

## **The Loewen Residence in Pretoria, Orenburg**

David F Loewen

In their back garden, the Loewens usually grew potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, beets, peas, chickpeas, beans, corn, sunflowers, a few watermelon or plain yellow melons, onions, and turnips. Their crops consisted of wheat, barley, and oats. Their home was next to the public school with a side road between the two properties. A caragana hedge encircled the yard as a border between their property and that of their neighbours.

In due course, the Loewen family graduated from the humble sod house to a more substantial and permanent structure. The house, as Tina Loewen remembers it, was of the style typical of Mennonites originating in Prussia - house, barn and shed all built in one long building running south to north. The living quarters were nearest to the front garden. Their house had three rooms – a kitchen, dining room/bedroom, and a living room/bedroom. Since the Loewen family was a large family with 10 – 12 people around the table, they needed a large kitchen for eating and cooking. The house was built with large homemade bricks and a straw roof, and the kitchen floor was made with home-mixed clay. Once a year, the floor was evened out or renewed with fresh clay.

At one end of the kitchen stood shelves for the dishes and food. That was their pantry with only a curtain to close it off. The stove, also built of clay, was situated to one side with cast iron plates. There was one large table in the kitchen and benches to sit on, or some wooden homemade stools. The dining room (used for eating only when guests were present) had one bed and one wooden couch that opened up for nighttime to sleep on. During the day it was used for sitting on. There was also a table with several chairs.

The living room had one double bed (for the parents) and two wooden couches for sitting during the day, but again, which opened up for sleeping at night. The bedding was always stacked on the parents' bed.

The wall between the dining room and living room was built of clay bricks, with an oven between so that both rooms would be warmed. This oven was also used for all the baking, and a built-in cast iron plate was used to heat food. The oven door was in the kitchen, and the fuel used was either straw or homemade manure bricks. The wall between the two rooms was almost the full length of the room. The house also had a small dirt cellar with a trap door in the wooden floor of the dining room as entrance, with wooden steps leading down. This is where the vegetables, pickled cucumbers, watermelon, and homemade syrup were stored for the winter months.

Next to the living quarters was the barn. The Loewens had a few cows, horses, sheep, and pigs. An open well for drinking water was located in the barn, about 30 or 40 feet deep. It was enclosed with a wooden fence and a wooden roof above. Water was hauled up with a rope and bucket. A small shed was built on the east side of the barn where wood was kept for the winter. It

was also used for the few ducks and chickens, and also where the clucking hens hatched their chicks. In the summer the chickens would roam freely outside. Next to the barn was a large shed (Scheune) where straw, hay, and equipment was kept, especially during the winter months. This unique building style ensured that no one needed to venture outside during the winter months, when the danger of becoming lost in frigid winter storms was a real threat.

There was another small house on the yard where the older boys slept and entertained their friends. It had two small bedrooms and a hallway. Next to their living quarters was a blacksmith shop and here is where they would also take their baths in the summertime. Abraham Loewen was the only blacksmith in the village so he would fix wheels for other people and also make horseshoes, etc.

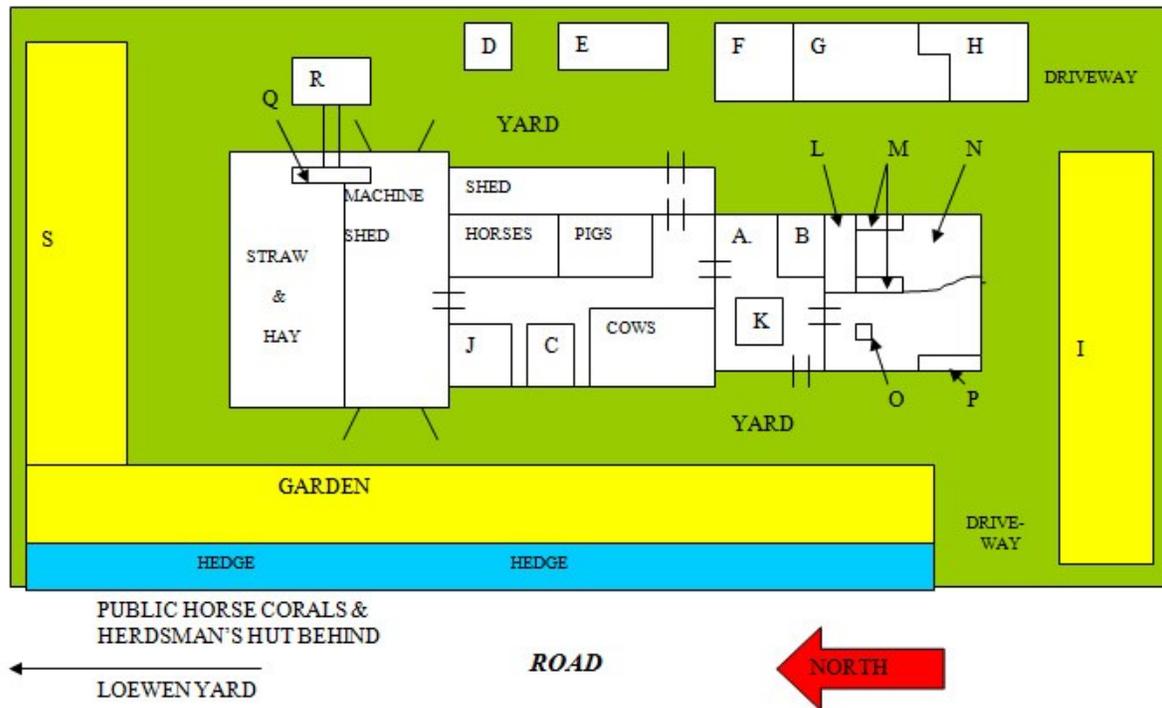
Next to this was a smaller room where they heated water in the summertime for baths, washing clothes, etc. There was also an oven, made of clay bricks, for baking bread, and in the fall, they would boil the syrup on that stove. On the yard they had a tread threshing machine which was horse-driven. Four horses were tied to a pole, and they would walk round and round. This would in turn drive the machine, which stood inside the barn walls. The children enjoyed getting on the platform and making the rounds.

Manure bricks, used as fuel for the stove, were made once a year, in the spring, from the horse and cattle manure produced after a long winter in the barn. The manure was mixed with straw and then spread outside on the ground about 8 inches thick. It was then trampled on by horses and flattened with a heavy roller. After a few days it was cut into 1 foot squares, which were piled up so that the air could dry them out. Once the manure “bricks” were dried, they were stored in the little shed, ready for use.

In the summer months, it was the children’s task to rake and sweep the yard every Saturday - the yard had to be clean for Sunday. Abraham Loewen made the broom they used from a type of brush which grew wild. During the winter months he fashioned their everyday brooms from sugar cane.

The street had elevated dirt sidewalks on either side of the street with a ditch so that the spring water could run off. The side street between the school and the Loewen property ran south and north. It led past the cattle corral behind their property, through some pastureland, and across the small Gussicha River, and about two miles further to the next village called Suworowka, or #13, where Maria Loewen’s brother and sister, Daniel and Anna Eitzen lived. The east exit road of the village led to Karaguj, about 1 mile away.

## A.J. LOEWEN HOME IN PRETORIA



KEY:	A - PANTRY	B - STOVE	C - WELL	D - OUTHOUSE
	E - WOODPILE	F - SUMMER KITCHEN	G - BLACKSMITH SHOP	
	H - BOY'S ROOM	I - FRONT GARDEN	J - SHEEP PEN	K - TABLE
	L - PARENTS' BED	M - GIRLS' BEDS	N - LIVING ROOM	O - TRAP DOOR
	P - BOY'S BED	Q - THRESHING MACHINE	R - HORSE POWER	
	S - BACK GARDEN			

**NOTE:** The above description is based on Tina Loewen's recollection from the time she was a 10-yr. old girl growing up there. The drawing is not drawn to scale.