MHV 1973.15.1, donor file.

[22] MHV 2016.16.2, donor file.

[23] MHV 1966.7000.1444, donor file.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Photo credit: Jerry Grajewski, Grajewski Fotograph Inc., as seen in Roland M. Sawatzky and Andrea M. Dyck, *A Collected History: Mennonite Heritage Village* (Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Heritage Village [Canada], 2014), 25.

[26] "*Liebesbrief*" in Roland M. Sawatzky and Andrea M. Dyck, *A Collected History: Mennonite Heritage Village* (Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Heritage Village [Canada], 2014), 21.

[27] MHV 2004.20.46, donor file; MHV 1974.34.1, donor file; MHV 2016.10.1, donor file.
[28] MHV 2016.10.1, donor file.
[29] Bertram, 138.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] MHV 1994.7.1, donor file
[33] Sean Patterson, "The Makhnos of Memory: Mennonites and Makhnovist Narratives of the Russian Civil War, 1917-1921" (Masters Thesis, University of Manitoba, 2013), 4.
[34] Transcript, *and When They Shall Ask*, directed by John Morrow, David B Dueck, and Dueck Film Productions Ltd. Mennonite Media Society, 1983. VHS: 6.
[35] 2015.14.1, 2, 3, MHV donor file.
[36] Aron A. Toews, *Mennonite Martyrs: People Who Suffered for Their Faith, 1920-1940*, Perspectives on Mennonite Life and Thought, 6 (Winnipeg MB: Kindred Press, 1990): 51-57; *...and When They Shall Ask*.
[37] MHV 2015.14.1, donor file.
[38] Frances Swyripa, *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*, Studies in Immigration and Culture Series, 5 (Winnipeg Man.: University of Manitoba Press, 2010).
[39] Arthur Kroeger, *Kroeger Clocks* (Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Heritage Village, 2012): 104.
[40] MHV 1973.40.1, donor file.
[41] MHV 2006.11.2, donor file.
[42] Susie Fisher, "Why Mennonites Love Their Gardens," *Canadian Mennonite*, May 20, 2015, http://www.canadianmennonite.org/stories/why-mennonites-love-their-gardens.
[43] MHV 2004.12.1-4, donor file; MHV 2013.22.1, donor file; MHV 1983.1.2, donor file.
[44] MHV 2003.46.1, donor file
[45] Photo credit: Jerry Grajewski, Grajewski Fotograph Inc., as seen in Roland M. Sawatzky and Andrea M. Dyck, *A Collected History: Mennonite Heritage Village* (Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Heritage Village [Canada], 2014), 31.
[46] Royden Loewen, *Village among Nations: "Canadian" Mennonites in a Transnational World, 1916-2006* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 97-98.
[47] MHV 2012.24.1, donor file
[48] Ibid.
[49] MHV 2000.21.1, donor file.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Fisher, "Imperial Porcelain on the Prairie," 5.
[52] MHV 1996.10.1, donor file.