

PETER J. REIMER, HIS STORY

By Elsie (Reimer Nesbitt), his daughter.

Originally written in 1970, then continued in 1977.

Typed by Lilian Reimer in 2003, then edited by Bill Reimer, his grandson, in 2008

Chapter 1: The Years in South Russia

Celebrating 81 years

Friends of Peter J. Reimer will be happy to know that he celebrated his 81st birthday on June 24, 1970, at his home at 14239 - 72nd Avenue, Surrey, B.C. His second wife, the former Anna Neufeld, and his daughter Elsie and two sons, Peter and Dick, and families were with him. He had a severe heart attack four years ago, but has made a marvelous recovery and is still happy to share old experiences and present-day news with his visitors.

Since his retirement to Surrey, Peter and Anna have been surrounded by good friends and neighbours. His six grandsons and one granddaughter have continued the education he was not able to finish, and at this writing they have ten university degrees to their credit. His four acre "farm" is a favorite spot for a Sunday picnic, where the welcome mat is always waiting and the "Old Days" fondly remembered. He likes to reminisce about his boyhood in southern Russia and the early days in Western Canada.

Peter's family

Peter Reimer's father was Jacob Peter Reimer, and as was the custom, his middle name was his father's first name. Neither father nor son were farmers at heart and were much happier as artisans or tradesmen. Both were born in the village of Schoeneberg in the province of Catarinslov (now Dnepropetrovsk), as was the grandfather, Peter, before them.

Most of the Mennonite villages centred around the Dneiper River and city of Rostov, although some were in the Ural Mountains at Saraktash. Many of the people who did not emigrate before the revolution of 1917 were sent as slaves to the forests of Siberia--Kanty--Mansiyk and Aleksandrovskoye on the Ob River. Some are still there.

The snakebite

Jacob Peter had two brothers (Peter and Franz) and two sisters (Anna and Aganetha) but he was by far the most mischievous. One of his escapades involved a dam near their village. Apparently some eighty years earlier a dam had been built about a mile upstream from Schoeneberg. Some of the villagers wanted the dam closer to the village and there were constant arguments about it. So Jacob Peter and some of his friends decided they were going to settle it once and for all.

One night they snuck up the valley and managed to open the dam just enough for the water to trickle out nicely. However, while walking around in the deep grass Jacob was bitten by a poisonous snake. No one had ever heard of poisonous snakes in the area and while one of the boys ran for help, another had the presence of mind to bind his belt around Jacob Peter's leg to stop the circulation.

By the time they got him home he was unconscious

Maria Schmidt



and it took some time for the leg to heal. His brothers claimed he wouldn't have pulled through if it hadn't been for his sweetheart, Maria Andreas Schmidt.

Protecting the forests of the Tsar

Two or three years after the snake episode, Jacob Peter was called into the Forestry section of the Russian army. The first two years of service he had to help cut out the dry wood and see that no one cut down any good trees. They also protected the wild life, such as bears and game, from poachers since it all belonged to the Tsar for his shooting enjoyment. His third year was spent near the Turkish border replanting grape seedlings on thousands of acres belonging to the government for the wine-making industry. After this army stint he married his Maria.

Jacob P. Reimer



Living on the trade route

Jacob Peter and his brother-in-law Peter Schmidt, now built a liquor store in Neuenberg (New Castle). It was on the Dneiper River between the closest centre Kikolayev and Dnieperprosk, and on the main caravan route of the "Arabians" who often had trains of as many as thirty camels laden with carpets for the markets of Odessa, Dnieperpetrosk and as far as Kiev. Later, Jacob Reimer built a general store at Neuenberg as well, and lived there for a while before moving to Rostov. There he had a contract loading and hauling bricks from a factory to the railway freight cars three miles away.

Farming grain

Most of the relatives were farmers who had five acre gardens close to their homes, and then eighty acres farther afield for various crops. As the grain ripened, two watchmen took turns guarding the fields against theft by the Russians three miles away. When it was ripe, a party of men would set out with scythes, stopping at Schmidt's on the way for a bit of refreshment. Wine was the accepted drink with meals. The women followed, forming the sheaves of cut grain without twine. Two acres was considered a good day's work. The ripened sheaves would be brought into the farm yards by horse and wagon.

A five-cogged threshing wheel of stone, called a "oofowshtein", was pulled round and round by a horse or oxen to separate the grain from the straw. Flails were also used. Then the loose straw was piled onto poles up to ten feet long and carried some distance to stack. The grain would later be taken to market in Odessa and beyond.

Watermelon games

Peter (Jacob's son) tells of visiting his cousin Peter Reimer, who lived in one of the villages close by. His Uncle, also Peter Reimer (brother to Jacob Peter Reimer), had a horse and wagon without the conventional wagon box - just a four-inch ridge around. He was picking up watermelons from his larger property. The fruits were stacked on the wagon in pyramid fashion, with his uncle perched on top. The two boys walked along side, eating watermelons and throwing the seeds down each other's necks. Suddenly the wheel hit a hole and down into the ditch slid his uncle, watermelons and all. There he lay with his feet in the air, shouting "stoy, stoy" ("stop" in Russian) for the horse to stop!

School in southern Russia

Childhood in the city of Rostov was a happy time for Peter and his friends. He tells of getting free rides on the horse-driven street cars by giving the conductor sunflower seeds. However, it was time to settle down and Peter was sent to school. Russian was the first language taught, with the second being French or German. This was a private school since there were no

public schools and the schoolmaster was paid on a daily basis by the parents who could afford it.

All nationalities were represented, and the morning ceremonies were started off with a Russian song, facing a picture of the Tsar. Prayers were often from the Greek Orthodox Church and therefore completely foreign to Peter. When he did not cross himself properly, the schoolmaster strapped him and put him in a corner. The boys teased him after school and made up a little rhyme in Russian, something to the effect "You Germans have got a sausage, and bought a horse without a tail!"

After repeated days of this punishment, he refused to go to school and finally told his parents the reason. Thereupon they hired a Jewish gentleman, who came to the house for Peter's instruction. The schoolmaster now apologized but Peter was happy with his own private teacher and his parents decided to keep him at home. He tells of many fist-fights with his former classmates. One of his chief tormentors became his best friend after Peter threw a brick at him over their eight-foot high board fence!

Planning to leave Russia

Because of the population pressure in the original Chortitza and Molotschna settlements, and new restrictive Russian government regulations, emigration to America was in full swing by the end of the 19th century. A cousin of Peter Jacob's grandfather had returned from America with glowing reports of the new land. Even though the elder Peter^a and his wife (Peter P. Reimer & wife Agatha Nickol) were in their 70's, they decided to sell their land and goods at auction and join their son Jacob Peter and family. Meanwhile the Jacob Peter Reimers had returned to Schoeneberg where his parents lived. They left for Canada from there.

Chapter 2: The Trip to Canada

Notes from Lilian:

The writer, Elsie, knows the following paragraph is in dispute, but until I am able to locate the diary left in Uncle Jake's house in Renata and from where I got the information, I will leave it as is.

PS: by Lil Reimer: That diary turned up at Sharon's, granddaughter of Uncle Jake, when Elsie visited her. Because we now have the record of the Ship and the sailing date, the following paragraph that Elsie mentions coming from her Dad (Peter Jacob) is now irrelevant. I will type it in anyway. Peter Jacob was only a young boy of 10 or 11 when the family came to Canada.

Arranging the necessary documents

Jacob Peter Reimer's passport is dated April 18, 1901, and includes "his wife, Maria, his son Peter, son Jacob, son Frank, daughter Maria". According to his diary, three families (Peter^b Reimer, Jacob Reimer, and P. Knelson) arrived in Halifax at 10:a.m.

Peter Jacob Reimer claims this is wrong – they arrived June 21, 1900^c. First of all he says the Knelsons received their passport from Gretna, Man. and had to take the boat to New York, U.S.A. one day later. And they didn't see this family until 1908 in Herbert.

He maintains that his Uncle Peter (Peter) Reimer came to Canada in 1898. The Jacob Peter Reimers came in June 1900 since they had to wait for their parents to get their documents and estate in order. Then Annie Reimer Wiebe^d and her family came in April 1901, and Frank^e

^a The father of Jacob Peter Reimer.

^b Jacob Peter's brother or Jacob Peter's father.

^c P.J. Reimer (Bill's Grandfather) would be 11 years old.

^d Jacob Peter's sister (?).

^e Jacob Peter's brother (?).

Peter Reimer followed later in the year 1901. The whole family came in separate groups rather than in one large group as was the case with many Mennonites.

The route to Canada

They had left their village by train for Riga (Liebow?), then by ship through the Kiel Canal to London. They travelled by train to Liverpool where they stayed for 4 days.

On their stopover in Liverpool, Peter tells how he locked himself in a closet and then lost the key, creating quite a hubbub until the attendant managed to open the door.

The ship took 15 or 16 days to reach Québec. There were many Jewish immigrants on board as well, searching relief from persecution and a new life in America. The train ride from Québec to Winnipeg was in wooden colonist cars; with no upholstery. The whole trip took 32 days from Russia to Manitoba.

According to "The Story of the Mennonites" by C. Henry Smith, by 1880 about 8,000 Mennonites had settled south of Winnipeg on the East and West reserves. The Ottawa Government had sent William Hespeler to Russia to encourage immigration to Manitoba. There the settlers were given 160 acres of land per each head of a family. They had practically all the privileges Queen Catherine had given their Frisian and Flemish ancestors in 1787 on their trek from the Baltic and Vistula Delta to Russia.

Before the families left Riga they were given medical examinations. The doctor kept little Maria Reimer^f under observation for two days and made them promise to take her to an eye specialist when they arrived in Canada, which they did. The two Reimer families^g arrived in Winkler on June 6 and were fed and billeted by their own people until they could find suitable accommodation. They remained in Manitoba for five years.

SS Lake Champlain



Settling in a new land

At first Jacob Peter worked for a man in Rheinland for \$30.00 a month. When harvest time came, he earned an additional \$1.00 a day for stooking sheaves. Eleven-year-old Peter earned \$40.00 a year at the Wheeler's eight miles south of Morden. Even at their age, the grandparents^h helped, and Peter recalls how kind everyone was. They could have all the garden produce they required, and he recalls they had 12 sacks of potatoes and bought 10 chickens, 4 ducks, 6 geese and one pig. As in the biblical days of Ruth and Boaz, mother and grandmother Reimer were allowed to gather the gleanings as feed for their animals. The jersey cow they bought was small but "gave lots of milk".

Harvest was over about the first week of December and the two families now moved south of Winkler to Schanzenfeld, named after Jacob Y. Schantz, where the elder Peter Reimer'sⁱ cousin lived.

Jacob Peter Reimer now contracted to make and repair harnesses for the hardware store in Winkler, and he found that with the help of his aged father, he had all the work he could handle.

Peter tells of a Letkeman family in Schanzenfeld, whose smokehouse containing ten hams caught fire. After putting out the blaze, the Letkemans told the newcomers they could have the salvaged hams. By cutting off the burned portions and resmoking them, the Reimers had enough meat to see them through the winter.

^f P.J. Reimer's sister (4 years old).

^g Jacob Peter and his father.

^h Peter P. and Agatha Nickel.

ⁱ Peter P. Reimer.

Religious trouble

Sad to say, after two hard but happy years, these enterprising pioneers ran into religious trouble with their ultra-conservative Old Colony (Weedertaufers) neighbours. Their embroidered blouses were too fancy, and they were told to cut off the embroidery on the sleeves and at the neck, and to buy celluloid collars for the men. Their conservative neighbours insisted they were to wear black and to paint the nickel-plated knobs on their buggy black. Suggesting they were "too worldly" the two heads of the families were called before their peers and "Oom Johann".

When they refused to mend their ways, they were banned from the congregation and the practice of "shunning" was enforced. No one in the village was allowed to speak to them, their cattle could not feed on communal pasture, the herder could not call for their cow, nor could they buy or sell to them. This meant they were completely ostracized and their only alternative was to leave. They moved a little south and went to Rheinland, into a building owned by a Mr. Enns. There they continued their prospering harness business and Peter was taught to be a harness-maker.

Chapter 3: Making a New Life in Saskatchewan

Travel to the homestead in Saskatchewan

But the desire for a homestead of their own culminated in Jacob Peter Reimer and John Siemans going to Saskatchewan to look at land near Herbert, Sask. They decided to move in the Spring of 1905. Before leaving, they bought three oxen, a wagon, one horse and buggy, a cow, a twelve-inch plow, plus 20 chickens, and a pig. They had \$160.00 in cash.

Young Peter, his brother Jake, and his father slept in the freight cars with the animals. Another man, Mr. Janzen, and his three children also came to Herbert at that time. They could ride free, but after three days the charge was 50 cents a day.

Peter told me a story of a Pennsylvania Dutch family who hooked on their freight cars at Portage la Prairie, he thinks, got off at Herbert and then went north of town. There they made a raft and crossed the Saskatchewan River for northern Saskatchewan. He remembers seeing baled hay for the first time when the six passenger cars were uncoupled at Broadview so that the animals could be taken to the stockyards for food and water. Peter's grandparents^j, meanwhile had decided to stay in Manitoba. They came to Herbert in 1907 to live with their daughter, Mrs Annie Wiebe.

Finding the homestead

In 1905 the town of Herbert had Klassen's lumberyard, a restaurant and a store owned by Jansens, where Maria Reimer^k and her children stayed. Young Jake^l remained at the C.P.R. tracks where the livestock was corralled, to look after their belongings, while the father and land inspector went out to their holding in Rockside, S.D., north-west of Herbert. Next day they loaded

Reimer Homestead near Herbert #33, Tp
17 R10



^j Peter P. and Agatha.

^k Maria Schmidt.

^l P.J. Reimer's brother.

their wagon with lumber and drove the eight miles with oxen, taking the horse and buggy as well.

Peter drove back and forth to town, starting at 4:30 in the morning and not arriving home until 11:00 at night, using the oxen for the heavy supplies.

Building a farm on the prairie

On the fourth day Jake brought Peter's mother and children to their partly completed shack. Suddenly that hot afternoon, a severe wind and rain storm arose, lifting the roof and floorless building right off its foundation without shattering a single window pane. Miraculously, no one was injured except for Peter's brother Frank who was left with a permanent scar on his temple. After the storm, Peter drove his mother and children back to town for shelter while his father and Jake tried to salvage what remained of their new home.

Their first barn was made of prairie sod. Later on, a second one was built of used ties from the C.P.R. railway, which initially circled the north end of Rush Lake. When the dam and tracks were built across the lake, ties could be had for the asking. At that time wood was very precious since the poplars on the Saskatchewan River were a long distance away.

Bringing in the harvest

Their first crop, plowed with the aid of oxen and seeded by hand, was a good one, selling for 48 cents a bushel. Prairie chickens and wild ducks were plentiful and a welcome supplement to their diet. Peter tells of trying to avoid destroying their nests as his plow broke new sod. The government supplied trees at no cost and some of them still remain as a monument to the pioneers' struggles.

P.J.Reimer driving oxen to the threshing machine, 1908



Celebration time at the shiveree

When asked what a "shiveree" was as seen in one of Peter's many photographs, he said that on New Year's Eve a group of men would get together and dress up in strange costumes. They would bring their violin and accordion with them along with drums made from square gasoline cans. Horse hair, washed with soap, was fastened to the top of the can. By holding the end and pulling in rhythm, it sounded like a large drum or horn.

Six to twelve or more would all sing and play, going from house to house, accepting tips along the way - including an assortment of refreshments such as sausage, cookies, and other good things to eat. One to three dollars was considered a good night's work. He says his cousin Frank Reimer was good at "pulling the tail".

The Brumm Tup Gang - 1908



Peter's own homestead

In those days a homestead could be bought from the government for \$10.00 at the age of 21, provided improvements were made each year. When he became of age, Peter bought the homestead immediately west of some C.P.R. land. Since he was living at home, he could stay at home and work from there, breaking

20 acres for three years and then getting the deed.

Jacob's homestead was on the shore of an alkaline lake. He also bought the C.P.R. property across from Mrs. Wiebe's^m. The elderly Peter Reimersⁿ had an 80 acre homestead directly east of them.

Chapter 4: Moving West

Checking out British Columbia

Jacob Reimer had now homesteaded at Herbert for one year. He and an English-speaking partner made harnesses on the side and earned good money. A neighbour of his, Jake Sawatsky, had heard of the milder climate and fruit growing-country of British Columbia. Since Jacob preferred gardening to farming, the two went out to the Okanagan to look around. Jacob didn't like the six feet of snow at Sicamous. They then looked over the Renata site on the Arrow Lakes, where the only settler was a Mr. Nash. Jacob liked it immediately, while his friend thought it was too isolated.

Preparing for the move

The two friends returned to the prairies with glowing reports of B.C. and decided to sell their land and leave for the warmer climate. A Mr. Harder wanted the land beside the lake and made a down payment. After Jacob had sold his oxen and some of his machinery, the purchaser reneged. In the meantime, a Mr Harms wanted Peter J's quarter, so Peter sold it for \$1200.00 in 1910 and gave the money to his father to go to B.C. Meanwhile, he took the previously C.P.R. owned property and partly finished house from his father, who by this time had sold the rest of his possessions by auction.

The death of Peter's father^o

A cousin of Peter's, K. Klassen, bought the Sawatzsky property. At the auction the weather was bitterly cold and Jacob caught a cold he couldn't shake. The move to Renata in November, 1911 as well as the boat trip on the "Rossland", was too much for him and he died there of pneumonia, leaving his wife and six children in a strange community.

Jacob and his wife Maria are buried side by side at Renata, B.C., their graves weighted down with concrete. Fortunately they were spared the sight of their orchard destroyed by the dams of the Columbia River (Note: the story of the flooding of Renata can be found in a second document). The church at Robson, B.C. has a marker in its graveyard with the names of the inundated gravestones.

Another death – Peter's Grandfather

In the spring of 1911 Peter's grandfather died at the age of 85. He had not wanted to be uprooted again and decided that he and his wife should stay with their daughter, Mrs Annie Wiebe^p in Saskatchewan. Before he died, he had expressed the desire to be buried on the hilltop overlooking his newly adopted



Margaretha Penner, 28 May, 1912



^m Jacob Peter's sister.

ⁿ Peter P. (?).

^o Jacob Peter

^p Jacob Peter's sister.

land. For many years his grave could be identified among the circles of rocks left by the Indians for their tepees. Since there was no church nearby, Mrs. Wiebe's garden was consecrated as a burying ground under the name of "Rockside Cemetery, Herbert, Sask." Many graves are still carefully tended there by a cousin.

The Peter Reimer family were in B.C. at the time of Peter's grandfather's death and were very unhappy that the grandfather had not been "properly" buried. His wife who died Nov. 15, 1917, is also buried in the garden. (Elsie, their great-granddaughter, could vaguely remember the funeral, although she was only 3 at the time.)



The Rossland loading at Renata

Peter's marriage

Peter J. stayed on the prairies until the Fall threshing even though his parents^q left for B.C. He made good money doing this work. You can also read a story from this time where he was clever enough to avoid getting up early (see "How Grandpa Got to Sleep in" at <http://reimer.concordia.ca>).^r

There he met Margaretha Penner, formerly of Langdon, North Dakota. and Main Centre, Sask. When he left for Renata the second time, Margaret's Mother cautioned her not to let Peter J. go unmarried, but she couldn't make up her mind. Finally, after New Year's she^s decided she would go anywhere with Peter^t and they were married in 1913.

However the marriage rites again created religious problems. The Penners belonged to the Brethern congregation, whereas Peter belonged by birth to a less strict church. Since the two were determined to get married, they got a license from a lawyer; then Mr. Janzen the minister, reluctantly married them after publishing the bans for two weeks.

Return to Renata

When Peter returned to Renata the second time, his mother wanted him to stay. So the plan was for the newly-weds to move to B.C. and rent out the homestead land. They took the train, Peter's third time, along with a friend Peter Harms, but they had to get off at the tunnel above Renata and walk down to the settlement in very deep snow, with Margaret wearing floor-length skirts!

Back to the prairies – and lost luggage

Peter's mother liked Margaret very much and Peter was happy working in the sawmill. But when Margaret got pregnant, she wanted to go home to her own mother, being the baby of a large family. Peter was annoyed since they were becoming established – besides, there was a mid-wife in Renata and a good doctor at Castlegar not too far away. However, nothing would do but she go back to the prairies, where they still had their land and a partly finished house.

Margaret packed many of her wedding presents and linens into a dresser and sent it to Herbert. When it didn't arrive, it was traced as far as Medicine Hat, where it disappeared. The C.P.R. asked its value and a conservative estimate was \$90.00. However, the fine print on the invoice said that each article was worth only \$5.00, and since the dresser was one article,

^q Jacob Peter and Maria

^r He was about 23 years old at this time.

^s She was about 19 years old.

^t He was 24 years old.

regardless of its contents, only a refund of \$5.00 was received...a tragic blow to this new homesteading couple.

Margaret's trials and a new religion

Now there were further religious troubles. Since Margaret was back in Herbert-Main Centre, Mr Janzen of the Brethern wanted her to rejoin the church, especially the choir. To repent of her past "indiscretions" she was to stand in front of the congregation and admit that she had been wrong and sorry that she had married outside the church! This she refused to do. Her parents, too felt that this would break up the marriage, so they all left the church. In later years, Margaret's mother became a strong adherent of the Christian Science Church. She had gone to Rochester, Minnesota for a second cancer operation on her face, when a Christian Scientist prayed for her and healed the cancer without an operation! She remained devout until her old age, reading her Bible every night.

Working in Herbert

Peter and Margaret's land at Herbert was rented out, so they moved into the town of Herbert where Peter worked at a blacksmith shop and went threshing in the fall. During the summer he worked with a carpenter named Loepky. He helped build the K. Klassen home (nee Annie Wiebe). One of his pictures dated 1907 shows his threshing machine with John Klassen and a new John Deere binder his father Jacob had bought for \$68.00. He had ordered it from Wisconsin, but when it arrived it was marked "Made in England".

Gambling on oil

But Peter's farming days weren't to last too long. After three years, an entrepreneur from Alberta came to Herbert, telling everyone of a gas discovery by the Bow Island Gas Company sixty miles south of Medicine Hat. Gambling fever was hitting the West. Grain was selling at \$1.05 and sure to go to \$2.00 a bushel. Peter traded his homestead for eleven lots in the gas fields, as he was certain he would get rich quickly. The deals all fell through, leaving many penniless in the Herbert area.

The move to Regina

Peter Penner, Margaret's brother, had a farm near his brother-in-law Jake Klassen, north-west of Wiebe's. Farming was not his first-love, either so he went to Regina and got work in the power-house. Then he persuaded Peter to come, as he had a job for him there as well. Margaret and Peter, now with three little children, packed up their meagre belongings and left for Regina.

Chapter 5: Death and Family Rebuilding

Margaret's death

When Margaret was a little girl she had fallen off a swing and hurt her foot badly. Now in Regina it started swelling and the doctor said it had developed into cancer and the only solution was to amputate. When her appointment became due, she decided to get the children's washing done before leaving for the hospital. It was bitterly cold weather and she hung the washing outside on the back verandah. The next day she developed a cough and the doctor advised her to stay home until it was better. A kind neighbour who was a trained nurse, looked after her and the doctor came to see her every day. He felt home care was better than the hospital, especially since the flu epidemic was now prevalent. However, the cold developed into pneumonia and she died Dec. 31, 1919.^u She was buried in the Main Centre, Sask. churchyard.

^u She was 25 years old.

The family breaks up

Peter J's Mother and her second husband, Diedrich Epp, came to the prairies for the funeral and took the two eldest children, Elsie and Peter, back with them to B.C. The baby Dick stayed with the aging Penner grandparents.

A new family

Several years later (1921), Peter J. married the former Anna Neufeld, who brought the family together again and became a loving mother and devoted wife.

Looking for work

Times had become hard in the slump after the First World War. Peter decided to try his luck and go to Morden in Manitoba to see how working conditions were there. After his wife's death he had gone back to Herbert into the garage business but his partnership had not worked out successfully. He joined Jake Peters in a freight car, taking care of cattle on the way. After a stay of two or three years in Morden, working in a service station and starting a vulcanizing business, he again became restless and moved back to Regina this time.

Peter gets an engine running - again

In Regina, Peter he started earning \$6.00 to \$7.00 a day – in those days considered very good pay. He met a man he used to work with in the Regina power house, who told him two men were looking for a good engineer to run their "Rumbly Oil Pull" engine. One man had already been turned down but they would be looking for another. It turned out to be Mr Ross and his son Carman.

When Peter told them his qualifications, they said they wanted a roadbuilder, not a thresherman. They were having trouble finding someone who could make their tractor work. Peter assured them he could make it go if they would buy extra ignition wire, which he felt was needed for this make of machine. They did so and took him twelve miles south of Regina to their work site. Peter said he would pay for the trip if he couldn't get the engine started.

He checked the ignition and asked Carman to fill 'er up. The latter only wanted to put five gallons into the 600 gallon tank, since a lot of theft had been going on. Reluctantly Carmen filled it up and away they went on two cylinders--right into the ditch!

When the engine stopped, Peter put in the new wiring and away they went. When Mr. Ross came out in the evening, a farmer told him the engine had been going all day. Peter asked for \$1.00 an hour when the going rate was 70 cents. He got it and often worked ten to twelve hours a day. Mr. Ross, who had contracted road building with Mr. DeStein, the Government Survey Engineer of Saskatchewan, gave up road building after a period of three years.

Grading roads in Saskatchewan

The Allis Chalmers Company sold road grading equipment at that time – usually supplying a competent man to work the machinery. Peter worked for them for a year, building roads around Milestone, Sask. The next year the Reeve of the Municipality wanted to buy a Holt machine. When the Council

Peter J. Reimer and Anna Neufeld, July 31, 1921



Elsie, Peter, and Dick in the Model T Ford



agreed, they hired Peter for three years, building roads in the area around Milestone, Weyburn, Vibank, Francis and Odessa.

When it rained, a lot of time was lost, and of course also the pay. One year they worked until mid November before freeze-up, but another year it was only until the middle of September. In those days there was no unemployment insurance so that meant that money was low.

During the summer holidays young Peter and Dick would sometimes spend their days with their father, sleeping and eating in the caboose, driving the Model T for groceries in town (before age 16 driving requirements were imposed by the government) and swimming in the plentiful sloughs everywhere, usually coming home every two weeks for a bath and with the "itch".

Chapter 6: Surviving the Great Depression

Mr Ross' advice

In 1928-1930 Peter J. worked at St. Brieux, 60 miles east of Prince Albert, for Lake Lenore Municipality.

During the Depression a relief work program was arranged in the Fall, whereby the farmers could work for three days a week, using their own team of horses and dump wagons. In this way they could earn enough money to buy coal and pay their taxes.

Mr. Ross had bought a gravel pit at Pilot Butte, east of Regina, and then sold the gravel for provincial road building. He also bought a Caterpillar tractor and elevator grader to build roads east of Moosomin and north of Rocanville. He knew that a blacksmith would be needed on the site to repair harnesses etc. So he told Peter J. to go to the Parliament buildings and apply for the job, but not to fill in an application form as it would only be thrown into the waste paper basket. Peter J. followed his advice and insisted on seeing the employment officer, who hired him on the spot.

Beating the system

At times there were as many as thirty teams. Even in those days there was the odd person trying to "beat the system". The trick was to use a wild team of horses along with harnesses and traces tied with binder twine. The teams would balk and act up, and the owner would be sent to the back of the line where he could sit and loaf.

The government timekeeper was in the blacksmith shop a fair amount of the time and told Peter J. about it. When the engineers came to review the work, they complained that not enough earth was being moved, fired the graderman and hired Peter J. Mr Ross's job was to tell the men where to throw the dirt and it was up to Peter J. to move it.

Doing it alone

Peter relates how hard things were one winter during the Depression. He needed one extra ton of coal costing \$6.00 to tide him over. He went to the City Relief Office to ask if he could borrow this amount. The office enquired as to how many children he had and whether any were working. At that time only the two boys were living at home: young Peter working at Simpson's Mail Order, often part time, and Dick going to school. Elsie was in Winnipeg earning \$15.00 a week, and sending home \$2.00 a week whenever possible. They suggested that the son quit his job and then the family would be entitled to the full welfare of \$79.00 to be paid for by the Provincial Government instead of the City of Regina. Peter J. of course refused.

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Most of the above story was originally written in 1970. Some additions and revisions were made in 1977 after a visit to Clearbrook, B.C. where Peter J. and Anna had moved, and after selling their property in Surrey, B.C. At age 88 Peter's memory is astounding and it is our hope that

these remembrances will be treasured by the younger generation.
signed July 4, 1980. Elsie (Reimer) Nesbitt.

Peter and Lil on a Date

