The 1940's signified a major shift from traditional agrarian life. Hybrid corn seeds were a recent development and shortly after that fertilizers and chemicals and tractors were introduced into the community. With the adoption of each new technology crop yields continued to go up and as the opportunity to make more money by growing irrigated corn farmers turned away from growing Turkey Red. In Kansas where a lot of Turkey Red wheat was grown it too was abandoned but for different reasons. With the availability of cheap nitrogen fertilizer farmers began applying it to Turkey Red only to find that when they did it fell over due to its height. Plant breeders began to make new varieties of wheat that were shorter and that wouldn't fall over when fertilizer was applied. The yields of these new varieties when grown with cheap nitrogen fertilizer was much higher than Turkey Red. The late 1940's and 1950's were a boom time for American agriculture. The world was recovering from a devastating war and farmers were convinced by the developers of these new technologies that their role was to feed the world.

Turkey Red could not survive in this context. In the rush to increase production we didn't give much thought to what was being lost. Your great-great grandfather Friesen once said that our people went through a terrible tragedy in the 1930's amidst poverty. He said the next tragedy our community will face is 'a tragedy amidst plenty.' What did he mean by that? He is not here to tell us. Like water dripping on stone, the lure of money and the power of technology has eroded community solidarity. We used to think of ourselves as being a separate, hard working community that differed from the individualistic, mass culture of American life. But the introduction of new machines changed the way we think about life. The logic of capitalism slowly infiltrated our decision making and thoughts. Following Jesus in our daily life became just a private matter. I think another part of the 'tragedy amidst plenty' is that the land, although productive, is not healthy and the food it produces is not healthy affecting our health and our community's health. Although people have been conscious not to till the soil as much as in the past the

soil aggregates are broken making the soil easier to blow away in the wind and wash away during a rain.

Dust storm photo taken near my hometown in Nebraska on April 30, 2018

Dust storms like those of the 1930's have returned in the past few years.

Ayame chan, It is hard to be a human being. It is doubly hard if you have to navigate life all alone. I want you to know that you are part of a family and a community. The community that you are a part of includes the land. We have many stories to tell from our experience over time and the land speaks to us too if we have eyes to see and ears to listen.

Checking the wheat fields in the Spring of 2024

Learning from the past not only helps us to not repeat past failures it also helps us to discern how to creatively respond to new situations. Growing Turkey Red is a reminder of our shared story that reaches nearly around the world. This morning I walked out to look at the growing wheat. It has emerged from beneath the snow in excellent condition. It has a robust green color even though we added no fertilizer. There is something that I can feel moving in my body when I see this field and contemplate its significance. These seeds connect me to my past, it feeds me in the present and it gives me hope for the future. I hope these seeds and the stories that they have nurtured will carry on in you.

I love you,
Gramps

In the winter of 1937 three of my relatives spent the winter months digging a deep hole in the ground. They made a simple tripod and pulley and they took turns digging soil and putting it into a bucket while the other two hauled it up and dumped it. After digging through 45 meters of soil they encountered a layer of gravel and in this gravel was water. This layer of gravel they later found was more than 30 meters deep and it contained massive amounts of water. They made pumps and started pumping the water out of the ground to water their crops.

Water is life. In the early days of its discovery it was seen as a precious gift of God that turned the terrible misfortunes of the 1930's into a period of peace and prosperity. One leader in my home town warned about the temptation of increasing wealth. He saw the possibility that farm sizes could begin to grow as early adopters of irrigation had much higher yields than those who did not. He hoped that the future of Henderson would include a growing number of smaller more productive farms to provide opportunities for a new generation of farmers so that the community could be maintained. Unfortunately his warning was not heeded.

Sunday afternoon demonstration of the first irrigation well dug by hand by John J. Thiessen in 1939. His F30 tractor running full speed produced around 1,000 gallons of water per minute. The boys are his son Albert and Walter Ott.