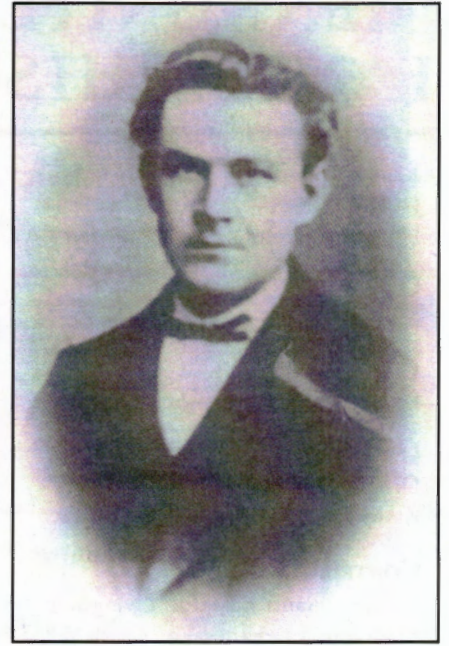




This mangle used to press wet laundry was made by Jacob Harder about 1885. Measurements are 70 inches long, 38 inches high, and 34 inches wide.



Jacob Harder (1849-1937) in West Prussia, Germany, about 1875.

A Mangle and a Manger:

The Furniture of Jacob Harder (1849-1937)

by D. Frederick Dyck*

When I first saw the contraption in the shadows of the old carriage barn, I thought it had something to do with crushing corn stalks for cattle feed. Whatever it was, it was made to work a person hard, of that I was certain. Later, I would have to ask my Aunt Emma Harder (1888-1988) what it was.

First, though, I worked at opening the sliding door of the second story of the barn wider to let in more sunlight. It was obvious that the door had not been open in many years. There was a layer of fine, wind-blown dust on every surface.



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Before entering the barn, I knew that this upper story had been the workshop of my Great-grandfather Jacob Harder (1849-1937), father of my Grandmother Marie (Harder) Dyck (1884-1973). Grandma and her sister, Aunt Emma Harder, had told me a lot about their parents, Jacob and Anna (Claassen) Harder (1862-1949), in the early weeks of summer 1963.

As a working/learning experience, my parents, Herbert Dyck (1927-2012) and Alice (Sitler) Dyck (1929-2021), had sent me to live with Uncle Arthur Dyck (1924-1991) and Aunt Wanda (Swartz) Dyck (1932-2014) on the family farm in rural Whitewater, Kansas, in the Emmaus Mennonite community. At age 13, it was the first time I had traveled alone and on a Continental Trailways bus from St. Louis County, Missouri, to Wichita, Kansas, via Kansas City.

Knowing Grandpa Harder had died in 1937, and judging from the thickness of the dust, I could believe no one had been in this upper story of the barn for at least 30 years, maybe longer. With the extra sunlight, I could



The Jacob and Anna Harder house built in 1882 in rural Whitewater, Kansas.

make out recognizable objects. There was a painted dowry chest that held seed wheat. Certainly not the hidden treasure that I had first imagined. And baby beds galore. At least two of a “normal” size, obviously homemade, but skillfully so. A third resembled a baby bed, but different. It was large and deep, with solid sides. Something else to ask Aunt Emma. She was my go-to answer person as she had lived in the stone farmhouse ever since she was born in 1888. She knew everyone and everything.

There were large bundles of horse hair hanging from the rafters. Later I learned this was used for stuffing or else chopped up to mix in plaster as a binder. There were small kegs of new, square nails of various sizes, and a trio of rock-maple wood planes: small, medium, and large, a couple of drawing knives to rough shape wood pieces, hammers, chisels for wood and stone, branding irons, a brace and bit set, axes, saws—all a veritable museum of tools and furniture. Some items were older than Grandpa Harder’s time. The dowry chest I knew and a small wardrobe; but it was now time to talk with Aunt Emma.

People can be as much of a treasure as any antique, and Aunt Emma was one of those persons. She and her twin sister, Bertha, were born on December 22, 1888,

the sixth and seventh children of Jacob and Anna Harder. In total, there were 13 children, but only six of the eight girls lived to adulthood. None of the five boys lived more than a few months.

From need and inclination, Aunt Emma became, as she herself put it, her father’s “right-hand man.” In the late nineteenth century, young Mennonite girls did some of the light farm work, but heavy field work with a team of horses was normally the bailiwick of boys and men. It was not as though Emma was deficient with the more domestic side of farm life. Not at all. When I learned to know her well in the 1960s, she was known as an accomplished seamstress and quilter. Many of us in the family have lovely quilts made by Aunt Emma.

As a young woman, Aunt Emma had at least one serious suitor. It was understood by me that this was not a subject for questions or discussion. Bits and pieces of the story gleaned over the years were that a young man in the Emmaus Mennonite Church community asked Jacob Harder if he and Emma could marry. Emma was enthusiastic, but her father said “No—she was too young.”

Emma’s mother, Anna (Claassen), had married Jacob Harder in 1881 at age 18, so I would guess Aunt

Emma was either 16 or 17 years old when her suitor proposed. It may have been her one opportunity, or perhaps she never again encouraged anyone. Worst of all would be a forever broken heart. Speculation is all there is now, and too much of that is not fair to Aunt Emma.

Emma would remain at her parents' farm for nearly all of her 99 years. After nephews took over the farm work in the 1920s, Emma became housekeeper and caregiver for her parents. She was also the collector of photographs, genealogy, and history. By the time I arrived in 1963, Emma's storehouse of knowledge was legendary.

The stone house that Aunt Emma shared with her nephew Arthur Dyck and his wife Wanda had been built in 1882. Professional masons dressed the exterior limestone quarried one-half mile south of the home site. This included lintels for windows and doors and finely-shaped sills to facilitate rain draining on windows. The interior walls of the house were done in rough stone that was plastered smooth for wallpaper. This gave the walls a total thickness of 24 inches as evidenced by the deep, inside window sills. Several additions have been built onto the house with one major remodeling in the early 2000s, keeping the house as original as possible. This house is currently owned and lived in by the sister of this writer, a great-granddaughter of Jacob and Anna Harder and is pictured on the previous page.

Aunt Emma had half of the downstairs as an apartment with her own kitchen and bath. Her front room had a quilt frame, a Singer sewing machine, and a few pieces of old furniture—old as in lovely antiques. The divan was a fold-out bed used by her parents. Pride of place was held by a heavy cherry wood chest of drawers that Aunt Emma called by its German name of *commode*. This chest held finished quilt tops and hundreds of cut quilt blocks. This chest of drawers was brought to America from West Prussia, Germany, by Aunt Emma's Uncle Gerhard Claassen (1819-1913) in 1876 and was likely an inherited piece already decades old. All of these things, and many more, I became familiar with in my many visits seeking information, company, or cookies and tea.

On the evening of the day I had spent in the top floor of the carriage barn, I quietly knocked on Aunt Emma's door and was beckoned as always with a high-pitched "Come in." Following a preliminary explanation, I asked about the large, heavy contraption that I had found. Aunt Emma listened carefully and proclaimed, "It's the mangle for pressing wet laundry." Aunt Emma was not a person with a sense of humor. Few of her generation had that trait. That told me that



Baby bed made in 1881 by Jacob Harder. All of Jacob and Anna's children used this bed. Following the marriage of their daughter Marie to Jacob J. Dyck, this baby bed was used for the 15 Dyck children.

her response was serious. The doubtful look on my face encouraged her to elaborate.

"In those days, we did large lots of laundry every few months. Small items, undergarments, would be done once a week, or as needed. Larger items could go for months, especially during the winter. This did not mean we wore dirty clothes or slept on dirty bedding. All of us had several changes of clothing and there was sufficient bedding to last for months."

Proof of this is shown in an inventory of laundry published in the 1975 family history book, *Abraham Claassen: Vistula to Plum Grove*, by cousin Ernest G. Claassen (1895-1996). Aunt Emma's grandmother, Anna (Bergmann) Claassen (1838-1917), wrote this inventory on March 28, 1868, when she was a 30-year-old housewife in West Prussia, Germany.

- 8 shirts too small for John, tied in a bundle in the *Kammer*
- 12 of John's, eight marked J.C.
- 20 of Helena's, 12 marked H6; the others are old
[Helena was her nine-year-old daughter who died four years later in 1872, EGC.]
- 19 of Anna's, of which 15 are marked A6, the other four are marked H.
- 31 men's shirts, marked AK, numbered 1 to 31
- 6 men's shirts marked AC, numbered one to six
- 4 men's shirts marked AC four
- 2 men's shirts marked AxC
- 15 old shirts, marked AK or GB. [GB were the initials of grandfather's uncle and of his grandfather, EGC]
- 1 muslin shirt, marked AK
- 59 men's shirts (total), 7 discarded
- 52 men's shirts
- 15 old women's shirts, marked HR, or JR, or LB
- 18 women's shirts marked AB 1855

12 women's shirts marked AB 1854
 6 women's shirts marked AB 1853
 5 women's shirts marked AxB 1845 No 16
 1 woman's shirt marked AcB 1844 No 7
 6 women's shirts marked AxC, numbered 1 to 6
 10 women's shirts marked JK or HR, total 73,
 11 discarded, 62 on March 28, 1868
 75 child's shirts on March 28, 1868
 11 1 1/2 width sheets, 3 coarse 1 1/2 width sheets
 10 double width sheets
 2 double width sheets
 7 white bed spreads
 2 red-figured bed spreads
 14 ticking table cloths
 7 ribbed table cloths
 7 ticking towels
 6 white linen towels
 8 checked ticking towels
 3 blue towels

An impressive laundry list that proves Aunt Emma's point, but how did the mangle work? Aunt Emma explained that the tray on top of the mangle would be loaded with stones and tipped toward one end while laundry to be wrung out was laid on the platform underneath the wood rollers. The stone-loaded tray was then tilted back level and two girls on each end would push and pull the tray back and forth squeezing the excess water from the wet laundry. This also had an ironing effect, reducing wrinkles prior to hanging on a line. Laundry must have been hanging everywhere in the yard!

My next questions for Aunt Emma involved what I perceived to be an oversized baby bed. Aunt Emma gave me a rare smile before explaining this piece. It was indeed a baby bed, albeit one made for a special purpose. The



Baby bed made by Jacob Harder for his twin daughters, Emma and Bertha, born in 1888.

bed was oversize and a little deep, without the customary slatted sides. Jacob Harder had made this bed for his twin daughters, Aunts Emma and sister Bertha (1888-1980).

In my research of my family history, this is the only birth of twins that I have discovered. An exceedingly rare event commemorated with this special bed. It has not been stored in the carriage barn for many years, but cleaned, and now has a special place in my sister Christine's collection of family heirlooms in the old stone house.

By the time that Jacob Harder made this special bed for his twin daughters, he had been in America for ten years. Jacob left his family home and farm at Neumunsterburg, West Prussia, after receiving his Imperial German passport on May 3, 1878. This passport describes Jacob as follows:

Stature: Medium	Form: Lean
Hair: Dark Blonde	No distinguishing marks
Eyes: Gray Born	

Jacob's ultimate destination in America was Whitewater, Kansas, where the West Prussian Mennonites of the large Heubuden congregation had settled in 1876. Here they formed the new Emmaus Mennonite Church and congregation. Jacob knew several families here and had previously worked for Abraham Claassen on his farm at Simonsdorf, West Prussia.

While working for Abraham Claassen, Jacob met Anna Claassen, Abraham's daughter, born in 1862. She was apparently quite taken with Jacob and told him she was going to marry him when she grew up. That part of the story was well-known family lore. So, did Jacob feel the same? His daughter Emma thought so and told me that Anna Claassen was the motivating factor in Jacob's decision to come to America.

Upon first arriving in Kansas in 1879, Jacob was employed at the Wiebe Lumber Yard in the town of Halstead, about 35 miles west of the Emmaus community at Whitewater. Halstead was one of many Mennonite farming communities that sprang up along the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad as it was being built west toward the future Dodge City, Kansas, after the Civil War ended in 1865.

Farm land sold by railway agents from the railroad right-of-way in the 1870s drew many Mennonites arriving from colonies in Russia, and a few from West Prussia, Germany. This included the Claassen

family and most members of the new Emmaus community. Single men like Jacob Harder were rare.

Within a short time, Jacob Harder was again working for his future father-in-law Abraham Claassen (1825-1910) and marriage to the now grownup Anna quickly followed on February 22, 1881. The newly-wed couple lived in an old log home built about 1870 on 160 acres that father Abraham originally owned. This quarter section of prime bottom land along the Henry Creek was part of the land that Abraham had purchased from the railroad in 1876 for an average price of \$12.00 per acre.

With the newly-married couple living in the log house, it is probable that the carriage barn where I found all the antiques was the first new building on the farm. The couple's first child, daughter Anna, born December 28, 1881, was born in the log house. This puts the build date of the stone farmhouse at 1882.

Professional mason Andy Patterson and his crew built Abraham Claassen's stone house in 1878, due east



Jacob Harder (1849-1937) and Anna Claassen (1862-1949) on their wedding day, February 22, 1881, in Plum Grove, Kansas.

one mile on the Henry Creek from Jacob and Anna Harder's home site. Andy is also the likely builder of Jacob and Anna's house.

Family lore is that Jacob was the builder. He probably did most of the carpentry work inside the house but not the stone work. A mason's skill is evident in the cut and dressed stone used in this house.

Once the house was finished and the babies continued to arrive, Jacob turned the log house into his first workshop. Aunt Emma and her sisters told about all the interesting buildings on the farm and how they enjoyed watching their father in his workshop as he created milk stools, repaired harnesses and wagons, and built furniture.

While sitting on the front porch in the evenings, Jacob recited German poetry, told stories about life in Ger-

many, and sang the German national anthem *Deutschland Uber Alles*. Aunt Emma said, "Father was very good at wood work. He learned that in Germany."

While Jacob made much of the needed furniture, some also came from Anna's parents, Abraham and Anna Claassen. This included the two dowry chests brought from West Prussia. One fancy, inlaid chest of ash wood was made about 1790 and had belonged to Abraham's mother, Justina (van Bergen) Claassen (1780-1853). My article titled "The von Bergen-Claassen Dowry Chest" was printed in the July 2003 *Mennonite Family History*.

The other more plain but painted dowry chest belonged to Abraham's wife, Anna (Bergmann) Claassen. Both chests are pictured in the book *Jacob J. Dyck: Am Trakt to America*, written by this author. The cherry chest of drawers originally owned by Abraham's brother, Gerhard, came from Anna's parents.

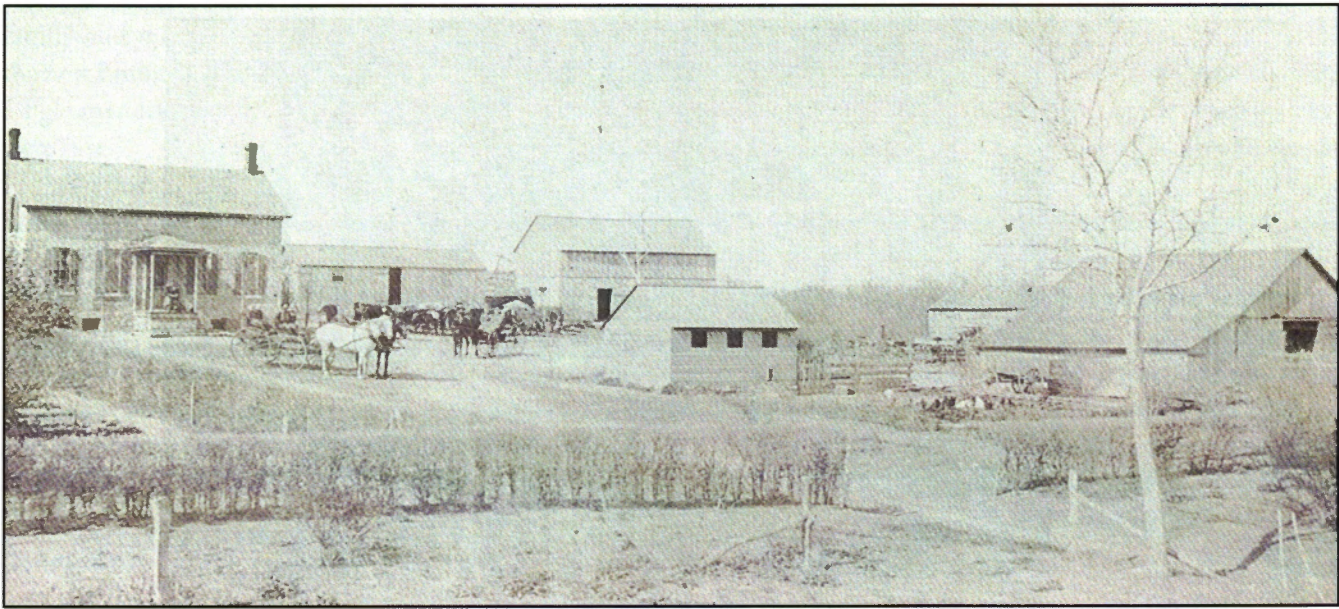
Bed frames made of ornamental iron seem to have been among the few items that were "store bought." Same with a kitchen table and chairs. Besides the man-



Wash stand/dry sink made by Jacob Harder about 1890.



Utility cabinet made by Jacob Harder and a photo of the Harder house and family about 1900. Note the original window frame from the Harder house kitchen.



The Harder farmstead about 1900 with the stone house on the left and the original log house built about 1870 just right of the stone house. The carriage barn is to the right of the log house.

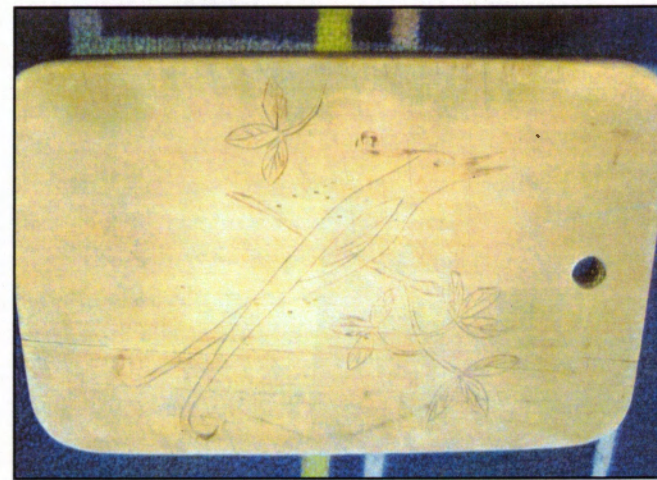
gle and twins' bed, other items that Jacob made that have survived include benches that could seat three to four children. Jacob continued making these benches as grandchildren came along and they were still in use at family gatherings in the 1960s. A small wood

washstand has survived from the 1880s, and one of the small baby beds. At least one well-used three-legged milking stool survives. These milking stools were made from the wood of Osage orange hedge trees planted as a living fence throughout Kansas in the late nineteenth century.



Jacob and Anna Harders' twin daughters, L. Bertha (1888-1980) and R. Emma (1888-1988), about 1890.

One especially cherished item is a bread/cutting board. The reverse side of this cutting board is decorated with a lovely stylized bird incised into the surface. While Jacob Harder was known as very capable in a variety of trades and crafts, being an artist was not one of them. The artist in this family was Jacob's father-in-law, Abraham Claassen, and he is likely the person who drew and incised the bird on the bread board.



Bread/cutting board made by Jacob Harder and decorated by Abraham Claassen, about 1881.

Several of Abraham's sketch books from the 1830s, as well as finished artwork of flowers, landscapes, birds, buildings, all done in West Prussia, remain with family. Particular favorites of this writer are pen and ink drawings of the Teutonic Knights' castle and headquarters at Marienburg, West Prussia. Abraham and his art will be the subject of a future article.

Jacob Harder is likely not unique or rare in making furnishings for his farmstead in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. What is rare is that so many items have survived and are still in his house 140 years later on a farm that has seen seven generations of family. Long may his memory survive, along with his mangle and manger!

Right: This "Rose Quilt" was 30 years in the making. The top was made in 1940 by Anna (Claassen) Harder, but it was not quilted until 1970 when Anna's daughter, Emma, completed it at age 82.
Photo: Christine (Dyck) Sehnert



This bench, milk stool, and boot jack were made from Osage orange trees by Jacob Harder.