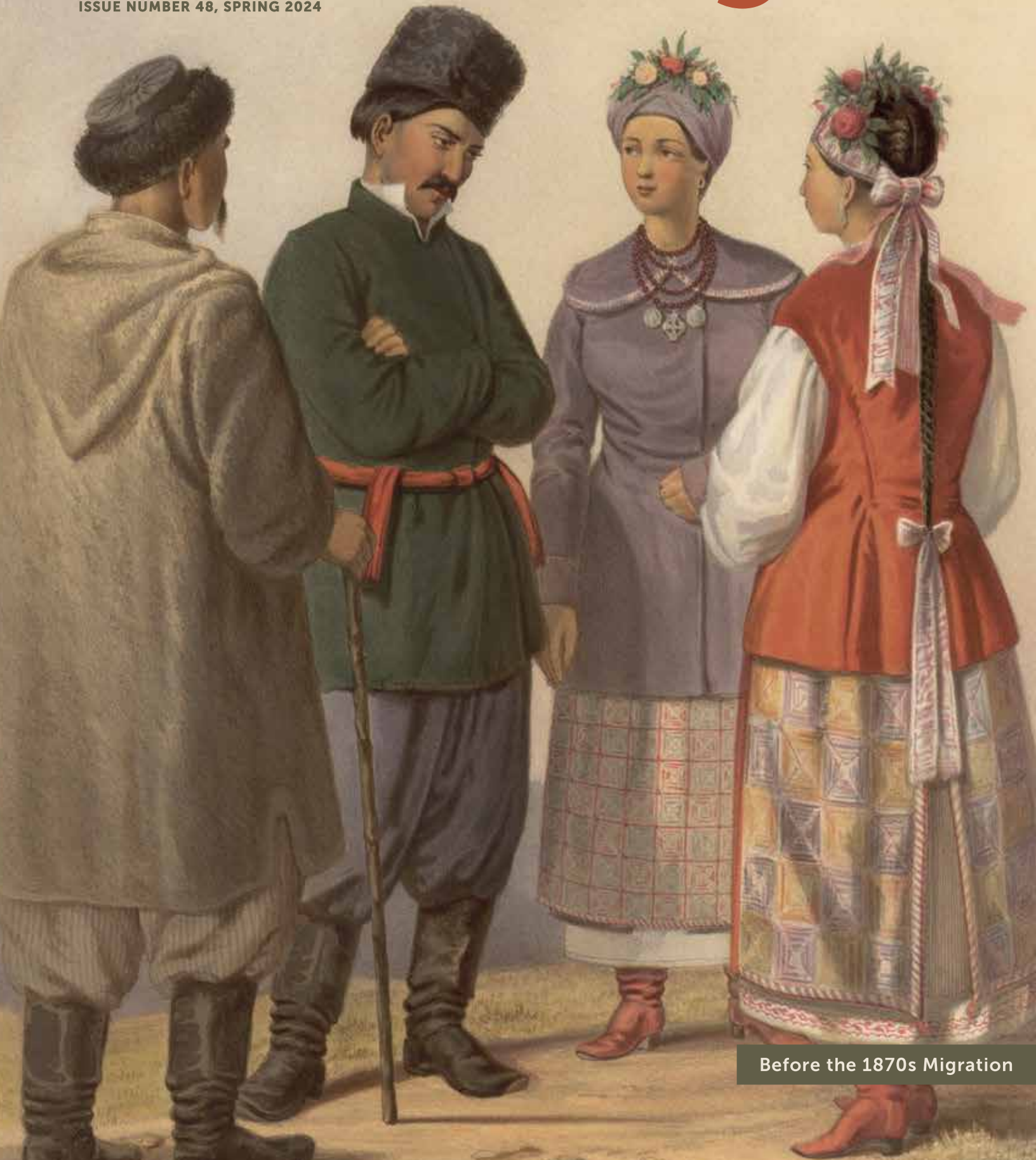
Preservings

ISSUE NUMBER 48, SPRING 2024



Before the 1870s Migration

Preservings

ISSUE NUMBER 48, SPRING 2024

A JOURNAL OF THE
D. F. PLETT HISTORICAL
RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.

ISSN 1914-7007 (Print)
ISSN 2563-7231 (Online)

EDITOR Aileen Friesen
MANAGING EDITOR Jeremy Wiebe
DESIGNER Anikó Szabó

PUBLICATION ADDRESS
Plett Foundation
University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Ave
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 2E9

ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS
Aileen Friesen
+1 (204) 786 9352
ai.friesen@uwinnipeg.ca

SUBSCRIPTIONS
To subscribe and pay online,
visit plettfoundation.org/preservings

ADDRESS CHANGES
info@plettfoundation.org

Preservings is published semi-annually.
The suggested contribution is $20.00 per year.
Cheques should be made out to the
D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation.

MISSION
To inform our readers about the history of the Mennonites who came to Manitoba in the 1870s and their descendants, and in particular to promote a respectful understanding and appreciation of the contributions made by Low German-speaking traditionalist Mennonite groups of the Americas.

COVER IMAGES
Front: A depiction of Ukrainians from the 1860s. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, LCCN 2018688988

Inside back: A playing card describing Ekaterinoslav province (1856).
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, LCCN 2018689300

Contents

From the Editor

Aileen Friesen

This year, 2024, marks the 150th anniversary of Mennonite settlement in Manitoba, Canada, by immigrants from the southern Ukrainian lands of the Russian empire. The first large group of Mennonites arrived on the shores of Quebec City aboard the SS *Austrian* on July 17, 1874, making their way to the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers.[1] This group consisted primarily of families from the Kleine Gemeinde church, including some widows as heads of households, intent on starting again in a new country.

The D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation places this moment, the 1870s migration to Manitoba, at the core of its mandate. Its interest in the migration has been reflected in past issues of *Preservings*, several of which have been dedicated to this topic.[2] Historically speaking, the 1870s migration was also a key moment in the spread of Mennonites across the Americas. This movement to Canada created a new branch in the geography of Mennonites originating from the European Low Countries, which would eventually extend to parts of Latin America.

To help us better understand the 1870s migration, this issue of *Preservings* focuses on the period before it happened. Rather than prioritizing the act of migration, this issue asks readers to think about the social, cultural, political, and economic changes facing Mennonite communities before the 1870s exodus that shaped the decision of families to leave or stay.

The first article, by Nataliya Venger, takes us back to the 1830s and 1840s when the reformer Johann Cornies was at the apex of his power within the colonies. She highlights the involvement of officials from St. Petersburg in the development of agriculture throughout the empire, including in Mennonite colonies, showing how Mennonites were co-opted into the reformist agenda of the tsarist state. The "Crown Trainees Project," which empowered Cornies to train youths from surrounding Ukrainian, Russian, and Nogai communities in agricultural methods, facilitated new interactions, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, between Mennonites and their neighbours. This article demonstrates how the legal categories (or social estates) of serf, state peasant, and colonist (which included Mennonites) created hierarchies, which theoretically were eliminated with the reforms of the 1860s, but whose legacies lingered until the revolution of 1917.

The next article, by Cornelius Fast (1840-1927), I discovered by happenstance in the Mennonite Heritage Archives. Fast, a member of the Kleine Gemeinde who worked as a carpenter and a teacher in the Borosenko colony before joining the migration to Canada in 1874, recalled the death of his father from an unexploded bomb from the Crimean War (1853-1856) in the southern section of the Molotschna colony. His description reminds us of the proximity of certain Mennonite communities to the battlefield as the Russian empire fought British, French, and Ottoman troops on the Crimean Peninsula. Mennonite contributions to the Crimean War would later be cited by Minister of War Dmitrii Miliutin to question the refusal of some Mennonites to accept the option of alternative service, in light of the heroic feats they performed transporting supplies to the front and carrying the wounded back, over five thousand of whom were treated within the colonies.[3] Reference to this past service hit a nerve in some communities, prompting certain leaders to apologize to the government for the sinfulness of their service in this war, likely causing more than a few raised eyebrows from state officials.[4]

After the humiliation of defeat in the Crimean War and the death of Tsar Nicholas I, the tsarist regime, under its new emperor, Alexander II, embarked on a series of reforms that spanned just over a decade. The most significant of these, the emancipation of the serfs (1861) and of state peasants (1866), alluded to by Venger in her article, had been on the minds of tsarist officials for decades. In the aftermath of this momentous change, Mennonites, particularly in Chortitza, as well as the Kleine Gemeinde in Molotschna, seized the opportunity to address issues of landlessness in their community by buying or leasing the estates of Russian nobles who could no longer rely on the labour of their former serfs. The proliferation of Mennonite settlements in the southern Ukrainian lands during the 1860s and early 1870s is significant: Mennonites settled land from seven different estate owners, in addition to creating new villages in the Crimea and in the Kuban province. Not all of these settlements were ideal. The family of Johan F. Toews, for instance, lived in a sod house (*semlin*) when they first moved to the Markusland settlement, close to Chortitza colony, and Johan recalled his father fighting wolves off their roof with a pitchfork, in a scene

that could easily have been replicated on the open prairies of Manitoba a decade later.[5]

The emancipation of the serfs and state peasants was not the only reform enacted by the regime. The abolishment of the colonist category on June 4, 1871, had several implications for Mennonites who consequently became "settler-proprietors." First, the former colonists were now under the new administrative structure that had governed peasants since 1861. This converted Chortitza colony into Chortitza district (*volost*) and divided Molotschna colony into Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld districts. These districts had the added responsibility of administering a district court with a jury system and were to transition from German to Russian in official correspondence. Demographically, Mennonites maintained their majority, although some villages such as Chortitza, Einlage (Kichkas), Halbstadt, and others shifted towards a multi-ethnic composition.

In contrast to Chortitza and Molotschna, the regime proposed to integrate Mennonite and Slavic villages into single districts in some of the offspring colonies, despite Mennonite objections.[6] A few Mennonites welcomed this administrative change, as they perceived it as weakening church authority. Peter Peters allegedly stated that he "would rather be judged by the *Khokhols*" (a derogatory term for Ukrainians) "than by the church."[7] To help prepare their co-religionists for cross-cultural exchanges in governance, the Chortitza religious leadership discussed several issues, including "how to behave during the period of the [Orthodox] fast" and "how to conduct themselves peacefully at meetings of village assemblies."[8] To date, the history of these encounters between Mennonites and their neighbours under these new administrative structures has not received much attention.

The administrative changes, particularly the introduction of judges, justices of the peace, and jury trials within the district, caused considerable consternation among some Mennonite congregations. In the Molotschna and Borosenko settlements, some Mennonites belonging to the Kleine Gemeinde church refused to pass judgement on others outside of the normal practices of church discipline. However, under the statute of 1871 they were required to make themselves available for jury duty. In the newly formed Nikolaital district, the Kleine Gemeinde leadership attempted to convince their neighbours who were part of the Chortitza church to ignore the new regulations and continue to address religious and secular issues through their own spiritual leaders.[9] The Chortitza contingent refused the suggestion; however, Bishop Johann Wiebe of Fuerstenland, who would become the leader of the Old Colony Church in Manitoba, expressed a similar apprehension to that of the Kleine Gemeinde over the involvement of Mennonites in the judicial process.[10]

Another reform initiated by the 1871 statute involved landownership. When Mennonites initially arrived in the empire, the imperial state granted land to the community, "with every family merely enjoying the use of its allotted portion."[11] In other words, individuals did not hold title to the land, making them reliant on the blessing of the colony to conduct real estate transactions. After 1871, each family was to receive a private property deed.[12] Such a deed made it theoretically possible to sell to people outside of the community (after three years). During the 1870s migration there was some debate among tsarist officials in the Ministry of State Domains about the legality and desirability of this development.[13] These officials also cynically wondered whether Mennonite emigrants were motivated by material gain by taking the profits from selling the land given to them in imperial Russia and absconding to North America for more free land.[14]

The administrative changes of 1871 arrived on the heels of a proposal to eliminate the exemption from military service enjoyed by Mennonites and other colonists since their arrival under Catherine II. Mennonites first heard rumblings of this change in November 1870 when Minister of War Miliutin published two memoranda outlining reforms to the military system, including the introduction of universal military service across the empire.[15] In early January, the newspaper *Die Odessaer Zeitung* published these proposals in German, causing panic among Mennonite leaders that ultimately became the main catalyst for the 1870s migration.

Abraham F. Reimer's diary, translated by Steve Fast, provides a day-to-day account of this tumultuous period from 1870 to the spring of 1874. An intellectual at heart, he was more interested in astronomy and other topics than farming, which resulted in financial struggles for his family.[16] His intellectual curiosity might explain the rich details of the diary, which provides insight into family and church life, as well as contacts between Mennonites and the larger society. Due to space constraints, only an excerpt from 1873 is included in this issue; however, it shows that the normal Mennonite life of brotherhood meetings, faspa, visiting, and farming continued despite the uncertainty faced by these communities.

Two other groups would join Reimer and his Kleine Gemeinde church community in mass migration to Manitoba: the Bergthal colony, and part of the Fuerstenland settlement together with individuals from Chortitza colony. In Canada, members of this latter group would gain the designation "Old Colony" in reference to their link to the Chortitza colony, the first Mennonite settlement in imperial Russia. Arguably, the motivations of this group have received the least amount of attention by historians. This issue of *Preservings* includes an excerpt from an 1880s sermon delivered by Bishop Johann Wiebe reminding his flock of the reasons for their migration, which sheds some light on the dynamics within the community and relations with the Chortitza colony's religious leadership during this period.[17]

Wiebe, born in the Chortitza village of Neuhorst, was a relatively young man in his mid-thirties when he led a flock of approximately one thousand to Canada from Fuerstenland in 1875. He had been elected and ordained as bishop in the fall of 1870, only months before the military conscription issue disrupted the comfortable position of Mennonites within the empire. Bishop Gerhard Dyck (1809-1887) of Chortitza colony conducted the ordination, laying his hand on the head of a kneeling Wiebe.[18] Wiebe must have been well-respected by the other ministers in the settlement, as the majority of Fuerstenland's ministers joined the migration, causing a turn-

over of spiritual leadership in the settlement.[19]

Unlike in Fuerstenland, the religious leaders of Chortitza agreed to the imperial state's offer of alternative service in lieu of military service. In 1874, Bishop Dyck and his ministerial council affirmed this solution during a visit of state representative Adjutant-General Eduard Totleben to the Mennonite settlements. Not everyone agreed with the decision of the ministerial council: some from Chortitza colony joined the migration movement, taking communion at the church before departing for Canada.[20] For Dyck, the arrival of Totleben in Chortitza represented yet another in a series of crises that required his leadership. In the preceding decade, Dyck had to manage tensions caused by landlessness, controversy over church singing, and the emergence of the Brethren movement, in addition to rushing to St. Petersburg on several occasions to address the conscription issue.

In our telling of the 1870s story, the singing controversy has received little attention. Many historians have emphasized the introduction of compulsory instruction in Russian as a factor in the migration.[21] However, a significant educational controversy in Chortitza and its offspring colonies during the lead-up to the migration was caused by an internal reform effort to improve Mennonite congregational singing. Traditionally, Mennonite congregations, led by a song leader (*Vorsaenger*), sang hymns in unison at a slow tempo, with syllables elongated to contain so many vocal flourishes the original melody was difficult to discern, a style of singing that later became known as the *ole Wies* ("old way," or "old melody").[22] Two teachers from Prussia introduced singing from a system of notation using numbers (*Ziffern*) in Mennonite schools: Tobias Voth in Ohrloff, Molotschna, in the 1820s[23] and Heinrich Franz in the village school in Gnadenfeld, Molotschna, as early as 1837. In 1846, singing according to this system was included in Johann Cornies's curriculum for Mennonite schools. Franz taught at the Chortitza secondary school (*Zentralschule*) from 1846 to 1858, where he continued to promote the new way of singing, which the educator felt enabled the learning of "correct" melodies and further musical development. In 1860 he published his *Choralbuch*, which contained four-part settings of the melodies of the standard Mennonite hymnal, using numerical notation.[24] This new way of singing was gradually introduced into churches.

Not everyone, however, welcomed the transition from the nasal, chant-like singing to the melodically simplified and formalized new style. This issue's "A Story from Russia and Manitoba," by an unknown author, provides an account of the controversy over singing in Chortitza colony during the period before the migration. On this question, it was Mennonites themselves, and not the state, who challenged the principle of separation from the world by their adoption of a "worldly" method of singing, which to some symbolized a moral and spiritual collapse.

The final feature article by "D. R.," originally published in 1878, offers a reminder that not all Mennonites left imperial Russia. Two-thirds stayed, accepting the 1871 reforms and agreeing to a system of alternative service. For some, these changes were necessary in order for Mennonites to become full members of the state. They had developed a sense of belonging in the empire and they were hopeful for the future. For some of those who left, this feeling of belonging was a warning sign – not something to be embraced, but a symptom of spiritual decline and discord. They accepted the end to their sojourn in imperial Russia and took advantage of the opportunity to leave the empire. Ultimately, each group embraced their own ideas of faithfulness to their spiritual heritage.

---

1 "Quebec Passenger Lists: 1874–1880," Mennonite Genealogy, https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/canada/quebec/passenger.html.

2 See for example *Preservings*, no. 7 (Dec. 1995) on the theme "Emigration"; nos. 14 and 15 (June and Dec. 1999) on settlement of Manitoba's East Reserve; no. 16 (June 2000) on settlement of the West Reserve; no. 17 (Dec. 2000) on the theme "1874 Revisited"; and no. 34 (2014), on the theme "1870s Migration."

3 For Mennonite service, see James Urry and Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonites and the Crimean War, 1854–1856," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 7 (1989): 15. For Miliutin's confusion, see Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arhiv (RGIA), f.1246, op.1, d.8, (1874), l.164ob.

4 Delbert F. Plett, *Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde (1850-1875)*, Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series 3 (Steinbach, MB: D.F.P. Publications, 1986), 274–75.

5 Johan F. Toews, "Remembrances of Johan F. Toews," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, Nebraska and Kansas, 1874 to 1882*, ed. Delbert F. Plett, Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series 5 (Steinbach, MB: D.F.P. Publications, 1990), 158. For more on Markusland (Yakovlevo), see Delbert Plett, "Markuslandt, Andreasfeld," *Preservings*, no. 17 (Dec. 2000): 91.

6 Jacob D. Epp, *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851–1880*, ed. Harvey L. Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 403. Epp described the negotiations related to the Baratov and Schlachtin settlements. The villages of Grunfeld and Steinfeld were incorporated into the Veselo-Ternovskoe district, which included a Slavic village.

7 Epp, *Mennonite in Russia*, 412.

8 Epp, *Mennonite in Russia*, 412.

9 Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 268–71.

10 The Bergthal colony also objected to this change. See James Urry, *None but Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789–1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), 209.

11 David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of Its Founding and Endurance, 1789–1919 (Concluded)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 48, no. 1 (Jan. 1974): 6.

12 Rempel, "Mennonite Commonwealth," 34.

13 RGIA, f.381, op.17, d.21366.

14 RGIA, f.381, op.17, d.21366, ll.12–18.

15 Epp, *Mennonite in Russia*, 304.

16 Delbert F. Plett, ed., *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874*, Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series 4 (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1987), 277.

17 Peter D. Zacharias, "Biography of Johann Wiebe (1837–1905), Rosengart," in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, 1875 to 2000*, ed. Delbert F. Plett (Winnipeg: D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, 2011), 45.

18 Epp, *Mennonite in Russia, 300*.

19 For a list of religious leaders, see https://chortitza.org/Predig1.htm#08.

20 Epp, *Mennonite in Russia*, 409.

21 The introduction of Russian language instruction was more advanced by the early 1870s than is often assumed; both Chortitza and Molotschna had schools teaching Russian. In Borosenko colony, Kleine Gemeinde member Abraham P. Isaak taught the Russian language in the Gruenfeld school. Cornelius Fast is even rumoured to have learned English before migrating, which would have proved useful to early settlers. Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 197. For more on Isaak see Abraham P. Isaak, "Reminiscence of the Past," *Preservings*, no. 38 (2018): 65-72. For more on the history of Russian language teaching among German colonists, see Irina Cherkazianova, "Mennonite Schools and the Russian Empire: The Transformation of Church-State Relations in Education, 1789–1917," in *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789–1945*, ed. Leonard G. Friesen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 85–109. For Fast's language ability, see Delbert F. Plett, *Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and North America*, Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series 7 (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2000), 174.

22 Hans Werner, "'Not of This World': The Emergence of the Old Colony Mennonites," *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies* 4, no. 2 (2017): 124.

23 Peter Letkemann, "The Hymnody and Choral Music of Mennonites in Russia, 1789–1915" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1985), 152, 206–11.

24 Letkemann, "Hymnody and Choral Music," 152–53, 175, 213–14, 238–50, 258.

ОСОБЕННОСТИ

Крѣпость Севастополь Порты и гавани

38

Виноград: сады.

Крымск: горы.

Сакские цѣлительн. грязи.

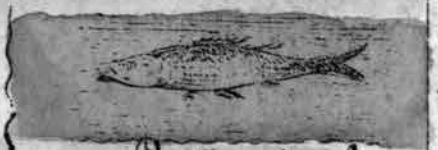
Скотоводство.

Города

1 СИМФЕРОПОЛЬ.
2 Ялта.
3 Феодосія.
4 Евпаторія.

5 Перекопъ.
6 Алешки.
7 Мелитополь.
8 Бердянскъ.

Хлѣбопашество.



Рыболовство.

Винодѣліе.

Соляныя горы.

Отъ Симферополя до С.Петербурга 2038 и до Москвы 1362 вер.

Торговля посредственная.

Въ губерніи находится одно градоначальство (Керчь-Еникольское.)

FEATURE

Training Orthodox and Muslim Youths

Johann Cornies and the Crown Trainees Project

Nataliya Venger

During the 1830s, the Russian empire was in a prolonged crisis, caused by social and economic problems related to serfdom (the ownership of peasants as private property) and the stagnation of agriculture. In 1837, the tsarist regime founded the Ministry of State Domains (MGI), tasking it with reforming agriculture in preparation for the emancipation of peasants from serfdom. This ministry, under the leadership of progressive administrator P. D. Kiselev, would initiate a new program, the "Crown Trainees Project," to train youths from state peasant settlements in innovative methods of agriculture. Unlike serfs who were owned by private individuals, state peasants farmed state-owned land and had limited personal and property rights. Tsarist officials identified Johann Cornies, the chair of the Mennonite Agricultural Society, as a useful collaborator in this project.[1]

In 1841, Kiselev met Johann Cornies. Following their meeting, he wrote to his new friend: "During my trip through the Mennonite colonies, I was impressed by their organization and especially the success of your farming. . . . I told this to His Imperial Majesty. His Imperial Majesty allowed me to convey that he is familiar with the name Cornies as one that belongs to a worthy and useful man."[2] A. P. Zablotsky-Desyatovsky, a MGI staff member, also wrote enthusiastically about the Mennonites: "These colonies truly constitute a large-scale experimental factory and model farm that is progressing and striving for improvement. . . . Under these circumstances, teaching Russian landowners with the improved farming methods adopted in these colonies would undoubtedly be beneficial for domestic agriculture. It would significantly extend the beneficial influence of Mennonite colonies to the most remote regions."[3]

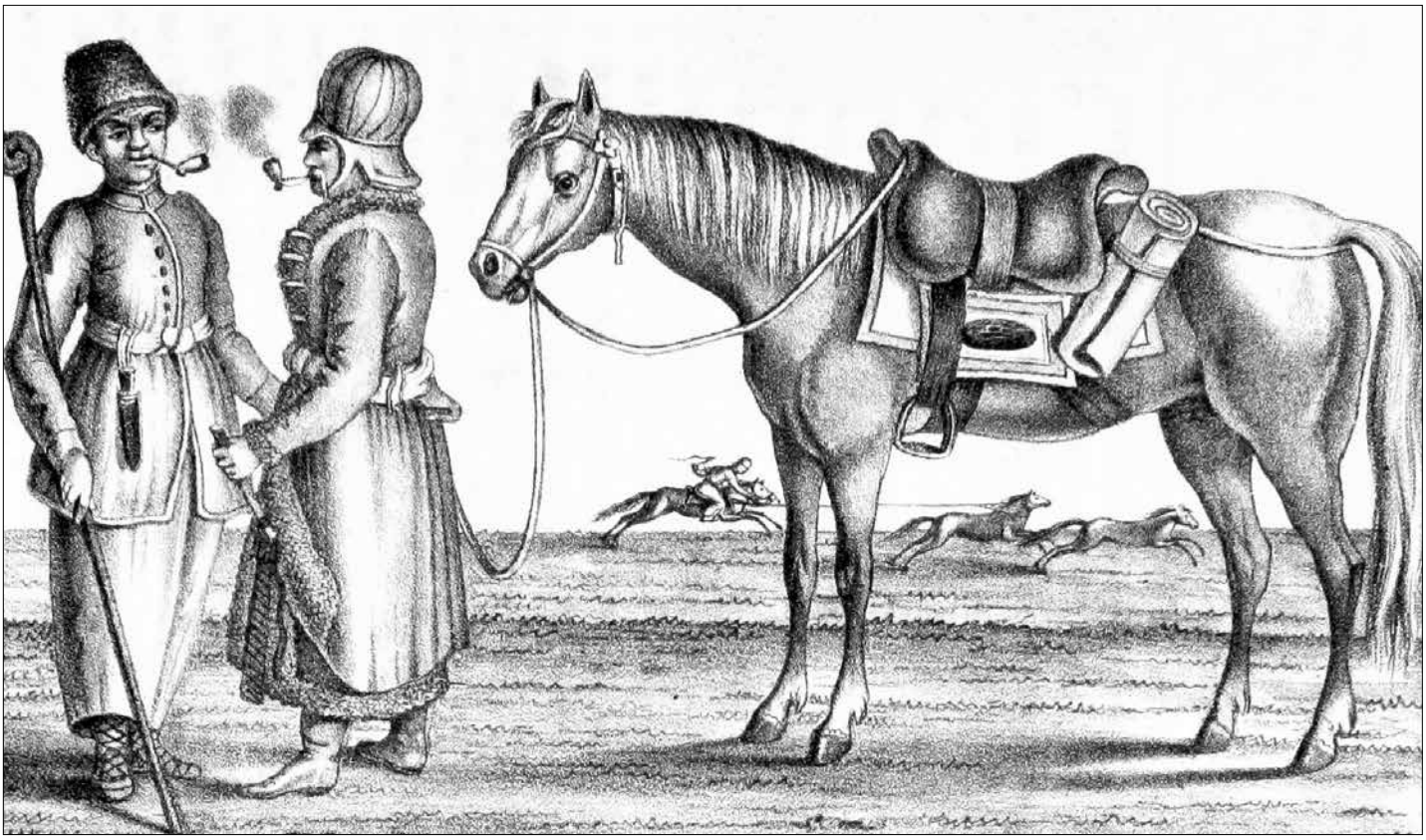
The Third Department of the MGI took responsibility for this project. Its duties included organizing farming competitions, interacting with scholars and economic societies, as well as monitoring agricultural innovations. E. F. von Bradke, who was appointed to the position of director of the Third Department in 1839, actively collaborated with authorities at the provincial level, including the Taurida, Ekaterinoslav, and Kherson offices of the MGI.[4] From 1839 to 1848, Baron F. F. Rosen was director of the Taurida office.

A playing card describing Taurida province, produced in 1856.
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, LCCN 2018689300

START OF THE PROJECT

In 1838, H. H. Steven, a well-known biologist and botanist who had held the position of chief inspector for sericulture in the Taurida province,[5] proposed to establish experimental farms to train farm managers in both Little Russian (Ukrainian) and Belarusian territories.[6] Kiselev and his immediate circle planned to establish experimental farms within each province. These farms would serve an educational purpose and contribute to the dissemination of practical knowledge among the state peasants. Initially, the idea of creating two such farms within each of the fifty-two provinces of the empire was discussed.[7] The authorities aimed to train over 2,200 peasants across the country (calculating around sixteen to twenty apprentices per farm). The Crown Trainees Project was part of this program.

In the summer of 1838, von Bradke received a note from Steven, who had inspected Taurida province to find a suitable location for establishing a model farm. During his visit to Molotschna colony he met with Johann Cornies. Impressed by what he had seen, Steven wrote to the MGI proposing to set up an agricultural school on two Cornies estates, Juschanlee and Taschenak.[8] He offered the following justification: "The treasury is subjected to no small circumstances in arranging a new farm; it is difficult to find a suitable plot of land for it, and even more problematic to choose a worthy manager for such an estate, which can maintain many people who remain idle for much of the time.



DANIEL SCHLATTER, *BRUCHSTÜCKE AUS EINIGEN REISEN MACH DEM SÜDLICHEN RUSSLAND* (1830)

Johann Cornies was entrusted with the training of Orthodox (Ukrainian and Russian) and Muslim (Nogai) students.

. . . Such establishments exist in Mr. Cornies's estates. . . . Due to the size of his estates and his level of education, he far surpasses all his peers and is undoubtedly the best estate owner in Taurida province."[9] Steven believed that state peasant youth would benefit from being exposed to Mennonite discipline: "The well-known morality of the Mennonites in general and of Cornies in particular can serve as a guarantee for their proper training."[10] Steven tried to convince the ministry that Mennonites in general and Cornies in particular could become reliable partners in implementing the program.

In the same letter, Steven outlined the main parameters of the project, which he had discussed with Cornies. Cornies would coach six "Russian" students aged fifteen to seventeen (the list included both Russian and Ukrainian surnames), the study period would be of ten to twelve years, and a scholarship of two hundred rubles would be paid to successful students upon the completion of their studies. Mennonites would also be obligated to accept four girls, entrusted to Cornies's wife, as well as (at Cornies's initiative) four Nogai and the same number of Tatar boys. While the proposal did not indicate that Cornies would be paid for his work, it can be assumed that he would have received some benefit from involving his apprentices in various types of agricultural work on the estates.[11] Students were not required to have had special training, but they were expected to be diligent about their work. Cornies would provide for the youths' upkeep, although he stipulated that the government should ensure "adequate clothing" for the students. As neither Mennonites nor peasants traditionally purchased clothes, the task of providing clothing for Cornies's students could pose a practical problem.

The central administration of the Ministry of State Domains was interested in training as many students as possible. They proposed to reduce the study period to eight years, with the aim of teaching more managers for private estates.[12] Later, this term was cut down to four years. At the suggestion of Minister Kiselev, four boys from the Crimean settlements of Kyrgyz Tatars were to be trained.[13] The government retained the right to terminate the experiment if the project proved to be unproductive.[14]

Officials, however, expressed concern about the religious influence of Mennonites on Orthodox youth. The authorities wanted the students to adhere to Orthodox religious traditions and learn the basics of Russian writing and arithmetic. Church attendance was obligatory for other Slavic Orthodox workers employed by Cornies (about seventy people), with the nearest churches located in the villages of Tokmak and Novo-Alexandrovka (later named Melitopol). Muslim students could attend the mosque in the village of Akkerman.[15]

Cornies declined to take on responsibility for elementary education, stating that his estates did not have suitable premises for a school. Problematically, the nearest school, located in the village of Orloff, was established with funds from the Mennonite community, and students were taught in German. The school building was too small to accept all the students, and Cornies recognized that the curriculum needed restructuring. Cornies admitted the challenge of choosing a capable Russian instructor who could competently teach while also upholding the moral

qualities valued by the Mennonites. As a solution, Cornies proposed including a literate youth in the student group to teach the others. He offered to find a boy from the village of Chernigovka in the Melitopol district, where, according to Cornies, a "normal school had been operating for several years."[16] He suggested that the youth could be exempt from agricultural work, provided "he had the desire and willingness to teach."[17] Upon completing the program, this teacher would receive a payment of three hundred rubles, emphasizing that the position of a teacher should be well paid because it was respected in the eyes of the Mennonites.

Unexpectedly for the students, they received another potential privilege. During their participation in the project, both the apprentices and their families could be exempted from military conscription. Moreover, once having completed their education (provided they received a diploma), former students could be granted a lifelong military exemption.[18] It should be noted that this was not a condition set by Cornies. In fact, the Russian empire had established legislation that gave this privilege to all peasants trained on model farms. This illustrates the significance that Kiselev and the Ministry of State Domains attributed to this program and to the goals of agricultural reform in general.[19] However, it was uncertain whether the courses established by Cornies with the support of the MGI could be classified as a model farm. Kiselev doubted that Cornies's students would be granted military exemption by default. He also hesitated to discuss that possibility with the Committee of Ministers, believing that "it would be difficult to obtain such a right (privilege) from the Government, and it would be more convenient to request it separately for each student."[20] The project leaders would have to revisit this issue at a future date.

After a period of negotiations, Johann Cornies signed the agreement that established the Crown Trainees Project in April 1839. As one of its clauses, Cornies insisted that the ministry would grant him freedom of action and it would not interfere in the training process.[21]

DIFFICULTIES AND SUCCESSES: 1839–1848

The authorities intended that the Crown Trainees Project would produce managers familiar with innovative and rational agricultural techniques. However, the project encountered challenges from its inception. The primary issue arose during the selection process. As stipulated in the agreement, candidates were required to show learning aptitude, robust health, and diligence. Out of the first group of four boys (Slavic youths from the state peasant settlements) and two girls, Cornies rejected some of the boys.[22] In response, the MGI urged local authorities to select candidates who could meet the requirements of the Mennonites. By November 1840, it was reported that out of the twelve youths selected (ten boys and two girls), only three boys were still actively pursuing their training: tragically, one of the youths had passed away, while six others had been sent back because of an "inability to learn, being underage, or physical frailty."

The ministry expected that local MGI officials and the Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers in the southern region of Russia would actively engage with parents, explaining to them the benefits of sending their children to Mennonite colonies for free training. It decided that if such "volunteers" were not found, local district administrators should ensure the necessary number were met "through orders," meaning forcibly, by pressuring families and presumably taking their children away.[23]

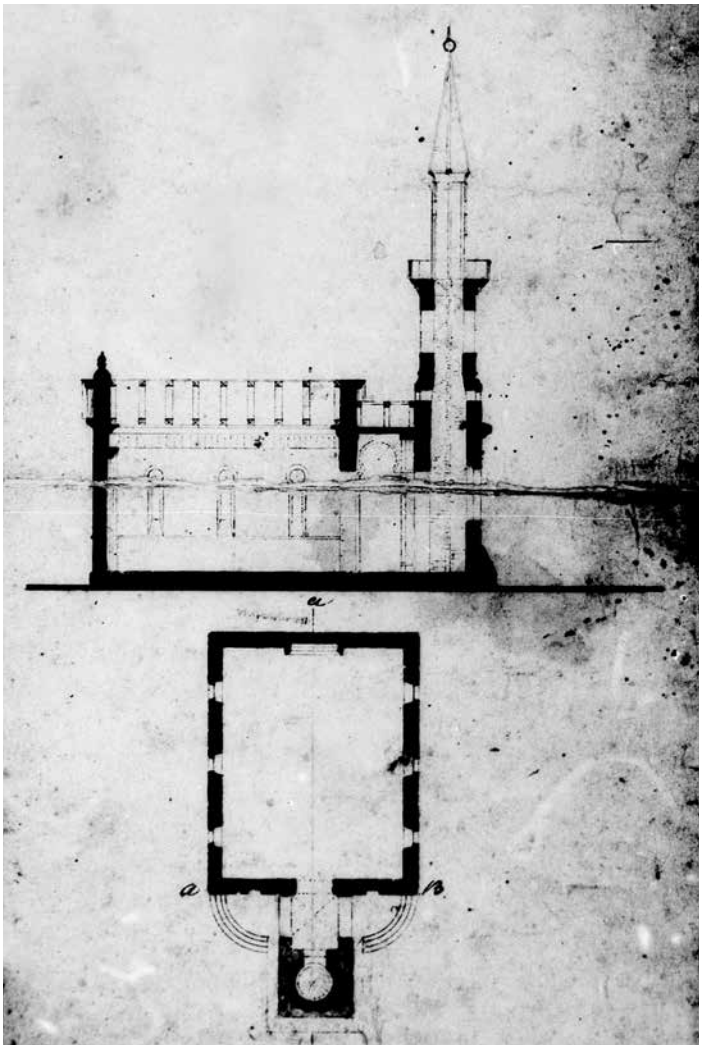
By mid-1841, the authorities had already reported the death of two peasant boys from Cornies's first group.[24] Another, Varlaam Hubka, from the village of Rohachyk in the Dneprovsk district, whose belongings had been returned to his family through the MGI's Taurida office, was sickly.[25] The Ekaterinoslav office reported that peasants were refusing to send their children to the Germans.[26] It is unlikely that the authorities informed the residents of neighbouring Ukrainian and Russian villages about these tragic events; however, peasants working on Cornies's estates likely informed others about the situation. Rumours must have circulated that children sent to the Mennonites were dying.

MAID: CENTRE FOR MENNONITE BRETHREN STUDIES, NP012-01-6

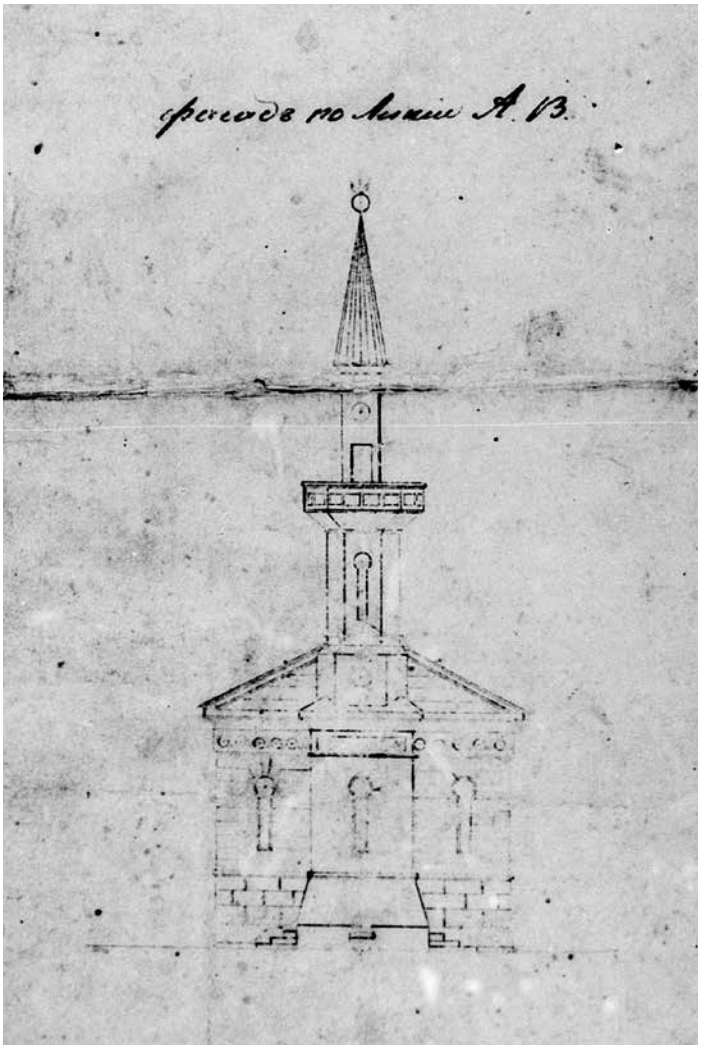
A typical Mennonite village in Molotschna colony. Drawing by J. H. Janzen.

At times, the search for candidates to fill student vacancies involved the local administration literally catching orphans on the rural outskirts. Many would have been barefoot youths with weak health and personalities affected by years of wandering. For instance, orphan Yefim Zubkov was sent to Juschanlee practically "in rags."[27] Steven commented on the attitude of the peasantry: "Rural communities sometimes send those children they want to get rid of, those under sixteen years old. Parents do not send their 'good' children, as they need good labourers."[28] In an estate-based society, in which social mobility was virtually impossible and one's fate seemed predetermined, parents cared little about educating their children. The family's physical survival was an existential challenge. Peasant life consisted of daily collective labour in the fields, in order to keep from starving to death. This required an investment of physical efforts for the present and tomorrow, rather than obtaining "abstract" knowledge that might improve their future prospects.

In July 1842, Steven, who had been appointed inspector of agriculture of the southern provinces, detailed Cornies's initial successes in his first report. A Tatar boy named D. Tuleshev proved to be the best in literacy training, with Steven noting that he "can read and write very well." Steven also positively assessed the living conditions of the students: "The food cooked for them is excellent, the place of accommodation is dry, warm,



STATE ARCHIVES OF THE ODESA OBLAST (DAOO). F.89. OP.1. D.1488



DAOO. F.89. OP.1. D.1488

Muslim students were expected to attend the mosque in the village of Akkerman.

and the clothing is very decent. Neatness, moral behaviour, and the fulfillment of religious duties, both Christian and Muslim, are observed strictly."[29]

Steven also described the numerous duties of the students, including tilling, haymaking, potato cultivation, tending to livestock, gardening, and working in the wood plantation. Older students were involved in flax processing, field clearing, treating livestock diseases, crafting simple tools, grafting, and planting trees.[30] In listing the students' responsibilities, he suggested that the duration of training should be extended, acknowledging that comprehensive mastery of various skills can take more time. Steven's comments on the level of preparation of the peasant girls were positive, noting that "the girls are diligent and well-behaved." The inspector was enthused about the progress of the project, proposing to reward the students with small gifts.[31]

The inspector did not overlook certain difficulties in the students' adaptation: "Considering that the boys joined the trainee group without the slightest understanding of proper farming, and the Nogai did not know the Russian language, and that the entire first year they were distracted from their sometimes not very commendable customs, some of them occasionally felt melancholic, while others used to fall ill. One cannot help but be quite satisfied both with the manner of their maintenance by Mr. Cornies and with their successes in both agricultural and moral respects."[32] Based on the report, the authorities concluded that "some [students] show themselves to be very good future managers."

As a mentor and teacher, Cornies was very demanding of his students. Yusuf Aliyev complained to the chief of the Melitopol District Police Office that he had received a beating from Cornies. During the investigation, Cornies reported that Aliyev had been lazy and refused to perform tasks assigned to him and other peasant boys. As punishment, Aliyev was ordered to look after cows, and in response, he ran away. Cornies wanted Aliyev to be disciplined by his father and then returned to the place of training.[33] Cornies was also accused of using his students as hired workers instead of teaching them. In his defence, he explained that practical activity was crucial for skill acquisition: "Common sense proves that apprentices can only learn the knowledge they need through hard work." He demanded that Aliyev be punished for providing false information.[34]

Other evidence suggests that Cornies genuinely cared for students who showed potential. In 1842, he petitioned for student Pavel Shkurka to be exempt from conscription.[35] Cornies

VIALE, *MALOROSSY (UKRAINTSY)*, 1862. LITHOGRAPH. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. LCCN 2018688988

Климатъ умѣрен. и теплый.

Гербъ губерніи

Населеніе губерніи состоитъ изъ Русскихъ, Татаръ, Болгаръ, Нагайцевъ, Евреевъ и небольшаго числа Армянъ.

ТАВРИЧЕСКАЯ ГУБЕРН.

Пространство земли 59,288 квадратныхъ верстъ.

Рѣки: Салгира, Вердянка и Днѣпръ.

Почва земли: черноземная, песчаная и глинистая.

Въ губерніи 572,200 душъ обоего пола.

reported that Shkurka's "excellent achievements and morality" meant that he would be "very useful to rural society."[36] Cornies repeated his previous request that all students be allowed to stay with the Mennonites until the end of their training.[37] Approval was granted by a personal order from Kiselev, who informed Emperor Nicholas I about the decision.[38]

CHANGES TO THE RULES

Steven's report prompted discussion about the future of the project. Cornies insisted it was necessary to extend the training term for another year. He also suggested settling the first group of graduates in two villages: a "Russian" one (for the Russian and Ukrainian boys) and another one for Tatars. Cornies hoped that his students would live and work together, providing mutual aid to each other. He explained that in such an experimental village, "one could support the other. If only one trained peasant lives in a village, his voice and practical example could be lost in the crowd adhering to old customs."[39] This statement contradicted the original 1839 plans of the ministry to disperse the trained youths to various villages and households, believing they could provide an example and disseminate new agricultural knowledge.

To optimize the project, Cornies suggested creating families from the young men and women who had been trained in the colonies. Cornies promised to persuade his students to marry each other.[40] However, without explanation, Cornies stopped training girls after 1845. By the autumn of 1845, the peasant girls (E. Dudkina, M. Bichek, and M. Shelukhina) had completed their terms and returned to their villages. Cornies demanded that the government provide them with the promised remuneration (fifty-four rubles and fourteen kopecks).[41] The MGI decided to postpone the payments until they married.[42]

Despite Steven's support for Cornies's proposal to create experimental villages, the ministry expressed hesitation. The ministry decided to seek permission from parents to settle their children independently, away from their home villages.[43] The response was predictable: parents demanded that their offspring be returned to their families. Some parents complained about being charged taxes for their sons not living with them. For example, Sylvester Blokh reported that taxes were collected from him for five census units, which included his son who was being trained in the Mennonite colonies.[44] It can be assumed that parents also wanted to benefit from the money which their children would receive from the government.

The parents of the Muslim boys (D. Tuleshev and K. Kaldaliev) were also against the idea of their sons' independent settlement. They requested placing them in their native villages but on separate private plots.[45] Later, the parents consented but demanded money from the ministry for their children, according to their custom.

Cornies petitioned for an increase in graduation payments, believing that the graduates would not be able to realize their skills with a meagre capital of 200 rubles. Cornies asked to raise the grant by 150 rubles, so that graduates could use the additional capital to build a house, and the Nogai boys could purchase wives.[46]

In 1846, discussion about the project resumed. In May, Cornies, who was satisfied with the overall results of the training, claimed that the boys "exhibited very good behaviour and had acquired sufficient knowledge in agriculture."[47] He once again insisted on creating separate villages. Following the suggestions of Steven and Cornies, the Taurida MGI office proposed resettling the students in the former Doukhobor village of Terpenie (in the Melitopol district) and in the Nogai village of Edinokhta (in the Berdiansk district). "In such a settlement," the office's report argued, "they [the trainees] would establish their new farms not far from each other. . . . This would enable them to continue to avail themselves of [Cornies's] advice, which would be invaluable to them on their newly established farms, and which their teacher had promised not to refuse them."[48]

This model of placing well-trained peasants in one village followed the Mennonite settlement pattern of independent farming and self-government. Later, in his well-known book *Nashi Kolonii* (Our colonies), Alexander Klaus would consider the question of whether the experience of Mennonite settlements could be replicated in neighbouring Ukrainian and Russian villages.[49] Klaus was optimistic about the prospects of imparting the experience of the colonists to Orthodox peasants: "What has been achieved in the colonies can and should be set as a goal when organizing and colonizing Russian peasants."[50]

By 1847, the Mennonites had been entrusted with seventeen male and four female young peasants from Taurida province, seven from Ekaterinoslav province, and seven from Kherson province.[51] The number of Mennonite instructors participating in the project had also increased. Peter Negresko and Ivan Didenko were trained under Peter Cornies (from the village of Orloff, since 1843); Joseph Litvinenko and Nikolay Dioriditsa were taught by Johann Suckau (Blumenort, since 1843); Matvey Bachkov was educated by Cornelius Wiens (Orloff, since 1844); Fedor Rabulo was entrusted to Isaac Wiens (Altonau, since 1844); and Jacob Neumann (Muensterberg) taught I. Zyubenko (since 1844).[52]

Over the course of nine years, the project to train state peasants in Mennonite colonies proceeded successfully and it was viewed positively by the government. However, after

Tsarist officials expressed concern about the religious influence of Mennonites on Orthodox youth. They expected Ukrainian and Russian trainees to attend Orthodox churches. NATALIYA SHESTAKOVA

Cornies's death in 1848, as his son-in-law Philipp Wiebe testified, students "were left without supervision and support" in Juschanlee.[53] The parents of the students complained to the regional offices of the MGI. For instance, a letter of complaint from peasant Agafena Klyushnikova claimed that after Cornies's death, "nobody was teaching children any skills."[54] In 1849, the Mennonites who had been under Cornies's supervision did not receive any apprentices.

PROPOSED EXPERIMENTAL SETTLEMENTS

The establishment of experimental settlements for graduates was planned to begin in the spring of 1849.[55] After much persuasion, parents allowed their children to settle separately from their home communities. The graduates themselves were not opposed to being independent. However, without any explanation from the authorities, their payment was reduced to 150 rubles.[56] This meant that the graduates found themselves under completely different conditions than originally envisioned. Additionally, this amount could only be received by those students who had successfully completed their training. One Nogai youth, Tibash Ogli (Kibash Ogli), received an unsatisfactory assessment at the end of his six-year term. As a result, he was sent back to his village without receiving any allowance. The Nogai boys K. Keldaliev, D. Tuleshev, S. Zhamanov, and Utai Ogli were to settle in the village of Edinokhta while Kh. Prilipko, P. Shkurko, and P. Timoshenko were to settle in the village of Terpenie.[57] The ministry decided to continue strict monitoring of their activity after settlement.[58] The Tatars were promised a small sum of money for purchasing wives: "A small amount is necessary, ranging from 25 to 30 rubles. . . . These funds can be provided when they need."[59]

Due to bureaucratic problems related to land allocation, the process of settling these graduates was delayed. In 1848, Baron Rosen instructed an agronomist named Bauman to create a project for the settlements of Terpenie and Edinokhta, consisting of twelve households in each village.[60] Family plots of fifty-nine dessiatins were to be created, corresponding to Mennonite ideas about rational farm management. Every farm would be divided into arable land, hayfields, and a household plot with a yard, garden, and orchard. Additionally, there would be space allocated for keeping small livestock, afforestation, and a common pasture.[61] Commenting on the project for the village of Terpenie, Bauman stated: "I based the distribution of land for various types of agricultural activities on the recommendations from the locals, who either know the area designated for the new settlements or have lived there for over forty years."[62] The project also provided space for a cemetery, a mill, and a dam. E. F. von Bradke, who took over as head of the Taurida office after Rosen, demanded that Bauman divide the territory of the future settlement into a larger number of family plots, to accommodate both project graduates and those families of lay state peasants who would settle there at their own expense.[63]

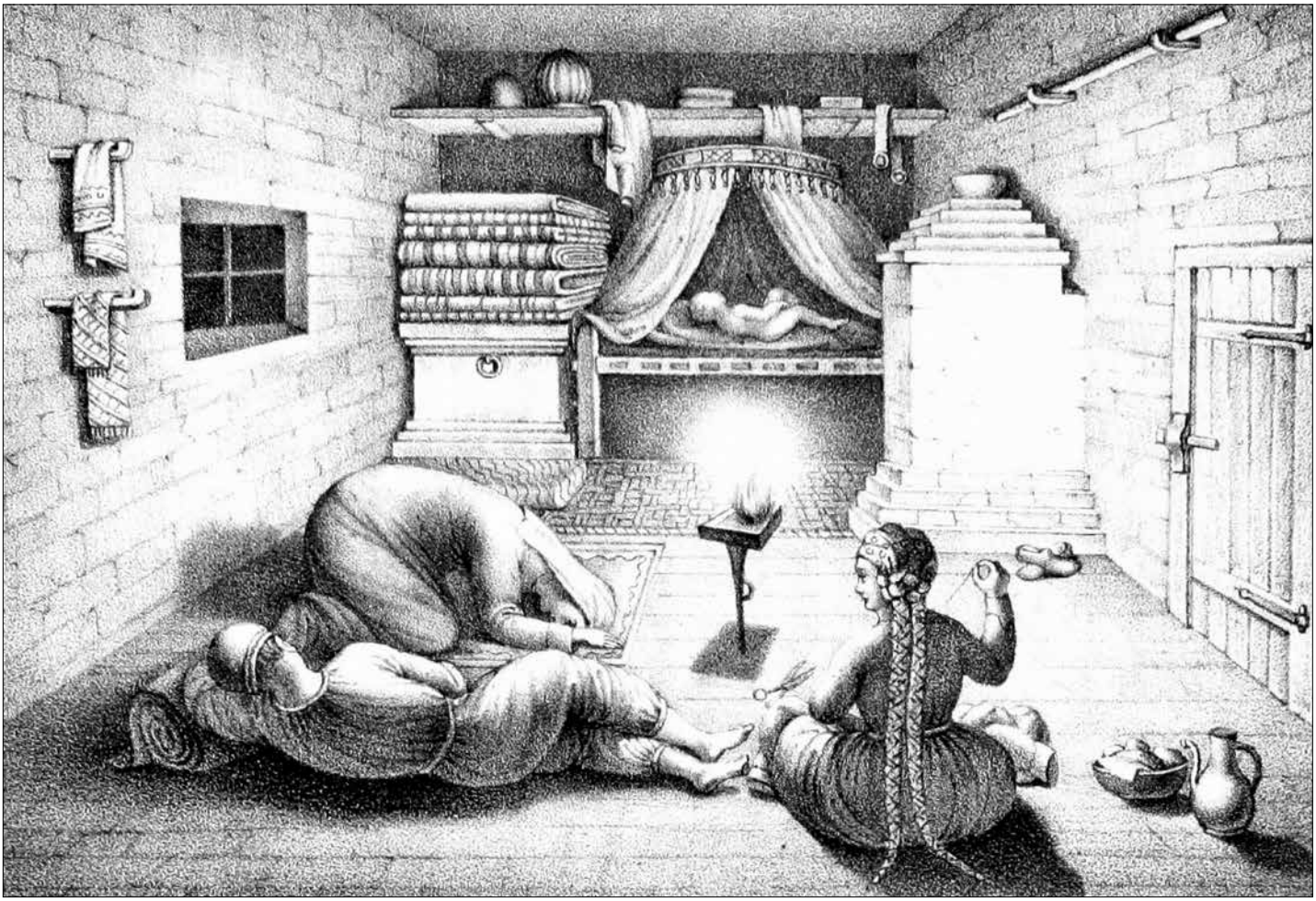
Regarding the village of Edinokhta, the agronomist noted that the territory of this settlement was not as picturesque as that of Terpenie. He predicted that settlers would face challenges obtaining water, building stones, and sand. Nevertheless, Bauman considered the location a very convenient place, providing proximity to the river, the opportunity to establish proper watering for livestock, well water, and sufficient usable land for various purposes. It was also situated between two big roads leading from the district town of Melitopol to Berdiansk and Orikhiv. Melitopol was just four versts (about four kilometres) away from the future Tatar village.[64]

It was estimated that each family would need at least 475 rubles if the government adhered to the rules of rational farm organization (this amount included the construction of a house, purchase of livestock, and tools). The ministry considered this amount excessive and expressed readiness to change the project to reduce its costs.[65] Correspondence between various departments reveals an attempt to justify the decision, which looked unreasonable ten years after the project had begun. For instance, it was remarked that "with the death of Cornies, one cannot expect success in organizing the mentioned settlements on the Mennonite model, as there is nobody to supervise."[66] P. Kiselev was a supporter, if not the initiator, of the new, restricted strategy. He ordered that only one graduate (P. Shkurko) be settled near the village of Terpenie. Ten years later, an experimental village would be founded at that location, and renamed Novopavlovka. The rest of the graduates were to be sent to their home villages, where they could "contribute to the development of their communities." Thus, most of Cornies's students were returned to their families, receiving a less significant payment of fifty-seven silver rubles and retaining the privilege of exemption from conscription.[67]

It could be concluded that the project of training peasant boys under Cornies and his peers did not achieve its full potential; however, between 1848 and 1858, six of Cornies's graduates from the first two groups wished to settle independently in the village of Novopavlovka (formerly Terpenie), without government assistance. In the 1860s, seven farms were in operation in the village.[68] It shows that living with the Mennonites influenced the character and life strategies of these young men. They gained mobility, some freedom, and a clear understanding of how to manage their households to achieve prosperity. However, when they returned to their villages, most of Cornies's former students could not adapt to the old way of life in their families and communities.

CRAFTSMANSHIP PROJECT

The program to train young people from the surrounding state peasant communities in agriculture and animal husbandry was not the only initiative involving Mennonites. In the mid-1840s, discussions arose regarding a project aimed at sending young men from the Bulgarian settlements to receive training from Mennonites in craftsmanship. However, as A. Skalkovsky pointed out, "no matter how persuasive they were, the Bulgarians remained resolute in their decision not to place their children in the care of the Germans."[69] While the Bulgarians declined the



DANIEL SCHLATTER, *BRUCHSTÜCKE AUS EINIGEN REISEN NACH DEM SÜDLICHEN RUSSLAND* (1830)

One Nogai student complained to the chief of the Melitopol District Police Office that he had received a beating from Cornies.

offer, state peasants had no choice but to obey.

In 1848, Philipp Wiebe embarked on a mission to recruit young people from Ukrainian and Russian settlements to acquire skills in cart-making and blacksmithing under the guidance of Mennonite craftsmen. Information regarding the selection process has been preserved in the Molotschna community archives. As always, the criteria for choosing students were stringent, requiring them to be in good health, diligent, and to possess a sharp intellect.[70]

In 1850, the miller Johann Toews from Schoensee took the responsibility, somewhat compelled by the authorities, to provide seven years of training in milling to two promising young state peasants.[71] This likely served as an inspiration for colonial authorities to contemplate enlarging the endeavour. In 1855, based on Johann Cornies's experience, the MGI initiated a comprehensive state program aimed at educating orphaned peasant boys in various crafts.[72] This project was successfully completed in 1859.[73]

In 1858, the chairman of the Taurida MGI office asked Philipp Wiebe and Johann Cornies Jr. (the son of the prominent leader) to select the best craftsmen to carry out a vocational training program for an ethnically diverse group of young men. Five craftsmen responded to the call. They were the blacksmiths Jakob Esau and Peter Hamm (from Juschanlee), the renowned mechanic Martin Heese (from Blumenort), and carpenter August Henning (from Halbstadt). Apprentices were selected from the Bulgarian colonies, which, the authorities believed, had high economic potential but lagged behind the Mennonite settlements economically. Initially, the Molotschna craftsmen were invited to move to Bulgarian villages, but not wanting to leave their congregations and the market for their products, which entailed material costs, the Mennonite craftsmen proposed the reverse option: to resettle Bulgarian youths in the Mennonite colonies. This scheme allowed both parties to benefit from the program, as it provided the craftsmen's farms with additional labour. The Mennonites supported the students' upkeep for the entire five years of the project.[74]

In total, forty-four craftsmen from the two Molotschna districts (Mennonite and German colonists) actively participated in the program. Twenty-five Mennonites from Sparrau, Lindenau, Tiege, Ladekopp, Orloff, Petershagen, Alexanderkrone, Friedensdorf, Schoensee, Rudnerweide, and Halbstadt villages were entrusted with the youths.[75] Forty-five Bulgarian boys from the Southern Bug region and Izmail district were sent to the aforementioned colonies.[76] Parents of the boys were satisfied with the living conditions and were content that the young men were apprenticed under the guidance of "reliable and skilful masters."[77] Although there is limited information available about the project, a letter from the supervisor of the Molotschna colonies

to the Guardianship Committee dated May 6, 1863, reported the successful conclusion of the program.[78] According to this correspondence, the former students underwent assessments and their professional skills were evaluated. Fifteen of the twenty-four youths participating in the examination demonstrated exceptional proficiency in their craft. Upon the completion of training in 1864, the most diligent students were rewarded with a grant of fifty-seven silver rubles.[79]

CONCLUSION

The Crown Trainees Project led by Johann Cornies, and later Philipp Wiebe, and supported by the Ministry of State Domains, represents a fascinating chapter in the history of the Mennonite colonies in the southern Ukrainian region during the nineteenth century. This initiative emerged from the government during a critical period in the empire's history, when discussions about the abolition of serfdom and the demand for effective agricultural reform were at the forefront of the political discourse.

Cornies, an influential and innovative figure in the Mennonite community, played a pivotal role in this project, demonstrating his commitment to progress and skilful cooperation with imperial authorities. Although Mennonites were not the only ethnic group to participate in the agricultural training of state peasants, they were the only group that put forward a program for instructing artisan skills. They also continued to support voluntarily the two experimental settlements established as a result of the program.

The Mennonites fulfilled all their obligations to the program. However, after its completion, the state began to question whether its original objectives had been entirely met. These uncertainties primarily revolved around the effectiveness of the administration in managing the outcomes of the project. Despite facing challenges, the Crown Trainees Project run by the Mennonites made a significant contribution to the progress of agriculture in the Russian empire and played an important role in training a new generation of farmers from Slavic backgrounds.[80]

Nataliya Venger is a professor of history at Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Ukraine, and a research associate at the University of Winnipeg.

1 The "crown trainees project" is depicted in extensive interdepartmental correspondence kept in the collections of two archives in Ukraine and the Russian Federation: the State Archives of Odesa Oblast (DAOO) and the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA). The sources about the project cover the period of 1839 to 1870.
2 DAOO, f.89, op.1, d.762, l.36ob.
3 DAOO, f.89, op.1, d.762, l.43.
4 *Historical Review of the Fifty-Year Activity of the Ministry of State Domains: 1837–1887* [in Russian], vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Yablonsky and Perott, 1888), xv.
5 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.1–4ob.
6 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.1–4ob; RGIA, f.398, op 5, d.812, ll.2–3
7 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.51–51ob.
8 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.1–4ob.
9 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.3.
10 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.4.
11 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.4.
12 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.5ob.
13 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.15–16.
14 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.16.
15 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.28.
16 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.50–50ob.
17 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.38.
18 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.16.
19 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.50–50ob.
20 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.146.
21 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.39–41.
22 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.55–56.
23 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.82.
24 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.75– 75ob.
25 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.29.
26 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.78–78ob.
27 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.138.
28 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.95.
29 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.94–95.
30 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.94–95.
31 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.95.
32 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.95.
33 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.5–5ob.
34 DAOO, f.89, op.1, d.656, l.6.
35 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.147.
36 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.148.
37 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.145ob.
38 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.151–151ob, 170–172.
39 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.221–222.
40 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.221–222.
41 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.245.
42 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.266ob.
43 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.249.
44 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.377.
45 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.341.
46 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.255.
47 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.272.
48 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.271ob–272.
49 A. Klaus, *Our Colonies* [in Russian] (St. Petersburg, 1869), 101ff..
50 Ibid., x.
51 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.334.
52 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, ll.293–294.
53 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.334.
54 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.330ob–331.
55 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.344–345.
56 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.279.
57 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.371ob.
58 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.313.
59 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.344–345.
60 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.315.
61 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.346–347.
62 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.347.
63 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.345.
64 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.347.
65 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.174, l.366.
66 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.8308, l.3ob.
67 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.8308, l.4.
68 RGIA, f.398, op.2, d.8308, l.4.
69 A. Skalkovsky, *Bulgarian Colonies in Bessarabia and Novorossiysk Region: Statistical Review* [in Russian] (Odessa: G. Neiman and Co., 1842), 139.
70 DAOO, f.89, op.1, d.1199 (pages unnumbered).
71 DAOO, f.89, op.1. d.465, l.6.
72 "Order of the II Department of State Domains Concerning the Training of Peasant Orphans in Crafts" [in Russian], Журнал Министерства Государственных Имуществ [Journal of the Ministry of State Domains], no. 11 (1855): 33.
73 DAOO, f.6., op.4, d.18098, l.4.
74 DAOO, f.6., op.4, d.18098, l.4.
75 DAOO, f.6., op.4, d.18098, ll.5, 12.
76 DAOO, f.6., op.4, d.18098, ll.58–161.
77 DAOO, f.6., op.4, d.18098, l.187.
78 DAOO, f.6., op.4, d.18098, l.292.
79 DAOO, f.6., op.4, d.18098, l.300.
80 During the 1860s, most Nogai emigrated from the Russian empire to the Ottoman empire.

Something of My Experiences

Cornelius Fast

As some of my children have asked me to, I will write of some of my experiences.[1] I was born in a village called Friedensdorf, South Russia, in 1840, June 24 (New Calendar).[2] I was my parents' first child, and at the age of one year, I went to Tiegerweide with my parents, where my father worked as a village blacksmith. In 1845, when the village Kleefeld was first started, my father helped to settle Mr. Johann Willems, and in 1855 helped David Cornies of Orloff on his estate "Altehirr" as blacksmith.

That was at the time that Turkey and the Crimeans were at war, and because Turkey was in debt, England and France helped for fear of their money; therefore, Russia had powerful enemies. As the Sea of Azov enters into the Black Sea at the Crimea, they also came across the Sea of Azov up to Berdiansk, and shot into the Russian villages that they could see. Opposite us was a village twenty-four versts away (a verst is 3,500 feet), towards the sea. The farmers had long ago gone farther inland, so the government had put the Cossacks on guard to watch that the enemy would not come into the land unnoticed.

One day they shot into the village again and we could see the smoke of the gunpowder clearly, and when it rose higher, we could hear the loud bang. The sound, or echo, was likely carried by the sea. Molotschna was partly hit also, and at our place it was six verst wide. The next day all was quiet, and then Cornies drove over there to see what damage had been done. (David Cornies Jr. was manager and son of David Cornies Sr. of Orloff.) He got there and saw some soldiers who were taking the gunpowder out of a bomb which had not exploded. They took over ten pounds out of it. Then he bought the bomb from them. It was not round like the other four that he had bought before, so it could not be emptied the same way. It did not have a brass stopper, like the others had; it was pointed, so one could hardly see where it had been loaded.

One day Cornies came to the blacksmith shop to ask Father's advice about his toothache. Father said, "The advice I would give you, you would not like: just have the tooth pulled." "Well,

MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES, PP-4-044-10.0

A monument in Neu-Halbstadt in recognition of the contributions of Mennonites to the Crimean war effort.

that advice was told to me by other people too, so I'll go and get it pulled." Then he went and sent orders to the stable to have the servant harness up a wagon, as he wanted to go to Orloff. He was going to Altonau to have the tooth pulled by the dentist Wiens, and then to Orloff for a visit.

Now there were some people there, and he asked them to put the bomb on the wagon, when it was ready, as he would take it along to Orloff. Then he and his wife went to get ready. The people looked at the bomb, and noticed more powder rolling out. Then Jacob Reimer, the windmiller, came running to the shop to ask Father what kind of tools would be best to remove the powder that was left, as Cornies wanted to take it along and he wanted it empty. They agreed that a hammer and a long, thin rod would do. He took them and went. Shortly after, Father followed, and then he, Cornies, and Reimer and a few Russians and the servant carried the bomb and put it into the shop. They had decided that as it was open at the top, if fire was put in, it would burn itself out. Then Father said, "Take it outside." Later he said he had thought only of the powder smoke. Then Cornies told the servant to take it outside. The servant took it outside and put it about three feet from the door. Then Father went with the hot coals, and when he saw how we were all hiding ourselves, he stopped and asked Cornies, who stood closest to the door, if there was still a lot of powder left in there that would cause an explosion. "No, no," said Cornies, "there is very little in there," and he went but he called back, "but take care, as it is still dangerous." Father said later he thought the smoke was the danger.

Now, he had the long-handled scoop with the coals, carefully put it on the rim, and was ready to run into the shop. He never made it. He fell instantly. The terrible bang scared me out from behind the blower, out of the door. I cried, "Now Father has been killed!" "No, no," said Cornies, "He won't be dead."

Our home was about fifty feet away, and Mother and our neighbour, Mrs. Hamm, who lived in the same house, had both been sitting looking out. When Mother heard the crash, she looked out the door and cried, "Now the shop is blown in the air and Father and Cornelius as well!" The smoke had hidden the shop, and Mother was with me before any of us were even out of it. They were all stunned or shocked and no wonder, as the explosion had left hardly a pane of glass in the windows. In our house and even in the strong granary, and about fifty feet on the other side of the shop, windows were blown out. One piece of glass had hit Father in the right leg; it left a deep gash as wide as a finger, and the left leg was gone to the bone, so that the foot was left hanging on a tendon. One piece of glass nearly hit Mr. Hamm, who had been outside; it passed near his head. One piece had cut through an alley of trees six rows deep. On the other side was the melon field, where the man who took care of it heard the crash, looked up, and saw the sky. Part of the hut's roof was torn off. He was soon at the shop and scolded, "Had I been here, none of this would have happened. None of you know what gunpowder can do." He had been a soldier.

Father was now bedded in the shop and his leg was wrapped to the best of their knowledge with pig and chicken manure and spider web, which was used to stop the blood flow. Cornies asked Father what was to be done with him now. Father said he wished he could be taken to Dietrich Wiebe's in Lichtfelde. If Father had to die among so many Russians, it would have been hard for him, as those who know Russia will understand. Since our horse was in with the wild horses on the field, they put three horses to a rack wagon (*Leiterwagen*).

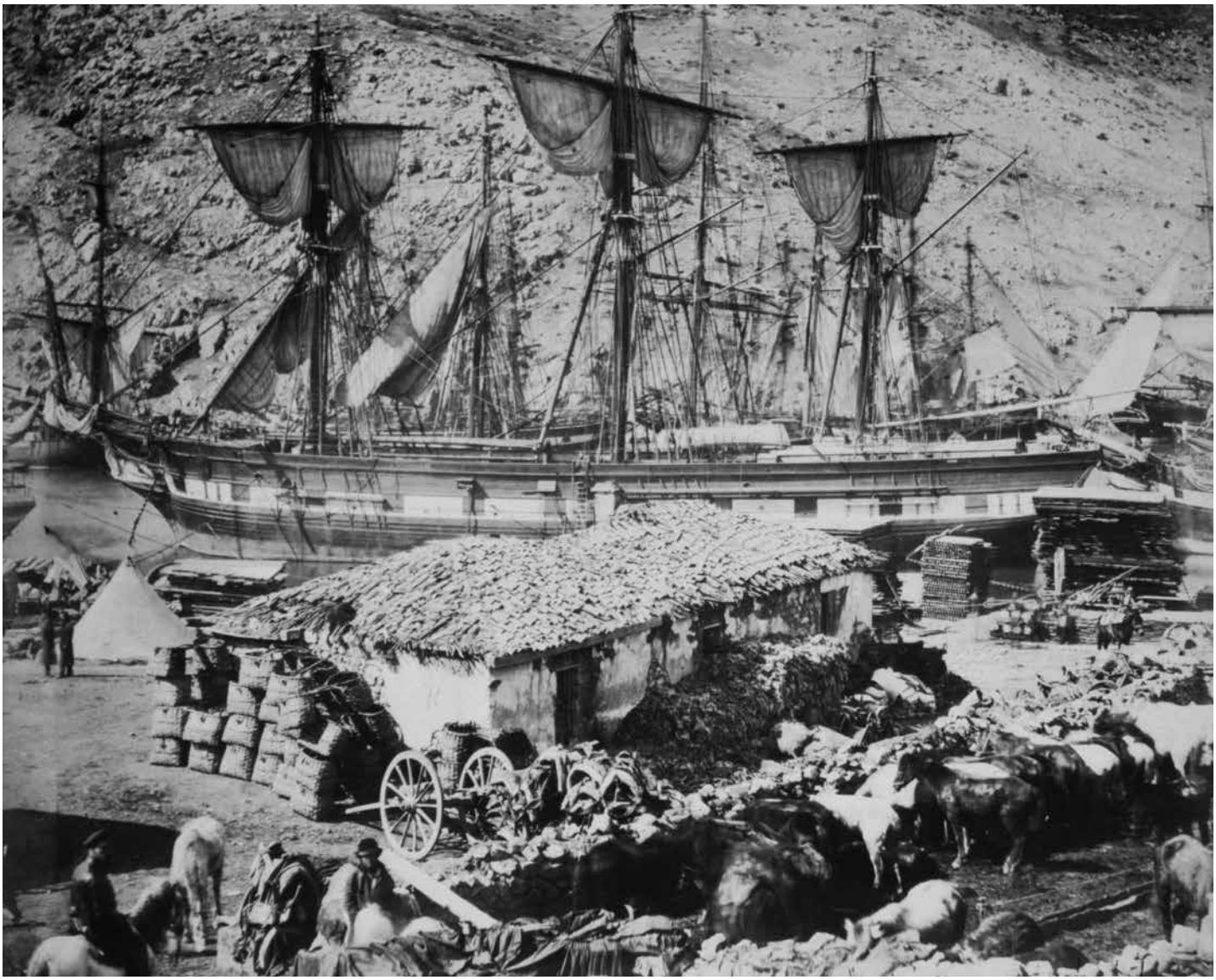
The wagon was filled with hay; Father was put into it. Reimer was driver, my mother and I were the helpers, and quickly we

During the Crimean War, some Mennonite villages in the southern section of Molotschna colony experienced cannon fire.
ROGER FENTON, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, LCCN 2001697694

were on our way. That was Tuesday. We drove, Cornies ahead of us, at full speed, till we got to Lichtfelde. We arrived around four in the afternoon without having fed the horses. After Mr. Wiebe had attended to Father as best he could, he asked Father, "What to do now, get the doctor?" Father said, "You know best what should be done with me, but I think it is too late." Mr. Wiebe said softly, "I think so too." Then we fed the horses, and after dinner, Reimer and I drove back, and were home Thursday before lunch.

Our horses were with a herd of wild horses and came home only twice a week, and were home now. I harnessed our "Walloch" and drove with my three sisters after lunch back to see Father. We arrived Friday at noon. There lay Father in a coffin. He had died Thursday, and was buried on Friday. He was so swollen up that his face did not look like a human face. His mouth was a large, round hole. His coffin was not opened at the grave, as they felt his body would be shattered.

We stayed at Altehirr for seven weeks. After that, I worked for about three months at the Peter Warkentins' in Kleefeld, and then two years with Dietrich Wiebe in Lichtfelde, where my father had died. Then I worked two years in Blumenort as a carpenter, and then in Lindenau as wheelwright (*Stellmacher*). Helena Born also worked there, and we decided to get married. That was in 1861. She died in 1873 of smallpox (*schwarze Pocken*). Then that same year I married Helena Fehr, from the Old Colony, and in



ROGER FENTON. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. LCCN 2001698864

The British army moving supplies into Balaklava harbour during the Crimean War.

1874 we went to North America.

After holdups caused by the Russian government, we finally arrived October 1 on our homestead in Steinbach. We managed to get through the severe Manitoba winter quite well, as we had, like several others, built a "mud hut" (*semlin*). I had to buy the boards, windows, doors, and nails, and that all cost me three dollars, and we had a good home. Then in 1876 we moved to Reinland on the West Reserve. We had gone [to Reinland] to see our father, Jacob Fehr, who was ill with TB and wished to see us again. Since I didn't have a vehicle, they [the Fehrs] decided to pick us up. Because of the length of time it took in exchanging letters and the long trip, Father died one hour before we arrived. Due to circumstances, we had to stay until 1892, and then in 1893, in the spring, my second wife died. In the fall, I married my present wife, who was formerly Anna Baerg, widow of Johann Wiebe.

Now, dear children, I want to add a small reminder. None of you can say that Father will die before me, even if I am eighty-six years old; therefore, we all have good reason to prepare for this important journey, because no excuse will be accepted up there. The apostle Paul said, "Pray without ceasing," and Tobias agreed when he said to his son, "Have God before your eyes and in your heart and guard against sinning willingly nor rebel against God's command." So let us prove our walk and will with God's word and think about how we will stand before Him when we, not only for every work but for every unnecessary spoken word, will be judged. We don't want to be one of the ones who can't answer one question out of a thousand.

I haven't given the reference on purpose. Look it up yourself and think about it!

Cornelius Fast (1840–1927), born in Friedensdorf, Molotschna, emigrated to Steinbach, Manitoba, in 1874. He worked as a schoolteacher in both imperial Russia and Canada.

---

1 This document can be found in the Mennonite Heritage Archives (Winnipeg), vol. 4199, file 9.

2 For more information on Cornelius Fast's family, see GRanDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry), #6506. "New Calendar" refers to the Gregorian calendar, which Mennonites moving to Canada during the 1870s would have adopted after their arrival. The Russian empire remained on the Julian calendar until early 1918.

FEATURE

Building and Leaving Borosenko

The Diary of Abraham F. Reimer

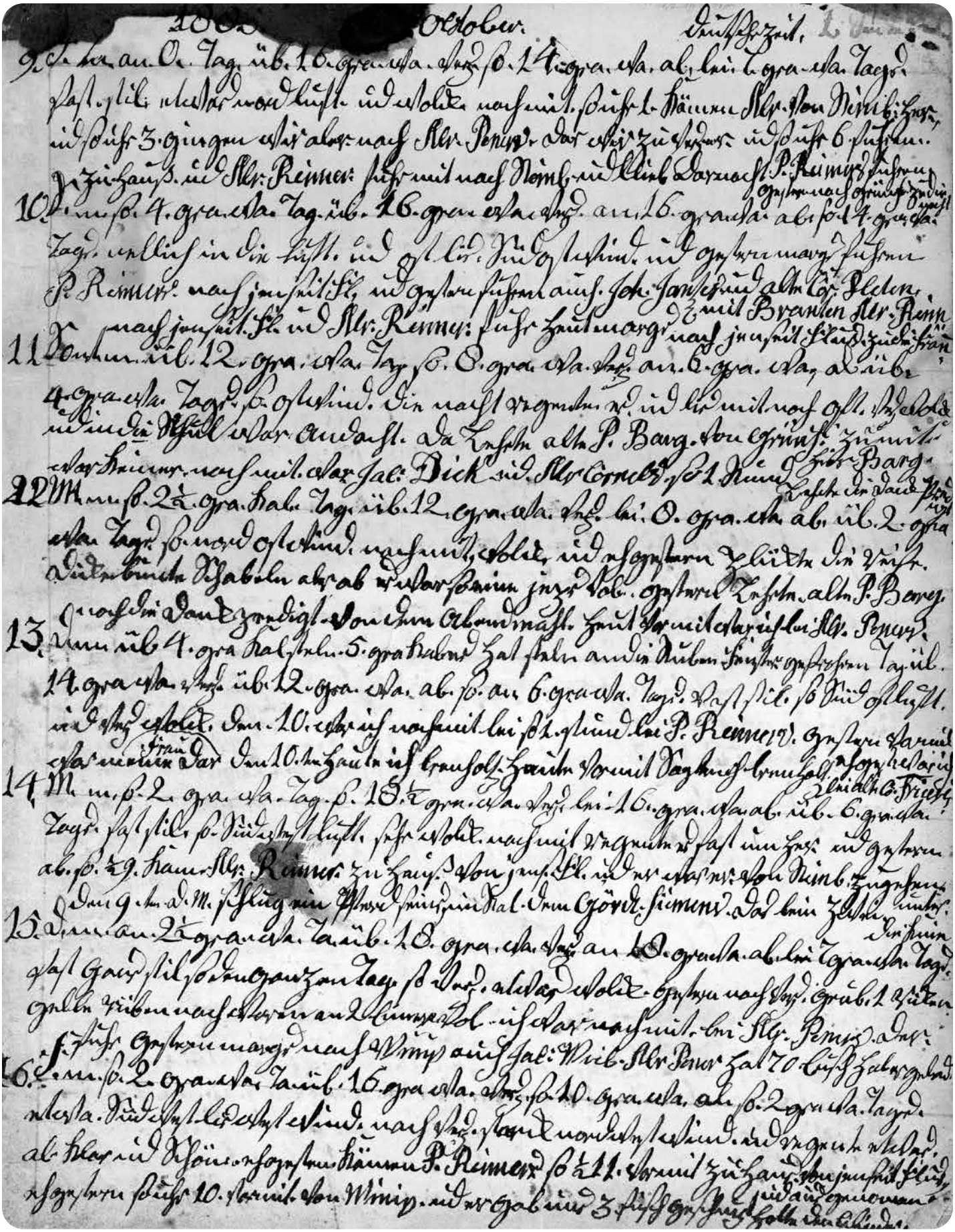
Introduction and translation by Steve Fast

As the new year of 1870 dawned across the southern Ukrainian lands of imperial Russia, Borosenko colony was a bustling collection of Mennonite villages that were springing up from the broad steppe. Families were improving their homes and planting gardens, and farmers were building new barns and breaking farmland. Borosenko had only existed for about five years, but it held great promise for its settlers.

Nearly all of the settlers in Borosenko came from Molotschna colony, where two-thirds of the families had no farm but instead worked as impoverished labourers for fellow Mennonites. Mennonite church leaders colluded with the colony administrators to keep young families off new farms and to rent the resulting vacant land to themselves. However, the Kleine Gemeinde (KG), a breakaway group of Mennonites in Molotschna colony, were

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS: FILE:УЛ.ЕКАТЕРИНОСЛАВСКАЯ, КОНЕЦ XIX ВЕКА.JPG

The town of Nikopol, where Mennonites from Borosenko hauled grain to sell for cash.



A page from Abraham F. Reimer's diary. MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (WINNIPEG), KLEINE GEMEINDE COLLECTION, VOL. 5907, ITEM 4

different. Their leaders had initially loaned money to young families to buy farms, but by 1860, the available land in the Molotschna colony was running out.

The KG tried to solve the problem by renting land and forming the Markusland colony 70 miles (110 kilometres) north of Molotschna in 1863.[1] For various reasons, the KG abandoned Markusland in about 1865, and acquired 16,500 acres (6,500 hectares) of land from a nobleman named Borosenko.[2] The new Borosenko colony was located 90 miles (150 kilometres) northwest of Molotschna. New KG families from Molotschna continued joining the colony until late 1872, buying and renting more land. The colony grew and became the centre of KG life.

The second motivation for forming Borosenko was to develop an independent base for KG life. The name Kleine Gemeinde ("small congregation") originated as a derisive nickname when they separated from the majority Mennonite church in 1812. Although they were eventually accepted on more or less equal terms, the Ohrloff Gemeinde controlled the colony administration. Forming a new settlement at Borosenko enabled them to bring their mass of members together in one area, although KG congregations also continued in Molotschna and Crimea.

THE DIARIST

As Abraham F. Reimer (1808–1892) sat down to record his thoughts in a new diary on the first day of 1870, a cold and cloudy Thursday, he noted things that would represent themes throughout its pages: the worship service in Rosenfeld to dedicate the new year to God, the weather, a cow calving on his farm, and his daughter preparing to give birth to a child. He was sixty-one years old and about to retire and turn over his farm to his sons. He had been born in 1808 in the village of Tiege, Molotschna, to Klaas E. Reimer (1770–1837) and Helena von Riesen (1787–1846). His father had been one of the founders of the KG in 1812, and was its leading bishop until he died in 1837.[3]

Abraham married Elisabeth Rempel (1814–1893) in 1835 in the village of Lichtfelde at her parents' home, when he was twenty-seven and she was twenty.[4] They settled in the village of Rosenort, but he probably did not own a farm there, as he is not on the voters lists compiled between 1847 and 1862;[5] he was supported financially by the KG congregation from 1847 to 1858.[6] He was surely glad for the chance to move to Borosenko in the mid-1860s to buy a farm.

FAMILY

By 1870, Abraham and Elisabeth Reimer had been married for thirty-five years and had eight children, all of whom had survived to adulthood. And those children had blessed them with eighteen grandchildren; sixteen grandchildren were added during the period of the diary. His sister Helena, a daughter-in-law Elisabeth (Friesen) Reimer, and three grandchildren died during the period covered by the diary. Seven of his children also lived in Borosenko colony, and the large family was closely knit. During the period covered by the diary, Abraham and Elisabeth Reimer lived in the village of Steinbach.

Abraham was close to his younger brother Klaas F. Reimer (1812–1874). Klaas was a successful farmer, in contrast to Abraham, and lived in Tiege, Molotschna, until the spring of 1871, when he moved to Blumenhof, Borosenko, where he established a farm. They visited each other frequently. Klaas became sick in December 1873, and decided not to emigrate when nearly all of the KG moved to North America in 1874 and 1875. He died in the empire in October 1874.

FARMING

Mennonite villages in imperial Russia consisted of a central lane with a couple dozen identical farmyards arranged neatly on both sides of the lane. Housebarns were built following a similar pattern and faced the street. The farmland was distributed around the village. Since the farmyards were close together, there was little privacy in a village. But neighbours were close at hand for visiting, fellowship, and help when needed.

The main crop the Mennonites planted was spring wheat. They planted wheat in March or April, as soon as morning temperatures crept above freezing. They also planted rye, oats, and millet in spring and barley in late fall. The harvest would start in June and continue until August. The grain was reaped with a cradle scythe, tied into sheaves, and stacked in shocks to dry to the proper moisture level. Once the grain was ready, it was threshed with a threshing stone pulled by a horse or an ox. After that, it was traditionally winnowed with a winnowing fork, to separate the chaff from the grain, although the Borosenko Mennonites were starting to use a fanning mill to clean it in the 1870s. Finally, it was bagged, ready for use.

Unlike their Ukrainian peasant neighbours, who practiced subsistence agriculture, Mennonites participated in the cash economy. They hauled grain to market, mainly to Nikopol but also to other towns, to sell for cash. Grain that they would use on their own farm was stored in the loft over the house or taken to the village windmill to be ground into flour. It was November before the last grain was hauled into the attic – harvest was a laborious process.

Mennonites worked very hard to get their harvest underway before their Ukrainian neighbours so that they could sell grain in the Nikopol market while the price was still high. This meant plowing and sowing in early spring while it was only a degree or two above freezing to get the grain growing as soon as possible, and reaping, threshing, and winnowing as fast as possible once the crops were ready. Mennonites respected hard work. They also hired Ukrainian labourers (they called them Russians) to work in their fields for cash, especially during harvest, so that they could finish quickly.

Planting gardens and flowers was also important to Mennonites. They grew all the vegetables that they would eat throughout the year. In summer they canned, pickled, and salted as much as possible to have fruits and vegetables to eat in winter. Melons, both cantaloupes and especially watermelons, were favourite Mennonite crops. Abraham Reimer also mentions

planting bushels of seed potatoes and picking cucumbers and green beans.

Hog butchering in late fall was an important event. Once temperatures dropped below freezing, extended families and friends would gather to butcher several hogs. It was a lot of work to skin and cut up the hogs, render the lard and cracklings, and salt and can the meat. But butchering provided them with pork to eat throughout the year and lard to cook with. It was a wonderful social event as well.

K.M. GRIBANOV, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, LCCN 2018689339

An early-nineteenth-century playing card of Ekaterinoslav province.

MAJOR EVENTS IN THE DIARY

Three major events occurred during the period of the diary, which covers January 1, 1870, to April 10, 1874. One was the smallpox epidemic of April–July 1873, which caused much suffering and claimed many lives. Mennonites had vaccinated for smallpox in the early 1800s in imperial Russia, so it is not clear why there should have been an epidemic.

Second, in 1871, the tsarist regime revoked the special status of foreign colonists. For Mennonites this meant the loss of their cherished *privilegium*, which guaranteed Mennonite exemption from military service, among other privileges. This was part of the series of social reforms that Emperor Alexander II (reigned 1855–1881) carried out in the wake of the empire's humiliating defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856). Mennonites made several attempts to negotiate with the emperor and senior officials to restore their privileges, but these were all unsuccessful. Ultimately, in early 1873, the Mennonites appointed twelve delegates to go to North America to determine if it would be a suitable destination for emigration and to select possible land. The two KG delegates were Cornelius Toews (1836–1908) from the Blumenhof congregation and David Klassen (1813–1900) from the Heubuden congregation.

Finally, preparations for emigration occupied the last months of 1873 and the beginning of 1874. The KG sold farms, barns, and houses that they had been building and improving since moving to Borosenko only nine years before. They auctioned their livestock and personal possessions, often at a great loss, in order to stay true to their faith. They collected money to defray the expenses of the delegates' travel and to help poorer members emigrate. And they squeezed into the remaining homes, barns, and schools as the buyers took possession of their farms while they awaited the passports that would allow them to leave. The church had decided that all members must emigrate as their spiritual duty, and virtually all did so. About one thousand members emigrated to Manitoba and several hundred emigrated to Nebraska in the summer of 1874.

THE DIARY

The following extract from Abraham F. Reimer's diary covers the beginning of 1873. It reveals what Reimer thinks is important. For instance, he carefully records temperatures, wind, clouds, and precipitation daily. Reimer was a farmer, to whom the weather mattered greatly. Also, he records the details of sicknesses and trips to nearby towns, which might not seem so important today, and his wife's activities as a midwife. The entries also record details about the appointment of delegates who were to investigate emigration to North America, and their travels.

JANUARY 1873

1. Mon. Morning +1½ degrees [35°F], day +5 degrees [43°F], cloudy, some southwest wind. We went with Peter Reimers to Blumenhof to the service. The young Peter Harms was re-accepted yesterday. There was a brotherhood meeting and the Lord's Supper. We were at the old Heinrich Reimers for dinner and *faspa*.[7]

2. Tues. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +6 degrees [46°F], calm, cloudy. Abraham Reimers of Blumenhof were here visiting. My brother Klaas Reimer of Heubuden was here. He brought his son Heinrich to learn blacksmithing for a month. If it goes well, it will be until spring.

3. Wed. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], clouds, some west wind. Yesterday our old Klaas Reimer gave us 2 rubles. He still owes a balance of 1 ruble. Heinrich Friesen of Rosenfeld was here. He has 2 printed letters, and the 1871 law issued in St. Petersburg.[8]

4. Thurs. Morning +4½ degrees [42°F], day +8 degrees [50°F], cloudy. Rained some yesterday. Much southeast wind during the night, which blew a shingle [*Pfau*] down from the smithy. Rained a little. We have made butter toffee [*gebuterit*] twice, today 6 *funtov* [5 pounds].

5. Fri. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], clouds, day +6 degrees [46°F], southwest wind. The Makhliny moved from Grünfeld.[9] Nearly the entire village helped them haul 11 wagonloads here. They bought the shepherd's hut for 15 rubles.

6. Sat. Morning +1 degree [34°F], day +5 degrees [43°F], southeast wind, clouds. On the 4th, Klaas Reimer by himself and Peter Reimer went to Blumenhof to the service. There was a brotherhood meeting about the Lord's Supper and that it would be observed once a week.

7. Sun. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], day +4 degrees [41°F], clouds, southeast wind. We went with Abraham Friesens to the service in Blumenhof. There was a brotherhood meeting again about the Lord's Supper and that it should be held on the first Thursday. We were at Abraham Reimers for dinner.

8. Mon. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +7 degrees [48°F], cloudy, southeast wind. My wife helped sew a fur coat for Toews for a day and a half. I was at Abraham Friesens for dinner. Until evening I helped sharpen things with a whetstone.
9. Tues. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], cloudy, nearly calm, day +6 degrees [46°F]. My wife went with Mrs. Abraham Friesen to Rosenfeld to our Penners. She was often a little better. I was at Toewses, and my wife was at Lemkes from 12 o'clock at night until 1 o'clock. They had a daughter.
10. Wed. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], cloudy, foggy, south wind, day +8 degrees [50°F]. There was such a strong south wind during the night that some roof tiles [*Pfauen*] were blown down from the smithy. My wife was very sick with swelling and pain. Mrs. Lemke is suffering a lot.
11. Thurs. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +6 degrees [46°F], in the forenoon +1 degree [34°F], early morning rained heavily. Snowed from 8:30 until noon with strong southwest wind. We went with Abraham Friesens in a covered wagon to Blumenhof for the Lord's Supper. We were at the young Heidebrechts for dinner.
12. Fri. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], clouds, day +4 degrees [41°F], south wind. Yesterday the Busuluk River thawed as far as Lemkes. Klaas Reimers of Heubuden were visiting here from 2 o'clock to 5 o'clock in the afternoon for faspa.
13. Sat. Morning +1 degree [34°F], clouds, some sunshine, southeast wind. The Busuluk thawed completely up to our place. Johann Reimer's Russian servant left. Peter Toews went to Rosenfeld. Her Russian maid has finished her term.
14. Sun. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], cloudy, some southeast wind. The Lord's Supper took place in Blumenhof. Minister Fasts, Heinrich Brandts, Johann Reimers, and Peter Toewses were here. On Friday old Jacob Toews got very sick.
15. Mon. Morning –1 degree [30°F], day +1 degree [34°F], cloudy. The Lord's Supper was held in Rosenfeld at our Abraham Penners for her sake.[10] In all there were only 10 men and 6 women. No one from here went.
16. Tues. Morning –2 degrees [28°F], clouds, day 0 degrees [32°F]. Held another Lord's Supper at Johann Koops in Neuanlage due to his sickness. Our Penners were here for faspa. They wanted to take me along.
17. Wed. Morning –3 degrees [25°F], clouds, east wind. The ice is strong enough to hold anything. Abraham Reimers were here for dinner and for faspa. Day –1 degree [30°F]. Klaas Reimer hired anew [the worker] for a month.
18. Thurs. Morning –7 degrees [16°F], day –3 degrees [25°F], clouds, northeast wind. The old Jacob Toews[11] died in Blumenhof in the afternoon. He was over 67 years old.
19. Fri. Morning –8 degrees [14°F], clear, east wind, day –2 degrees [28°F]. The ice is strong again. Franz Kroeker and Peter Loewen of Sawitzki[12] went to the Molotschna on Monday.
20. Sat. Morning –8 degrees [14°F], day –12 degrees [5°F], clouds, east wind. There was an election for minister in Blumenhof. The old Peter Kroeker[13] of Heubuden, the deacon, was elected minister with 75 votes; the old Jacob Barkman[14] of Friedensfeld as minister with 64 votes; and Heinrich Wiebe[15] of Rosenfeld as deacon with 19 votes. The old Peter Toews[16] had 18 votes.
21. Sun. Morning –6 degrees [18°F], day –2 degrees [28°F], clouds, southeast wind. Only a few from here were in the service in Blumenhof. Bishop Peter Toews of Blumenhof, Minister Loewen of Hochfeld, and old David Klassen of Heubuden went to a meeting in Pordenau, Molotschna, about emigrating to America.[17]
22. Mon. Morning –8 degrees [14°F], day –1 degree [30°F], clear, southeast wind. The old Johann Warkentin and the young Isaac Warkentin were visiting here for faspa. Toews of here and Heinrich Brandt left at 8 o'clock to Yekaterinoslav to buy flour.[18] Peter Enns, who moved in fall from Berdiansk to Kutschebe, was here in the evening.
23. Tues. Morning –6 degrees [18°F], day –2 degrees [28°F], clouds, nearly calm. Peter Enns went from here to Rosenfeld. He was here from Sunday, 2 days and 2 nights. In the evening Klaas Brandts were here visiting.
24. Wed. Morning –7 degrees [16°F], clouds, nearly calm, day –1½ degrees [29°F]. Peter Friesen of here went with Klaas Brandt to Blumenfeld to Doctor Loewen because of tapeworms.
25. Thurs. Morning –5 degrees[19] [21°F], clear, nearly calm, day –1 degree [30°F]. Klaas Reimer took 6 *chetvert* [36 bushels] of wheat to Ebenfeld. Abraham Penner and Abraham Friesen of here took 10 chetvert [60 bushels] of wheat to Nikopol at 8 o'clock in the morning. Wheat sold for 10 rubles 80 kopecks and rye for 7 rubles.
26. Fri. Morning –4 degrees [23°F], clouds, some east wind, day 0 degrees [32°F]. Franz Kroeker of here and Peter Loewen of Sawitzki returned from Molotschna. I was at Toewses of here. Klaas Reimer and Abraham Friesen came back from Nikopol at 5 o'clock in the evening. Our Toews and Heinrich Brandt returned from Yekaterinoslav.
27. Sat. Morning –2½ degrees [26°F], day +1 degree [34°F], cloudy, some sunshine, nearly calm. The old, small Jacob Friesen of Heubuden was here yesterday for a little while. The old Klaas Reimer of Heubuden was here for faspa. I had fever in my feet in the afternoon. The old David Klassen came back from Molotschna late afternoon.
28. Sun. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], clouds, nearly calm, day +½ degree [33°F]. There was no service. Abraham Reimers of here were at Abraham Friesens. We were also there. On Thursday the old Jacob Barkman of Rosenfeld was taken to Peter Friesens of here.
29. Mon. Morning –1 degree [30°F], partly cloudy, day +1 degree [34°F], east wind. The small, old Jacob Friesen had a big auction sale in Heubuden of the livestock, _____ house, and tools [*gerälth*]. The livestock and sheep were _____ .
30. Tues. Morning –2 degrees [28°F], forenoon cloudy, cold, east wind, day +2 degrees [36°F], afternoon clear. We went with our Friesens to Rosenfeld to Abraham Penners. She is a little better. She was up most of the time.
31. Wed. Morning +1½ degrees [35°F], rained half the night, rained heavily in the morning, completely cloudy, southeast wind,

day +3 degrees [39°F], rained until evening. Rain mixed with snow in the evening. Ended with heavy snow during the night.

FEBRUARY

1. Thurs. Morning –1 degree [30°F], snowed heavily until late afternoon. Snow was 5 inches deep with drifts 3 feet deep. Somewhat stormy in the evening with north wind. Bishop Toews and Abraham Loewen came home from Molotschna. Peter Friesen came home from Dr. Loewen in Blumenfeld.

2. Fri. Morning –4 degrees [23°F], clear, nearly calm. There was a good sleigh road. Day –2 degrees [28°F]. Our [Abraham] Friesen of here, Klaas [Friesen] of Annafeld, and Dietrich Isaac of Rosenfeld checked our chimney. Yesterday Klaas Reimer made a bell [*kling*] for the great room door.

3. Sat. Morning –7 degrees [16°F], clear, nearly calm, day –5 degrees [21°F]. Many people went on sleighs. Our Abraham Penner of Rosenfeld was here and brought us 2 *Jäng*[?] plow hubs [*Pflugnabels*] and a pair of socks that they had knitted. Peter Dyck,[20] the schoolteacher of Blumenhof[?], was here for a little while.

4. Sun. Morning –10 degrees [10°F], nearly calm, clouds, day –6 degrees [18°F]. The children without their wives were in the service in Blumenhof. There was a big brotherhood meeting. Cornelius Toews of Grünthal was elected as an agent along with David Klassen of Heubuden to go to America to evaluate it. It would cost 1,500 rubles. It was discussed with old Johann Warkentin about funds [*Lohn*] from the district office. It lasted until 5:30 in the evening.

5. Mon. Early morning –14 degrees [0°F], most of the time –18 to –20 degrees [–8°F to –13°F], clear, calm, day –8 degrees [14°F], late evening –4 degrees [23°F], night calm, clouds. In the afternoon I was at Peter Friesens. Peter Barkman took the old Jacob Barkman to Rosenfeld again.

6. Tues. Morning –14 degrees [0°F]. Yesterday it was so cold that today it was actually 2–3 degrees warmer. But it is calm and clear. I was at Peter Toewses of here in the afternoon, but he had gone to Ebenfeld.

7. Wed. Morning here –16 degrees [–4°F], day –13 degrees [3°F], clear, calm. The old _____ grandfather Heinrich Reimer of Blumenhof, Abraham Dyck of Annafeld, and Heinrich and Klaas Brandt of here were visiting here. Klaas Reimer of here sold his sleigh.

8. Thurs. Morning –12 degrees [5°F], day –5 degrees [21°F], clouds. I was a little sick and had some foot fever. Our Abraham Penner of Rosenfeld was here for faspa.

9. Fri. Early morning 0 degrees [32°F], clouds, day +4 degrees [41°F], nearly calm. After faspa there was a strong north wind and such heavy hail that one could not see another house. Late evening again clear.

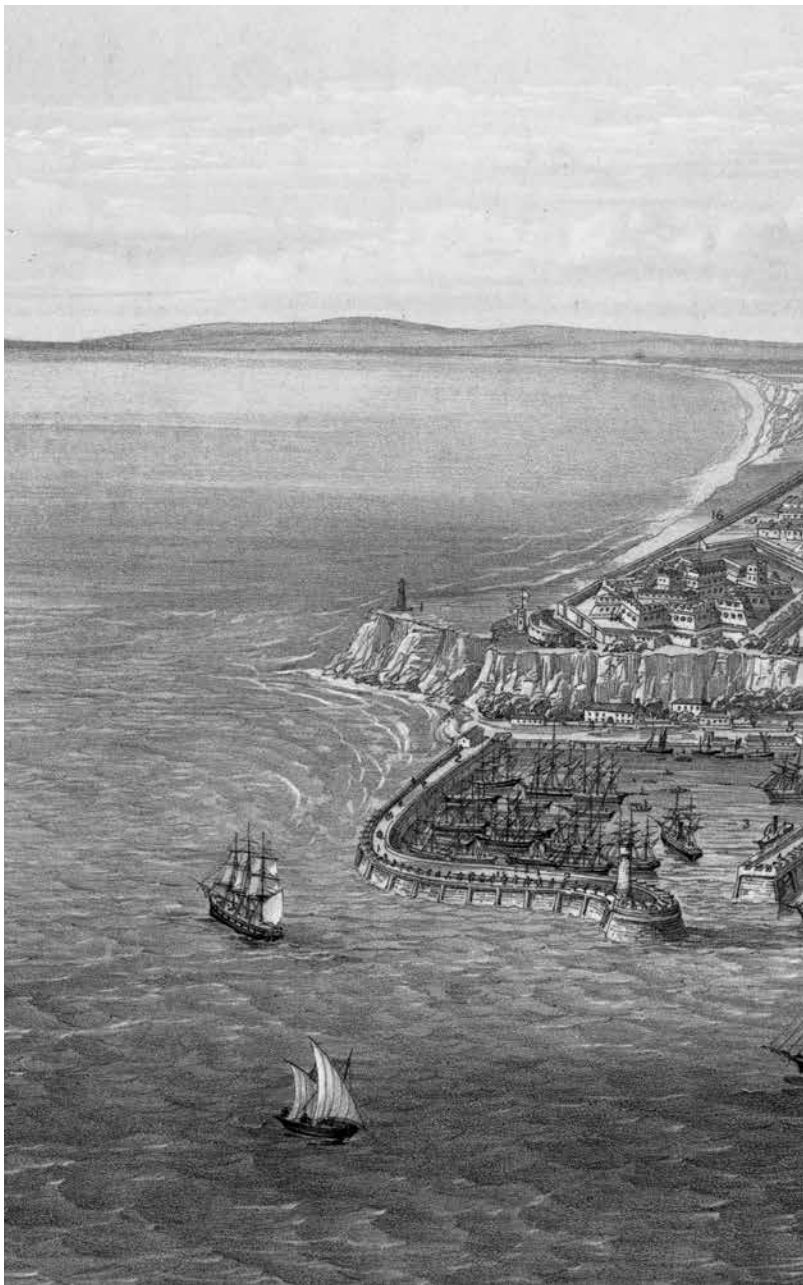
10. Sat. Morning +1 degree [34°F], day +5 degrees [43°F], calm, partly cloudy. There was a brotherhood meeting in Blumenhof about collecting the money, and they settled on each baptized soul paying 6 rubles. Mrs. Abraham [Penner] of Rosenfeld is still sick for some time from getting cold [*erkält*] and fear [*Schreck*].

11. Sun. Morning –½ degree [31°F], east wind, day +4 degrees [41°F], very cloudy. My wife went with Peter Reimers to the service in Blumenhof. Minister Jacob Barkman of Friedensfeld preached for the first time. My wife went with Peter Reimers to Rosenfeld to Abraham Penners for dinner. She had improved and is often up, but my wife is sick.

12. Mon. Morning +1 degree [34°F], rained heavily during the night, strong south wind, day +3 degrees [39°F]. Rained until afternoon, and water flowed in the late afternoon. The garden is full [of water]. My wife was still a little sick. Since yesterday Mrs. Peter Reimer was very sick with a stroke.

13. Tues. Morning +2 degrees [36°F]. The creek rose so high that the bridge is completely under water, and people had to cross at Sawitzki. Here the _____ on the footbridge were under [water]. The sleigh road had completely gone on Saturday[?]. Day +4 degrees [41°F], clouds, calm.

14. Wed. Morning –1 degree [30°F], day +3 degrees [39°F], mostly



A view of the city of Odessa, ca. 1854. The city served as a transit point for many Mennonites when they journeyed to North America.
N. WHITTOCK, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, LCCN 2003677966

clear, nearly calm. Teacher Fast of here's son Isaac[21] died. He was 2 years, 2 months old. He died at 3 o'clock in the morning and was sick for 3 days. Cornelius Janzen went to Heubuden on Tuesday morning.

15. Thurs. Morning 0 degrees [32°F], day +3½ degrees [40°F], mostly clear, some south wind. David Klassen of Heubuden and Cornelius Toews of Grünfeld left from Blumenhof for America at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a sorrowful departure.

16. Fri. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], south wind, clouds, day +4 degrees [41°F] The young Mrs. Plett[22] had an auction in Neuanlage. The farmyard was leased. The livestock and household goods sold for 1,000 rubles.

17. Sat. Early morning –1 degree [30°F], day clouds, afternoon sunshine, nearly calm, day +3 degrees [39°F]. We were at Toewses of here for faspa on Thursday. Abraham Reimer of Blumenhof was here for dinner and faspa. They had an accident in the yard on the way home. Teacher [Fasts] had a funeral, and the whole village was there.

18. Sun. Morning 0 degrees [32°F], day clouds, nearly calm, +2 degrees [36°F]. Nearly all the children from here went to the service in Blumenhof. Johann Reimers got stuck on the dam, and the others had to help them to get back, so no one from here was in the service. The new minister Jacob Barkman preached in Friedensfeld. Yesterday for the first time mature cattle went out [to pasture?].

19. Mon. Morning –1 degree [30°F], partly cloudy, nearly calm, day +3 degrees [39°F]. The old and middle-aged Heinrich Reimers[23] of Blumenhof and Klaas and Heinrich Brandts were here for faspa. They also brought Mrs. Plett from Neuanlage. She has moved to Franz Kroekers of here.

20. Tues. Morning 0 degrees [32°F], partly cloudy, east wind, day +4 degrees [41°F]. In the forenoon my wife was at Toewses. She caught a cold there yesterday, so she was sick in the evening. There was an auction of livestock and household goods at the old Abraham Friesens in Rosenfeld. It brought over 500 rubles.

21. Wed. Morning –1 degree [30°F], day +2½ degrees [38°F], cloudy, often nearly calm. Peter Reimer and Abraham Friesen bought sheep at the auction. They drove them _____ into the field. David Klassen and Cornelius Toews of Grünfeld came home from their America trip because they had gone only to Molotschna.[24]

22. Thurs. Morning –1 degree [30°F], day +3 degrees [39°F], clouds, east wind. Yesterday I was at Toewses of here. Abraham Dycks of Annafeld were there also for faspa. My wife was very sick yesterday. This afternoon she mostly lay in bed because she had a very high fever and severe headaches.

23. Fri. Morning 0 degrees [32°F], day cloudy, forenoon calm, afternoon cold east wind. I was up all day, although I was ill. In the afternoon Mrs. Abraham Friesen, Toews, and I went to the Abraham Penners in Rosenfeld. She is better. She was up all day and worked some in the house.

24. Sat. Morning –½ degree [31°F], cloudy, nearly calm, day +1½ degrees [35°F]. My brother Klaas Reimer was here with his son Jacob.[25] Reimer was at Jacob Klassens for dinner and here for faspa. My wife had a high fever since breakfast, and she lay in bed all day.

25. Sun. Morning +½ degree [33°F], partly cloudy, day +2 degrees [36°F], southeast wind. My wife had no [fever?] but was still sick, so she hardly could be up. There was a brotherhood meeting in Blumenhof about the America trip, and congregation discussed the young people.

26. Mon. Morning –1 degree [30°F], day +1 degrees [34°F], nearly calm, snowed all day. In the evening south wind and snowed over 1½ [inches]. For the third time, my wife had high fever. She laid down all day and was weak _____. She babbled some. In Heubuden and Blumenhof they seeded wheat on the 23rd and 24th.

27. Tues. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], day +4 degrees [41°F], clear, calm. A little bit of a sleigh road. Our Abraham Penners of Rosenfeld were here for dinner faspa. He tipped over the covered wagon nearby on the other side of the dam.

28. Wed. Morning –1 degree [30°F], day +3 degrees [39°F], clouds, nearly calm. On the steppe there was still something of a sleigh road. Abraham Reimers of Blumenhof were here at Toewses for dinner and for faspa at our place. Cornelius Janzen of here has been sick for 5 days. He does not have _____. The old Peter[26] of Neuanlage died Monday at 9 o'clock. He was sick only 2 days.

MARCH

1. Thurs. Morning +1 degrees [34°F], day +7 degrees [48°F], clouds, nearly calm. Still had some snow on the fields. The Abraham Dycks were here for faspa. Dietrich Isaac went on the sleigh to Abraham Friesens for faspa. Two from Huttersthal[27] should come to Heubuden to discuss going to America.

2. Fri. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], nearly calm, clear, very mild. Our Friesens and Bullers went to Nikopol on Tuesday and Wednesday. Wheat still brought 11 rubles and in Odessa up to 16 rubles. Yesterday it was discussed that the 3 from Jantz would keep their land until Peter Friesen _____.

3. Sat. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +11 degrees [57°F], clouds, some southeast wind. There was a betrothal at Franz Kroekers of their maid, Helena, the daughter of the old Abraham Rempel,[28] and Cornelius Plett.[29] Yesterday old Peter Thiessen of Neuanlage was buried. He was 65 years and was married 42 years.

4. Sun. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], clouds, nearly calm, day +8 degrees [50°F]. The young people stood up.[30] There was a short brotherhood meeting about the young people and some about the American trip. Jacob Friesens' son Abraham was removed from the congregation. Johann Toewses of Grünfeld were here.

5. Mon. Morning +2½ degrees [38°F], day +8 degrees [50°F], cloudy, nearly calm. Peter Toewses planted potatoes and plowed near the creek. Heinrich Brandt of here also planted potatoes. Jacob Klassen sowed spring rye and harrowed it.

6. Tues. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], clear, nearly calm, day +10 degrees [54°F]. There was a big auction at the Peter Thiessens in Neuanlage. Nearly everything was bought. There were school exams here. Cornelius Friesen of Annafeld and Dietrich Friesen were here.

7. Wed. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +8 degrees [50°F], clouds, nearly calm. Today everyone harrowed and most sowed wheat. Cornelius Janzen of here took very sick, but he is still mostly up. He sat _____ up first on a chair and then on the bench or in bed.

8. Thurs. Morning +5 degrees [43°F], clouds, south wind. Nearly all have started to sow and to plow. Klaas Reimer began to plow and to sow barley. Johann Reimer and Heinrich Brandt also planted barley. Cornelius Janzen was very sick and died at 5:30 in the evening. He drank much water and did not remove his trousers all day and sat near the stove on a chair.

9. Fri. Morning +6 degrees [46°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], cloudy, rained all night, rained heavily during the morning and until noon, cloudy all day. Afternoon hardly any plowing was done. South wind.

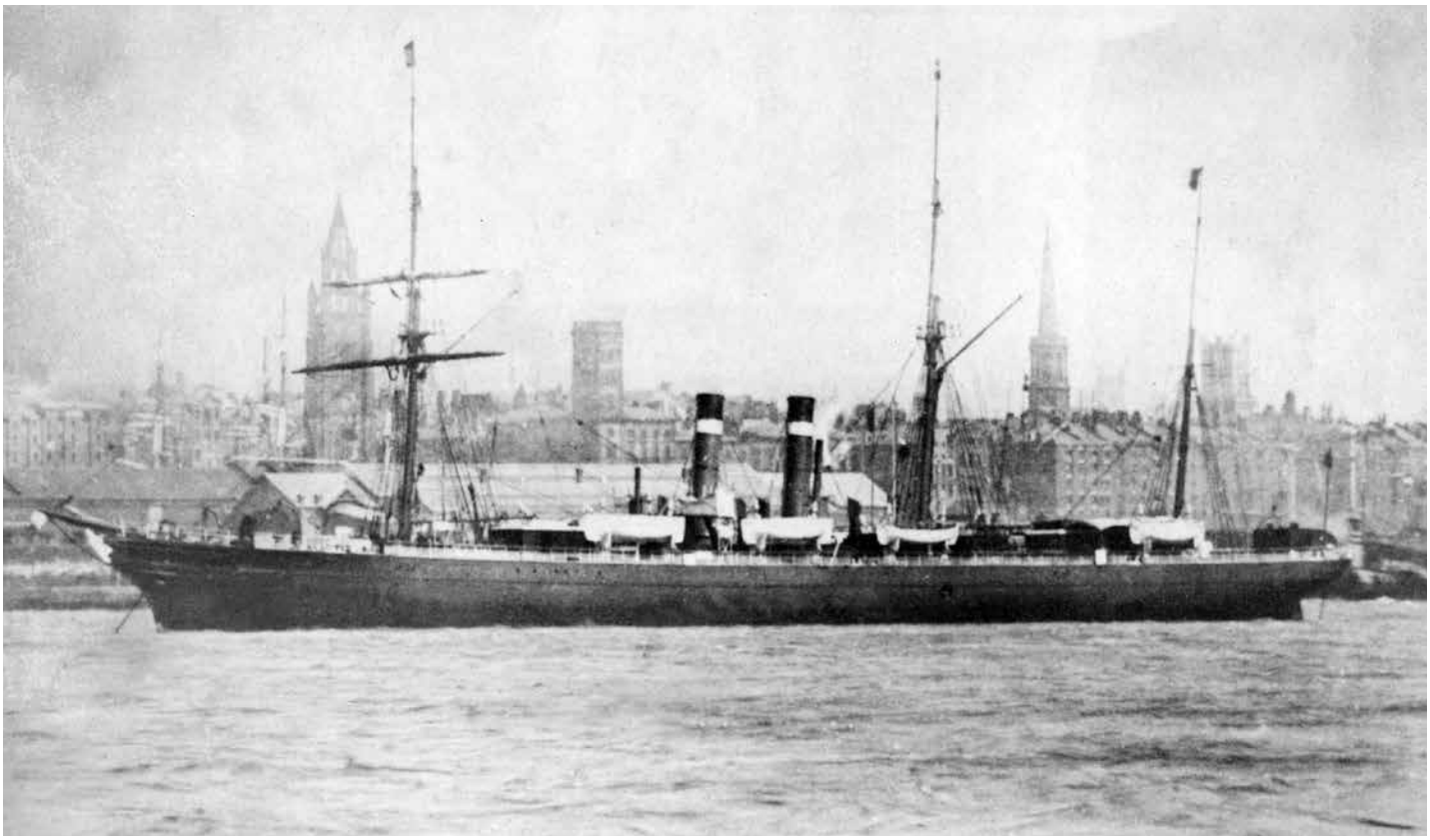
10. Sat. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +5 degrees [43°F], cloudy, snowed some. Very little plowing. Teacher Fast made the coffin for Cornelius Janzen in the school. Peter Reimer helped him.

11. Sun. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], clouds, day –½ degree [31°F], cold northeast wind. My wife dressed Cornelius Janzen in the forenoon. In the afternoon we were at Jacob Klassens for the funeral.[31] He was 25 years, 1 month old. Only Peter Toews attended the service in Blumenhof.

12. Mon. Morning –4 degrees [23°F], nearly everything is frozen, day 0 degrees [32°F], clouds. No one at all plowed in the forenoon because the ground was frozen. In the afternoon was the first plowing. Abraham Friesen and Peter Reimer began plowing today. On the 11th, the young people sat on the front bench.[32]

13. Tues. Morning –2 degrees [28°F], day +2 degrees [36°F]. In the forenoon some _____, but in the forenoon many plowed. Abraham Friesen built a big grain drill for Martin Janzen last week. Peter Friesen of here has [sowed] grain on 28 *desiatinas* [75 acres] of land, and in Heubuden they [sowed?] barley.

14. Wed. Morning –1 degrees [30°F], day +5 degrees [43°F], clear, nearly calm. Most people did much plowing, and people planted all types of grain. In the afternoon I was at the old Cornelius Friesens and at Klaas Friesens in Annafeld. Klaas Friesen has been very sick for 5 days. On early Friday at 2 o'clock, Heinrich Brandt came here to get my wife.



MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES. 050-12.0

From Hamburg, many Mennonites travelled to England on ships like the SS *Peruvian*.

15. Thurs. Morning –1 degree [30°F], day +8 degrees [50°F], clouds, east wind, clouds. Today I got 1 *pud* [36 pounds] of groats and helped carry them. On Friday at 2:30 in the morning, Johann Reimer went to Rosenfeld to Mrs. Franz Wiens. It was very dark, so he got lost and tipped into the ditch near Annafeld.
16. Fri. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], partly cloudy, northeast wind. Teacher Fast helped Peter Reimer with the plowing. Mrs. Lemke of here has lain in bed with a swelling for 8 weeks.
17. Sat. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +11 degrees [57°F], very cloudy, north wind. The stork came back last Monday, the 12th. Here and everywhere much plowing and seeding is being done.
18. Sun. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], clouds, nearly calm. My wife had to go to Heinrich Brandts at 4:30 in the morning. A daughter[33] came at 6 o'clock in the morning. My wife was very weak and sick.[34] I wanted to go along to Blumenhof, but I had to tend to the sheep and lambs.[35]
19. Mon. Morning –1 degree [30°F], north wind, day +8 degrees [50°F], clouds. Yesterday the young people were baptized in Blumenhof. There were 5 daughters and 3 sons. From here only Gerhard Siemens were in the service.[36]
20. Tues. Morning +2 degrees [36°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], clouds, nearly calm. Cornelius Toews was here visiting and for faspa, because he was in the field plowing and haying. Abraham Reimer of Blumenhof has finished plowing and sowing.
21. Wed. Morning +1 degree [34°F], day +8 degrees [50°F], partly cloudy, some east wind. The old Franz Wiens of Rosenfeld was here for dinner. He had walked from the house. In Heubuden and Blumenhof some have finished plowing and sowing.
22. Thurs. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +9 degrees [52°F], clouds, forenoon some rain. The old Mr. Wiens of Rosenfeld was here in the afternoon until faspa. He had been at Bullers overnight. A Russian was fishing here in a large barge, and he brought out half the village at one time, and he fished for half an hour.
23. Fri. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], clouds, calm. I was in Annafeld at Klaas Friesens. He was nearly well. He wanted to come here. I was still doing a lot of plowing in the forenoon. She [my wife] has set out everything in the garden except the beans.
24. Sat. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], clouds, nearly calm, day +11 degrees [57°F]. Many are still plowing here, and plowing is going very well this week. Abraham Reimer of Blumenhof was here visiting and brought *Martyrs Mirror* to Klaas Reimer. The *Martyrs Mirror* books and calendars were all shipped from America.
25. Sun. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day here +12 degrees [59°F], in places up to +16 degrees [68°F], a few clouds, nearly calm. Peter Reimers and Abraham Friesens went to the service. For the 3rd time we could not go along to Blumenhof. Our Abraham Penners were here visiting for dinner and faspa. In the evening I went with them.
26. Mon. Morning 0 degrees [32°F], clouds, day +13 degrees [66°F]. I was at Abraham Penners overnight. In the evening he took me home. Jacob Barkman came from Waldheim, Molotschna, with his son–in–law Martin and son Jacob.
27. Tues. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +14 degrees [64°F], nearly calm, clear. In Rosenfeld our Penners and others have

finished plowing, and in Heubuden many have finished plowing and sowing.

28. Wed. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], rained some during the night and in the morning, rained often until noon, south wind, cloudy, evening partly clear. Got 2 sacks of chaff from Klassen. Mrs. Janzen and Klassen finished plowing and sowing. Day +11 degrees [57°F]. Mrs. Janzen wants to move away.

29. Fri. Morning +1 degree [34°F], day +12 degrees [59°F], clouds, rained some, strong southeast wind that tore up straw [stacks], so I had to cover them. Peter Friesen, Peter Reimer, both Brandts,[37] and Johann Reimer finished plowing and sowing. Klaas Reimer and our [family members] planted melons this week, also Toews.

30. Fri. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day up to +14 degrees [64°F], southeast wind, clouds. Someone from Molotschna came with vinegar and aprons. I bought 1 *quart* [1.6 US quarts] of vinegar and 1 apron. On Saturday my wife was at Klaas Brandts from 8:30 until 2 o'clock at night. But it passed, and is healthy. I was in Annafeld at the old Siemens for dinner.

31. Sat. Morning +5 degrees [43°F], day +15 degrees [66°F], clouds, nearly calm. Here nearly all have finished plowing. I saw the swallows yesterday. Some saw the swallows 8 days ago. Jacob Regiers were here in the afternoon.

APRIL

1. Sun. Early morning +6 degrees [46°F], at 8 o'clock +10 degrees [54°F], day +16 degrees [68°F], clear, nearly calm. I went with Peter Reimers to the service. The new minister preached the other time in Blumenhof. There was a brotherhood meeting about Cornelius Friesen and Klaas Friesen of Annafeld.

2. Mon. Morning +5 degrees [43°F], day +15 degrees [66°F]. I had dinner yesterday at Abraham Reimers, and for faspa I went with Peter Reimer to Rosenfeld. I came home at 7 o'clock.

3. Tues. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], very cloudy, south wind. Yesterday evening the frogs began to croak. Klaas Reimer and Abraham Friesen completely finished their sowing and plowing. Cornelius Loewens[38] of Grünfeld visited here a little bit.

4. Wed. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], southeast wind, rained often yesterday, still raining some today, clouds, day +8 degrees [50°F]. I cleaned our chiming clock and hung it on the wall in the evening.

5. Thurs. Morning here –3 degrees [25°F], day +7 degrees [48°F], clouds, east wind. I took the chiming clock off the wall again, and I myself did a little repair to it. Quite a few visitors from Molotschna have come. Also, Gerhard Rempel of Mariawohl.

6. Fri. Early morning –4 degrees [23°F], had frost nearly everywhere, frost on the windows, many places –5 degrees [21°F], all the barley is frozen, day +10 degrees [54°F], northeast wind, clouds. The service[39] was here at Franz Kroekers. It should have been at Siemens, but the maid Elisabeth has smallpox. Barkman taught.

7. Sat. Morning –2½ degrees [26°F], day +12 degrees [59°F], clouds. Abraham Reimers were at Toewses for dinner and faspa. We were also visiting there. Had no visitors on Friday. I completely repaired the chiming clock so that the movement would work properly [*zu greifen*]. Isaac Friesen of Bainitzke was here for dinner and faspa, as were the old Isaac Harms[40] of Heubuden.

8. Sun. **Easter**.[41] Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +14 degrees [64°F], clouds, afternoon rained, toward evening rained. We went with Klaas Reimer to the service in Blumenhof. Abraham Loewen taught. We were at Abraham Reimers for dinner. For faspa we went to Klaas Reimers in Heubuden. Yesterday the young Gerhard Warkentins of Fischau were [here].

9. Mon. Morning +8 degrees [50°F], day +15 degrees [66°F], clouds, nearly calm. We went with Klaas Reimer to Rosenfeld to Abraham Penners, and Klaas Reimer went from there to Blumenhof to the service. Yesterday Isaac Friesens were in Blumenhof in the service. Mrs. Cornelius Janzen moved to Heubuden on 4 April.[42]

10. Tues. Morning +6 degrees [46°F], day +14 degrees [64°F], clouds. I stayed overnight at Penners, and my wife went home yesterday with Klaas Reimers. Yesterday afternoon Mrs. Penner was so sick that she lay near death. Yesterday evening again she was sick for 3 hours but is a little [better?]. I was with Klaas Reimer in Neuanlage at the _____.

11. Wed. Morning +7 degrees [48°F], day +15 degrees [66°F], clouds, nearly calm. The old Gerhard Rempels of Mariawohl, Molotschna, were here for dinner. We were with Gerhard Rempels at Peter Friesens of here for faspa. On Sunday Jacob Dycks of Molotschna were here.

12. Thurs. Morning +5 degrees [43°F], day +9 degrees [52°F], somewhat cold, northeast wind, clouds. For Mrs. Penner it was somewhat bearable but was nearly always in bed but also up. Abraham Friesens were there. On Sunday Mrs. Penner will be sent to Molotschna because her illness _____.

13. Fri. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], cloudy, cold north wind. Toews of here and Lemke will go on Wednesday to Nikopol. They sold all the wheat and returned on Thursday, 5 April. The wheat sold there for 10 rubles 60 to 80 kopecks. It had been 11 rubles 40 to 50 kopecks 4 weeks ago. Lemke brought us 3 puds [110 pounds] of meat[?].

14. Sat. Morning +5 degrees [43°F], day +11 degrees [57°F], clouds, some east wind. Yesterday Klaas Reimer took 5½ chetvert [33 bushels] of wheat to Nikopol, and Johann Reimer took 2½ chetvert [15 bushels]. It sold for a very good 12 rubles and rye [*Korn*] for 7 rubles per chetvert. They came home at 7 o'clock in the evening. Abraham Reimer of Blumenhof and 7 others went to Nikopol and from there to Odessa, and 2 accompanied them.

15. Sun. Morning +6 degrees [46°F], day +12 degrees [59°F], cloudy, some east wind. At 6 o'clock in the morning, I went with Klaas Reimer to Rosenfeld to Abraham Penners. At 8 o'clock in the morning, they left to Molotschna to Mrs. Barkman [*Barche*] in Alexanderwohl. There she hopes to be cured. My wife is there overnight because she went there yesterday with Peter Toews. I went home with their Abraham in the forenoon.

16. Mon. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], rained often and most of

the afternoon, completely cloudy. Mrs. Abraham Reimer was here for dinner and faspa and went home and wanted me to go along and stay there for a couple days, but it was muddy in the evening and there was only 1 horse. Reimer has paid out his servant and Russian [workers].

17. Tues. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +10 degrees [54°F], clouds, nearly calm. On Sunday the Abraham Dycks and Fasts were here for faspa. Today our cousin Peter Friesen[43] and two of the youngest married children were here. They stayed overnight at the Abraham Friesens.[44] The old Johann Friesens[45] were here visiting and for dinner. The old Abraham Friesens[46] of Rosenfeld were here yesterday.

18. Wed. Morning +1 degrees [34°F], but there was hoarfrost during the night, day +8 degrees [50°F], clouds. The bridal couple, the old Gerhard Rempels' son Johann[47] of Mariawohl with his bride,[48] the daughter of Mrs. Klaas Friesen[49] of Marienthal, and Gerhard Rempels[50] of Rosenfeld were here for dinner and faspa. Cornelius Toews and David Klassen have left for America.

19. Thurs. Morning +3 degrees [39°F], day +11 degrees [57°F], cloudy, rained often, south wind. The big Katrina was very sick during the night and until noon. Here much grain has been sprouted [?, *gewaltzte*]. My wife is still making me a set of a blue jacket and vest [*Curuns*] for Good Friday.

20. Fri. Morning +4 degrees [41°F], day +12 degrees [59°F], very cloudy, rained some and often, south wind often and westerly wind. I was at Makhliny for faspa. I went to Abraham Dycks in Annafeld and in the evening to the Toewses. The old Gerhard Rempels were here for the last 8 days and have gone home.

21. Sat. Morning +5 degrees [43°F], day +11 degrees [57°F], clouds, west wind. Yesterday Toewses had 2 pairs of visitors, his Worms brothers, for dinner. They are moving to Kutschebe. My wife is making him a greyish vest [*Curuß*] and still has 5 more to make for others.

22. Sun. Early morning +6 degrees [46°F], at 8 o'clock +10 degrees [54°F], day +14 degrees [64°F], clouds. We went with Johann Reimers to the service in Blumenhof. Jacob Barkman of Friedensfeld taught. A Penner and a Regier from the more distant villages of Molotschna were there also.

23. Mon. Morning +8 degrees [50°F], nearly calm, clouds, day +15 degrees [66°F]. Yesterday there was a brotherhood meeting in Blumenhof. The big Jacob Friesen's son Abraham was accepted. We were in Blumenhof for dinner and faspa and others for Saturday dinner from _____. [?] Abraham Reimer came home.

24. Tues. Morning +7 degrees [48°F], day +18 degrees [72°F], in places +20 degrees [77°F], nearly calm. Brother Klaas Reimer was here with his son Jacob and at our Friesens for dinner and faspa. Mrs. Siemens[51] of here died yesterday of smallpox at 3:30. She was 25 years less 2½ hours.

25. Wed. Morning +9 degrees [52°F], day +20 degrees [77°F], clouds, some south wind. On Sunday the old Abraham Friesens of Rosenfeld moved here to Peter Reimers because Mrs. Peter Reimer has been sick since last week. She has difficulty walking and sleeping. Mrs. Siemens of here was buried. My wife dressed her. It was a big funeral, but from this village only the neighbour women were there.

26. Thurs. Morning +12 degrees [59°F], day +23 degrees [84°F], clouds, southeast wind. At 9 o'clock in the evening yesterday, our Abraham Penners and Klaas Reimer came to Rosenfeld, and Klaas Reimer came back home at 11 o'clock in the evening. They were away for 11 days. Our Mrs. Penner was at Mrs. Barkman, who examined her 5 times.[52]

27. Fri. Morning +14 degrees [64°F], day +22 degrees [82°F], in places +24 degrees [86°F], yesterday +25 degrees [88°F] in places, some south wind, clouds, afternoon cloudy, after faspa heavy rain, thunderstorms in places and much lightning in many places and all night. Yesterday Abraham Reimers of Blumenhof were here for dinner and faspa. We went with Klaas Reimer to Rosenfeld after faspa and stayed there overnight. Mrs. Peter Reimer has been sick this week.

28. Sat. Morning +11 degrees [57°F], south wind, cloudy, from late afternoon until evening rained heavily here. Rained very heavily in the southwest and northeast. Lots of thunderstorms and heavy lightning. Lightning in places and rained all night. I walked home at midnight, at 12:30, to the house. For Mrs. Peter Reimer it was very bearable, and she could walk again.

29. Sun. Morning +10 degrees [54°F], day +20 degrees [77°F], cloudy, south wind, afternoon rained heavily. Last Friday and Saturday the cuckoo cooed. My wife had to go to Peter Reimers at 5 o'clock in the morning. A daughter[53] came at 5:30 but died at noon because she was 6 weeks early.

30. Mon. Morning +11 degrees [57°F], day +18 degrees [72°F], southwest wind, clouds, cool breeze. The child was buried at Peter Reimers in the afternoon. Mrs. Peter Reimer was completely _____. She walked to the barn and in the house. She could eat and drink. We, our [children], and Klaas Reimers came for the funeral.

MAY

1. Tues. Morning +10 degrees [54°F], southwest wind, day +16 degrees [68°F]. Yesterday rained very heavily here and on our fields. We have not had more rain this year than this. Very heavy thunderstorms, especially beyond Scharlach up to Gruschfeld[?]. From morning to noon very many field mice were struck dead.

2. Wed. Morning +8 degrees [50°F], day +17 degrees [70°F], west wind, clouds. Mrs. Fast,[54] the schoolteacher's wife, died at 8:30 in the evening from smallpox. She was sick for 12 days and some days so sick that she could hardly speak aloud or eat. She was 35 years, 3 weeks old.

3. Thurs. Morning +9 degrees [52°F], day +15 degrees [66°F], south wind, rained some. From last Saturday until Wednesday, Peter Friesen of here and Thiessen were in Molotschna. Our Abraham Friesens left for Molotschna on Sunday at noon. Peter Reimer made the coffin for Mrs. Fast. Yesterday our Abraham Penners were here in the afternoon and for faspa.

4. Fri. Morning +10 degrees [54°F], southwest wind, clouds. Mrs. Fast of here was buried at 10:30 in the forenoon. Her

body was laid in the grave with hardly any clothes because of the awful odour. The funeral was in the afternoon. Abraham Reimers were at Johann Reimers for dinner and faspa because Johann Reimer has smallpox. He was breaking out[?] for 3 days. But now he is sitting up some.

5. Sat. Morning +11 degrees [57°F], clouds, nearly calm, day +18 degrees [72°F]. Makhlin of here has had smallpox for 11 days, but yesterday he began to improve. He had many pox. Abraham Penner of Rosenfeld was there. I should continue until the week that he returns from Yekaterinoslav.

6. Sun. Morning +12 degrees [59°F], day +22 degrees [82°F], nearly clear, nearly calm. We went with Klaas Reimers to the service in Blumenhof. There was a brotherhood meeting about borrowing money and serving as a surety. We were at Abraham Reimers for dinner. Had high fever. Yesterday Cornelius Toews and Klassen wrote from Hamburg that tomorrow 25 April they will set sail on the ocean for America.[55]

7. Mon. Morning +12 degrees [59°F], day +21 degrees [79°F], clouds, nearly calm. The old Penner[56] took me to our Penners in Rosenfeld. In the morning he went with their team to Yekaterinoslav. Martin Barkmans of Mariafeld were here. Klaas Reimer took me home for dinner, and Barkman took me back to Rosenfeld.

8. Tues. Morning +14 degrees [64°F], day +22 degrees [82°F], clouds. There were many guests at Penners. The deputies wrote that they had left Odessa on 17 April and had reached the Austrian border on the 18th, where they stayed until the 20th. They were in Prussia at _____ on the night of the 21st. On the 22nd they were in Berlin for the night. From the 23rd to the 25th, they were in Hamburg for night.

Steve Fast is a finance manager in the oil and gas industry and lives in Hillsboro, Kansas. He has been passionate about genealogy since he did a school project on his ancestry in seventh grade. Abraham Reimer is his great-great-great-uncle.

---

1 D. Plett, "Markuslandt, Andreasfeld," *Preservings*, no. 17 (Dec. 2000): 91.
2 Rudy P. Friesen, *Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture, Landscape, and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 2004), 441.
3 Entries from the Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry for Abraham Reimer (#3945), Klaas E. Reimer (#3944), and Helena von Riesen (#3596). Available at https://grandmaonline.org/. All subsequent number references are to this database.
4 Elisabeth Rempel #3955.
5 Glenn H. Penner, "Molotschna Colony Voter Lists: 1847, 1850, 1857 and 1862," Mennonite Genealogical Resources, accessed Oct. 14, 2018, http://mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Molotschna_1847_to_1862_Voters.pdf.
6 Delbert F. Plett, *Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia, 1812 to 1875* (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 1999), 248.
7 Reimer used the Réaumur temperature scale for his daily temperature measurements. On this scale, water freezes at 0 degrees and boils at 80 degrees. It was commonly used in imperial Russia into the early twentieth century and by older Mennonites in North America into the middle of the twentieth century.
8 The "1871 law" refers to the decree that revoked the special status of all foreign colonists. The Mennonites' *privilegium*, issued by Emperor Paul in 1801, had guaranteed them privileges including freedom from military conscription, administrative autonomy, and the right to use German in their education.
9 The Makhliny were the shepherds for the village and probably Ukrainians.
10 Mrs. Abraham Penner had been sick for months, so the congregation held a special communion at the Penners' house so that she could participate.
11 Jacob Cornelius Toews #5567.
12 Some families probably rented a tract of land from Sawitzki and formed a small village there.
13 Peter Kroeker #6713 (1840–1915) and Margaretha Braun #6714 (1841–1919).
14 There are many Jacob Barkmans, and I cannot differentiate them.
15 Heinrich F. Wiebe #5780.
16 Peter Toews #5752 (1831–1922) and Aganetha Barkman #5778 (1828–1899).
17 Although they had discussed for many months what to do in response to the new tsarist law on conscription, this is the first explicit mention in the diary of emigration to America.
18 Normally they would get flour at the local mill, but earlier Buller's mill was not operating regularly due to illness.
19 The text says +5 degrees, but this seems unlikely.
20 Peter Dueck #3819 (1837–1931) and Margaretha Friesen #3818 (1840–1900).
21 Isaac Fast #1394015 (ca. 1871–1873).
22 Maria Brandt #5935 (1843–1927), widow of Isaac Plett #5936 (1844–1871).
23 Heinrich Reimer #3845 (1818–1876) and Margaretha Warkentin #5943 (1841–1913).
24 According to the diary of *Aeltester* Peter Toews, "As the other delegates wanted either to call off or postpone the delegation until Easter, [the Kleine Gemeinde delegates] shortly returned from the Molotschna." Delbert Plett, *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874* (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1987), 160.
25 Jacob F. Reimer #317338 (1854–1937).
26 Peter Thiessen #3656 (1808–1873) and Margaretha Friesen #3630 (1810–1876).
27 Probably the two Hutterite delegates to America, minister Paul Tschetter #1241 (1842–1919) and his uncle Lorenz Tschetter #823 (1819–1878), who travelled to America together with the KG delegates David Klassen and Cornelius Toews.
28 Abraham Bernhard Rempel #6444 (1798–1878) and his late wife Maria Hamm #5445 (b. ca. 1795).
29 Cornelius L. Plett #3727 (1846–1935) and Helena Rempel #6445 (1843–1913).
30 The baptismal candidates were introduced to the congregation and stood before them, gave their testimonies, and answered questions about their faith. The brotherhood then would have met and discussed whether to accept the candidates as members.
31 Jacob Klassen's wife Katharina Janzen #6389 was Cornelius Janzen's sister, and Jacob Klassen was a cousin once removed of Cornelius's wife, Aganetha Klassen.
32 Probably sitting on the front bench at the worship service indicated that these young people had been accepted for baptism.
33 _____ Brandt #743442 (1873–1873).
34 His wife Elisabeth was a midwife, so she was responsible for delivering many of the babies in the area.,
35 The peak of the lambing season is in spring, although ewes may give birth at any time of the year. He must have seen that one or more ewes were about to give birth, so he needed to stay home to assist in any difficult births and to help any weak lambs start to nurse. The baptismal service that Sunday would have been a special time, and children of his relatives and friends were surely being baptized.
36 Gerhard Siemens was in the service because his sister Sara #6464 was being baptized.
37 Klaas Brandt and Heinrich Brandt.
38 Cornelius Loewen #6563 (1827–1893) and Helena Bartel #6564 (1833–1876).
39 Good Friday service.
40 Isaac Johann Harms #3890 (1811–1891) and Anna Sawatzky #3859 (1809–1877).
41 "Easter" written in blue ink in the original.
42 Her parents were David and Aganetha Klassen, who lived in Heubuden, and she had a fourteen-month-old daughter to care for. Her father was preparing to leave as a delegate to scout land in America, so her mother would surely have appreciated having a daughter and granddaughter around the house in his absence.
43 His cousin Peter Friesen #3753.
44 Abraham Friesen #3767 was Abraham Reimer's son-in-law and a nephew to Peter Friesen.
45 Johann Friesen #2608 was a brother to Peter Friesen.
46 Abraham Johann Friesen #3751, another brother to Peter Friesen.
47 Johann Rempel #3808 (1853–1904), his wife's nephew.
48 Helena Friesen #3807 (1854–1932).
49 Margaretha Braun #3802 (1817–1873). Her husband, the late Klaas Friesen #1756, was Abraham Reimer's cousin.
50 His wife's brother Gerhard Rempel #5849 (1816–1888). His wife's nephew was marrying his cousin once removed. It was customary for Mennonite bridal couples to go around and visit all the relatives in the days before the wedding.
51 Anna Plett #6467.
52 On 15 April, Klaas Reimer took the Abraham Penners to Molotschna for treatment by Mrs. Barkman.
53 Maria F. Reimer #251946 (1873–1873).
54 Helena Born #6508 (1838–1873).
55 In fact, they did not sail until 9 May. They sailed with the two Hutterite delegates, Paul and Lorenz Tschetter.
56 Peter Penner #5491.

The Emigration from Russia to Manitoba in 1875

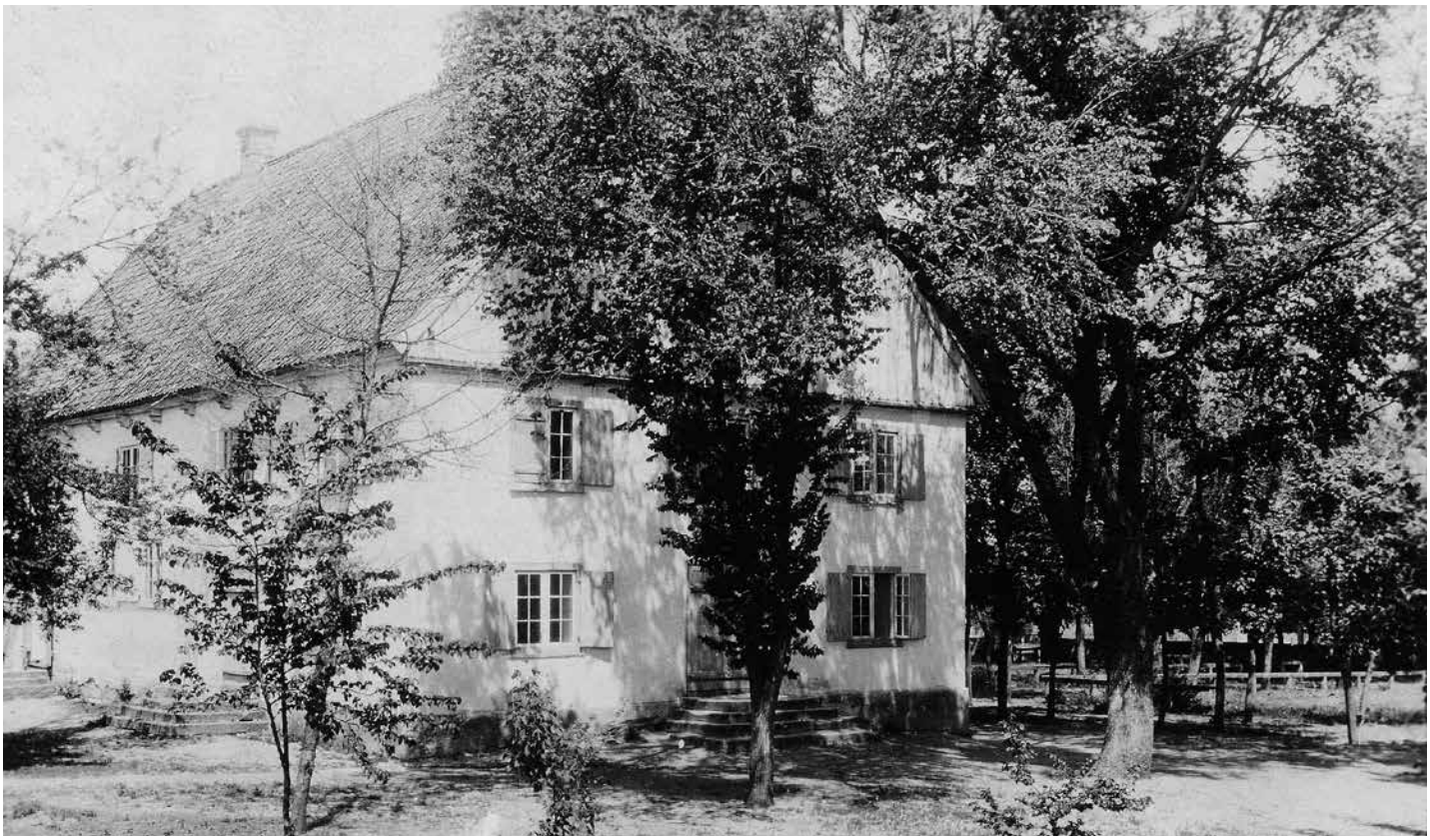
Johann Wiebe

What we have said in the preface is only about our journey from Russia to America.[1] But what we want to say now, if the Lord will give us grace, should encourage us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). To show how difficult our progress has been in spiritual matters, in the work of the church, and how hard it has been to keep God's word as our rule and guiding principle, as Jesus and the apostles teach us, and we ourselves have recognized the same as lawful at holy baptism, which we, a great part of us, had already lost in Russia by drawing strength from mere flesh (Jeremiah 17:5).

We would not allow ourselves to be punished by God's Spirit, because we lived far too carnally and worldly. And to be carnally minded is death (Romans 8). Therefore, we could no longer remain in the freedom into which Christ has delivered us, because people had already made themselves too subservient to worldly law and punished their disobedient brethren with worldly power rather than with church discipline. For this reason, the bishops and ministers, together with the entire church, dropped the practice of brotherly discipline according to the word of God, and turned to worldly power, which only belongs to the authorities and not to the followers of Jesus (Matthew 21). That is why they could not remain in freedom and let themselves be caught again in the yoke of bondage (Galatians 5).

"Are you still so foolish?" Paul asks. "After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Galatians 3:3). "But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?" (Galatians 4:9). How can a follower of Jesus, or the church of the Lord, exercise such punishment as all of us who were born and grew up in Russia have experienced? Namely, they were imprisoned and punished with blows of the rod for being heavily in debt, and were fed with bread and water, and yet remained as brothers in the church. Still other disobedient members were punished with fines, with hewing wood and digging ditches. Can God be pleased with such people? Can he bestow his Spirit on them? No, for Jesus says to his disciples: Rulers and overlords exercise authority, but it should not be so among you (Matthew 20:25). And if it is not to be so among his disciples, then Mennonites who exercise such authority and rule among themselves will not be able to be his followers. Because Jesus says: it shall not be so among you. For he said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). "But you do not believe me because you are not my sheep" (verse 26). Alas! How much struggle and strife there was in Russia for a poor servant like me, to plead this with God, that is, with all those who did not want

General Eduard Totleben, who travelled to Mennonite villages to convince them not to leave imperial Russia. SMIRNOV, CA. 1858–1861, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS, FILE:TOTLEBENEI.JPEG



MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (MHA), 665-88.0

The church in Chortitza under the leadership of Gerhard Dyck and Heinrich Epp decided that their future remained in imperial Russia.

to transgress God's word, to free ourselves from everything there.

We first had to plead for God's grace and mercy, to leave such a large congregation filled with bishops and ministers who saw it as completely unnecessary and wrong to emigrate. Indeed, some ministers even said, after General Totleben (on behalf of the emperor) had explained the matter to us, that our children should only do civilian service and not immediately take up the sword, that anyone who did not want to do this was going against God and the authorities. Oh, how frightening it was for us poor sinners to hear this. And such were the general attitudes of the ministers in the Chortitz congregation. Even the dear Bishop Gerhard Dyck, who had baptized me and had me elected as a minister in 1865 and bishop in 1870, said that his conscience told him that we had no choice but to give the children to such service. And he went on to say: "On the one hand it's piled high, and on the other hand it's piled even higher." And with those words I drove away from him. Sighing and crying out to my God in heaven the whole journey from Chortitz to Fuerstenland, I returned to my family and my dear congregation. May the Lord have mercy on me, a poor sinner, and give me help, strength, and support to deal with this important matter properly before God and the many souls who are close to me. For God knew my great weakness, but I would gladly do what is good. I pleaded the whole journey home, that it did not go all in silence: May the Lord have mercy on me and graciously help me through and lead me in the right way, without discussing it with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16). Lord, help us to do everything right for you and the church, so that none of the souls entrusted to us may miss the right path.

Yes, help me to teach my congregation, entrusted to me by God, and to lead them to good pasture, so that their blood may not be exacted at my hand (Ezekiel 33:6). My struggle continued at home, so that my family, wife and children, were moved to compassion. And when I stopped praying, I went back to my room, confident and cheerful, thinking that the Lord can and will help. I took the hymnal, let it fall open, and found the beautiful song, number 346, "Great, O Lord, is thy goodness, / Very great is thy faithfulness / In the righteous tabernacle / It shows itself daily anew, / When in all adversity / It turns away fear and suffering, / Through tribulation leads to joy / And compels even death," etc.[2] How every word of this song was so comforting to me, a poor and weak man. And I really felt the great grace and goodness of our God, so that I could almost exclaim: "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who trusts in him" (Psalm 34:8). And all fear and distress were suddenly gone, and my heart was now at peace, and I went to my God with confidence. I could cast all my worries on the Lord in the hope that he would do all things well (1 Peter 5:7). But I have to say that when I arrived home, my neighbours and friends immediately came to me and were curious to know what I had learned from the bishop there and what my attitude was now. Then I felt so weak and was afraid to say what I wanted or should do. Would I be able to carry it out? The apostle's words had to be fulfilled in

Abraham Friesen and Eleanora Rempel, photographed ca. 1864, would settle in Manitoba's West Reserve. MAID: MHA, PP-PHOTO 514-19.0

me, which he himself had to experience: When I am weak, then I am strong. Therefore, I take pleasure in weaknesses, in shame, in difficulties, in persecutions, and in distresses for Christ's sake (2 Corinthians 12:10). I experienced this very vividly in myself at that time, after the hard-fought battle through which the disciples of Jesus and all the apostles, and so many thousands of martyrs, went so joyfully, not only to prison, but also to death; and I myself was threatened with it while still in Russia, and came so far in it that I felt no fear or terror about it, but there was a longing in me, a desire to suffer for the sake of Christ (1 Peter 4:13). And John says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not heavy. For everyone born of God overcomes the world. Our faith is the victory that has overcome the world" (1 John 5:3–4).

Then I called the brethren together in the Alexandertal church to discuss whether we should emigrate or not, which General Totleben also asked us to state. At that time we agreed to emigrate with 150 families. But many attitudes and dubious thoughts were expressed among them. But if we wanted to remain faithful to the vow we had made to God and the church at our holy baptism, we knew no other counsel than to follow Jesus where he would be with us, for there was no other way open to us but to leave. And we wanted to renounce, according to God's word, those duties that our children were to assume, and everything else that had already gone too far in Russia. And seek to improve ourselves, and follow Jesus alone, who would do everything well, and carry out everything according to his will and pleasure and for our good, as the poet says: "Where Jesus goes, follow him, / How and where he leads, / Because no harm will surely come to you, / If he will not touch you. / No harm will befall you without him, / All your time is in the hands of God the Father."[3]

And the Lord said to Abraham! (So reads our text.[4]) "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" [Genesis 12:1] And all this gave me, a poor sinner, courage, so that I could touchingly and prayerfully send my sighs up to heaven: May God have mercy on us poor sinners, and give us strength to live according to his will, and to become strong through his Holy Spirit, in our inner being, and to have Christ dwell in our hearts through faith, and to be rooted and established ever more firmly through love. That we may understand, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height. Also to realize that to love Christ is better than all knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly (and often has done so) above all that we can do, ask or understand, according to the power that works in us, to him be the glory in the church which is in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen! [Ephesians 3:16–21]

In such a spirit, as already mentioned in the preface, we had to say goodbye to our beloved congregation, bishops and ministers, many good friends and acquaintances, parents, siblings, and children. With much sadness and sorrow in our hearts, saying and asking: Do you really want to stay there and take on all this? Are you not afraid of God? "That [. . .] is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus" (Ephesians 4:20–21). Paul says so clearly: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Jesus our Saviour was willing to suffer gladly. And all his followers must be of the same mind. Christ did not want to be shielded by Peter with the sword. And yet when Peter was so eager and cut off

MAID: MHA.PP-4-044-80.0

Bernhard Paul Schellenberg, ca. 1860, the first doctor in Chortitza colony, who stayed in imperial Russia.

the ear of the high priest's servant with his sword, Jesus healed it and said to Peter, and so to all his followers: "Put your sword back in its place. For whoever takes the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:51–52). And whoever wants to repeat after our Saviour in truth, as he said there on the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do": all weapons fall from their hands. Just as nothing more was heard of Peter, for he was a true follower of Jesus, Christ wanted to drink the cup that the Father had given him, and how could it be otherwise: a Christian must also drink the cup of suffering with Christ (John 18:10–11). Or do you think that anyone can be saved by any way other than that which Christ taught us? Is not Christ the way? The truth and the life? Is he not the gate for the sheep, so that no one can enter it except through him (John 10:9)? Is he not the

shepherd of the sheep, whom the sheep must follow? Is he not our Lord and Master? Is he not our leader and guide? Therefore, undaunted (says the poet), it is not difficult to find / the trail of eternity / Through the sea of gloom, / Through weather, fear, and stormy winds. / The Lord of the sea leads the way / He is the right helmsman / He will steer the little ship well / And guide it to the happy shore. / He always hurries towards heaven, / There one is in desired peace.[5]

MAID: MHA.PP-PHOTO.514-10.0

Johan Heinrichs, pictured with his daughter Helena, migrated to Manitoba with his family in 1876.

I want to remind you of our weak struggle, and our great weakness, here in America. How we have had to continue to govern the whole church according to God's holy word, or to act according, as Jesus and his apostles have so clearly taught and prescribed for us in Matthew 18:15–17, 1 Corinthians 5 and 6, 2 Thessalonians 3:7, 1 Timothy 1:20, Titus 3:10, and many other passages. Because we have pledged and promised all these things at holy baptism, to live, teach, and act according to God's word! Already in Russia a large part had fallen away and holy baptism, which should only follow repentance and faith, was only rightly recognized and felt or brought to life in the heart by a few. So also brotherly discipline, which Jesus instructed his church to practice, was greatly neglected and almost lost on the disobedient brethren, according to Matthew 18. Instead of punishing the disobedient with admonition and church discipline, almost everything was dealt with using worldly power. There was quarrelling and judgement before the unrighteous, and not before the saints as Paul so clearly instructs the Corinthians and all Christians baptized in the faith, saying: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" (1 Corinthians 6). The fornicators and adulterers were still punished with the word of God and put out of the church. Bu.t the other

MAID: MHA.PP-4-044-457.0

Maria (Wiens) Dueck and her children stayed in imperial Russia.

disobedient ones, who did not live according to the apostolic statutes, were punished with the secular law.

I say that almost everything in our church was already lost in Russia. Although we confessed and considered it lawful, as our twelfth article of faith clearly teaches, that all rebellious and disobedient members should be excluded after three warnings if they do not improve, what happened to this beautiful teaching? Because we had men among us in Russia who were elected by the congregation and confirmed by the authorities to punish the disobedient with secular power, to imprison or beat very severely with the rod, and other such acts. With the help of God, we fled all the way to America, and even in Russia could not tolerate such acts, but always taught and testified against them, that such acts do not befit any follower of Christ.

As soon as we arrived here, after resting for several days at the immigrant houses, I called together all the brethren who had received faith and baptism with us from our mother church in Russia (Ephesians 4). Because we had gathered here from many

MAID: MHA PP-PHOTO 514-14-0

Katharina Doell and Bernhard Hildebrand and family ca. 1878, the year they migrated to Manitoba.

places or regions and not all of them were from the congregation entrusted to me, I wanted to consult with them to see how the brethren who had come all this way were now feeling, and to hold fast to the basic teaching given by the Lord and seek to renew it, as Jesus so clearly teaches us, saying: "Teach them to keep everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28). We immediately made the decision, as much as God would give grace and blessing to it, to lay aside and renounce here in America all the human statutes and everything that had been punished by the authorities in Russia and rather let us elect a man or leader who would help the church to lead and govern everything according to Christian order. This also applied to the great debts we had incurred through the long journey. And if there were any disobedient brethren, which there always were, who did not want to accept their fault, they were to be reported to the teaching ministry, and if that did not help, they were to be tried by the church according to Jesus's words (Matthew 18:17). This was agreed upon at the very first consultation in the immigrant houses, in great weakness. I was the bishop, but how weak, together with my fellow servants, we were in such actions because such things were unknown and neglected. And how much weaker still was the congregation, with the exception of a few fighters and warriors who were already well-informed and practiced in the Spirit and who gave me so much assistance. Some of these have already passed into eternity, and will hopefully rest there among the number of the blessed departed. And we here in this vale of tears must still struggle with sin until our hour of redemption comes. If only we could fight properly, for if anyone fights, he will not be crowned unless he fights rightly (2 Timothy 2:5). O Lord, give us the earnestness to do all that we do, whether in word or deed, in your name, and to give you thanks for it (Colossians 3:17). And so, in our great weakness, as poor sinners, ignorant and unable, we sought to build and plant our church with the help of God.

Johann Wiebe served as the bishop of the Fuerstenland settlement in imperial Russia and helped to lead the migration from the settlement to Manitoba in 1875.

---

1 Excerpted in translation from *Ein Reisebericht von Russland nach Amerika anno 1875 herausgegeben vom Ältesten Johann Wiebe* (Cuauhtémoc: Libreria "Aleman," 1994), 11–20.

2 "Groß ist, Herr, deine Güte," *Gesangbuch in welchem eine Sammlung geistreicher Lieder befindlich* (multiple editions, e.g., Odessa, 1859), no. 346.

3 "Komm, Seele, geh' in Gott zur Ruh'," *Gesangbuch*, no. 307.

4 Wiebe concludes the preface to this sermon with the same passage of scripture.

5 "Ihr Wanderer, wo geht ihr hin," *Gesangbuch*, no. 240 (with modifications).

FEATURE

A Story from Russia and Manitoba

Anonymous

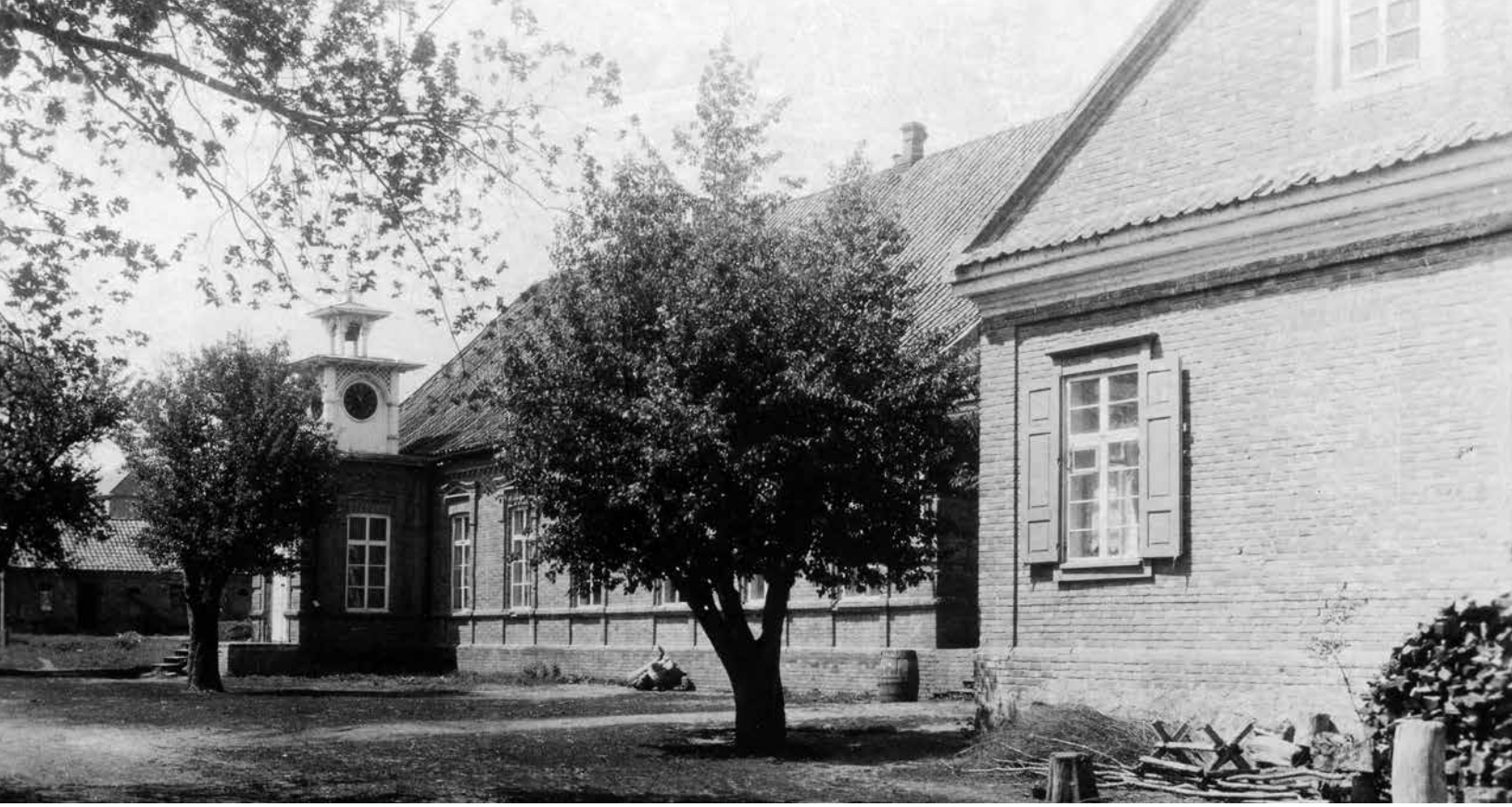
A look back in time and later, from the great decline in the year 1865 and afterwards.[1] Because the decline had increased so much at that time, and I was only leading a worldly life at the time, I already had a feeling inside: what am I doing? I want one day to enter the eternal, blessed afterlife. So in time I realized that the general worldly life was increasing and how it was progressing.

But what struck me the most was this: how the new style of singing was introduced into the church, to say the least, by devious devices (which may be called the fruit of the high schools) – namely, that it was hatched in the high schools, and then made public at that time. The students who were taught in the high schools felt superior to all others at that time, for they saw no age, nor grey hair, nor did they feel any fear of God, as if they were superior to all.

They set about working independently and sat themselves in the temple, where it should not be, for they had practiced their singing in order to be heard on the coming Sunday, to sing the song which the old singers would announce, which they accom-

MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (MHA), 412-10

A Mennonite choir, possibly from Tiegenhagen, Molotschna, ca. 1865. Conflicts over note-singing within the Chortitza church contributed to the migration of Mennonites to Canada during the 1870s.



The Chortitza Zentralschule (secondary school), where teachers taught singing from musical notation by the mid-nineteeth century. MAID: MHA, 665-86.0

plished with their followers. For when the song was announced, these practiced singers sang with full voice according to their manner, so that all had to be silent before them. The old singers, who still wanted to keep the old song, were saddened by this, and what kind of devotion this was can be imagined but not experienced as it was felt by them.

Among these singers was Jacob Wiebe, our deceased bishop's brother. The new "sing by numbers" melodies were sung from then onward. But the older singers were left behind. So it was left to the high school singers to sing. The same thing happened in the Chortitza church, and so the oldest Mennonite house of prayer gave way to the new style of singing.

In Burwalde, the old style of singing was kept for a short time, and for that time the older people who did not want to listen to the new style went there to worship. How long it was kept there is unknown to me. But in the course of time the new style of singing also penetrated there, in such a way that old fathers took their books and left the church so disheartened that they forgot their caps. Then the younger singers threw nasty handwritten notes down on the older singers saying that they should remain with them in the church. After that the people turned to our Bishop Gerhard Dyck, and at their request he came to make peace. He eventually decreed that the new style of singing should continue as it had begun, which caused great sorrow to many of the older God-seeking souls.

In time we emigrated to America. To my knowledge, in 1872 we were invited by an emigrant, Mr. Hespeler, to emigrate to America. In order to freely practice our faith there, according to our understanding of the gospel doctrine. It was soon decided to investigate the matter more closely, which was done by the Bergthal congregation, which sent deputies to investigate America. So they went in 1873, to find out whether it really existed, and to see at once whether it was possible to live there, and if we could hope for our natural progress there, which they found to be the case, and immediately brought back the certificate from the government. When the deputies returned safely, we immediately prepared to emigrate the following year.

In 1874, some of the Bergthaler emigrated to America. And in 1875 a number emigrated from the Old Colony. And in 1876 several more emigrated. I decided to go with my dear wife and five children. But fourteen families had to stay in the hospital in Liverpool because of the measles, where seven children from our group died. But finally, with God's help, we arrived happily here in America after a nine-week journey.

I was where I longed to be when we left Russia with the verse that had been given us: "So I will lead you into the desert, so that I can speak to you in a fatherly manner."

So we went straight back to work, for after we had again chosen a place for ourselves here, we discussed building a church, with the agreement that each owner should supply a beam of lumber. And when the church was finished, we thought with moving hearts of the Promised Land that was given to the children of Israel in the days of Moses. And so the time came for our house of prayer to be blessed. I was among those who stood at the door and sang with a moved heart: "Open the gates of Jerusalem and let your people into the temple," and so on. The gates were opened, and but the struggle started all over again.

1 Written by an unidentified writer, this narrative is excerpted in translation from an appendix to *Ein Reisebericht von Russland nach Amerika anno 1875 herausgegeben vom Ältesten Johann Wiebe* (Cuauhtémoc: Libreria "Aleman," 1994), 32–34.

FEATURE

In Memory of the Mennonites

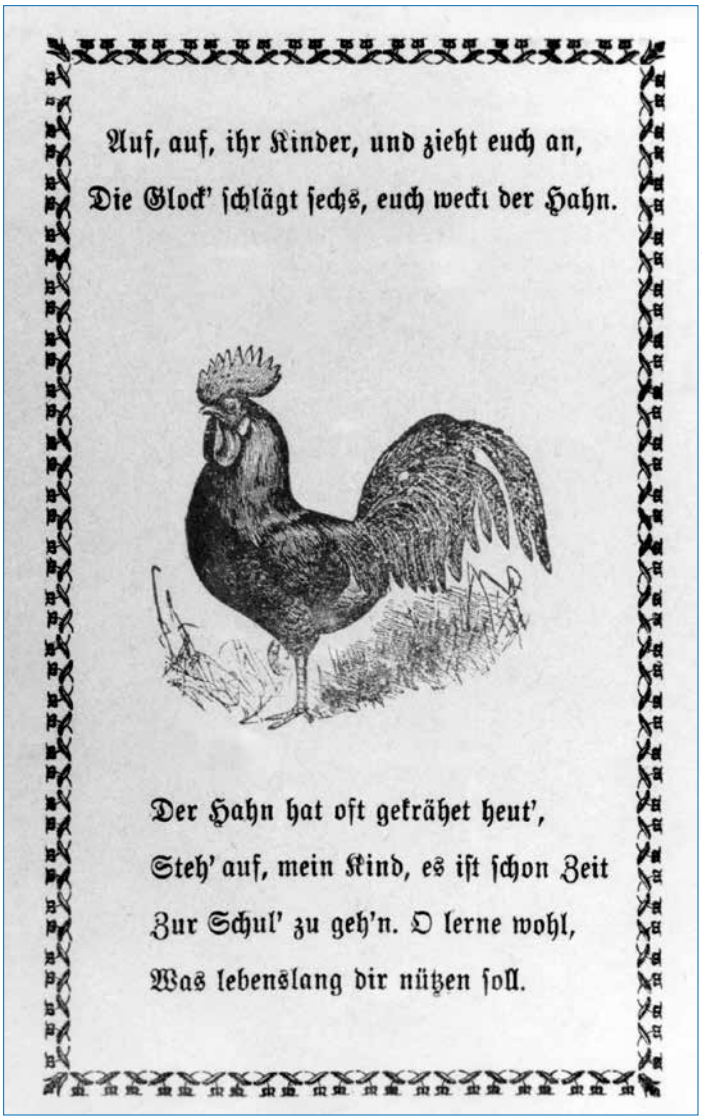
Who Emigrated to America

D. R.

Translation by Lukas Thiessen

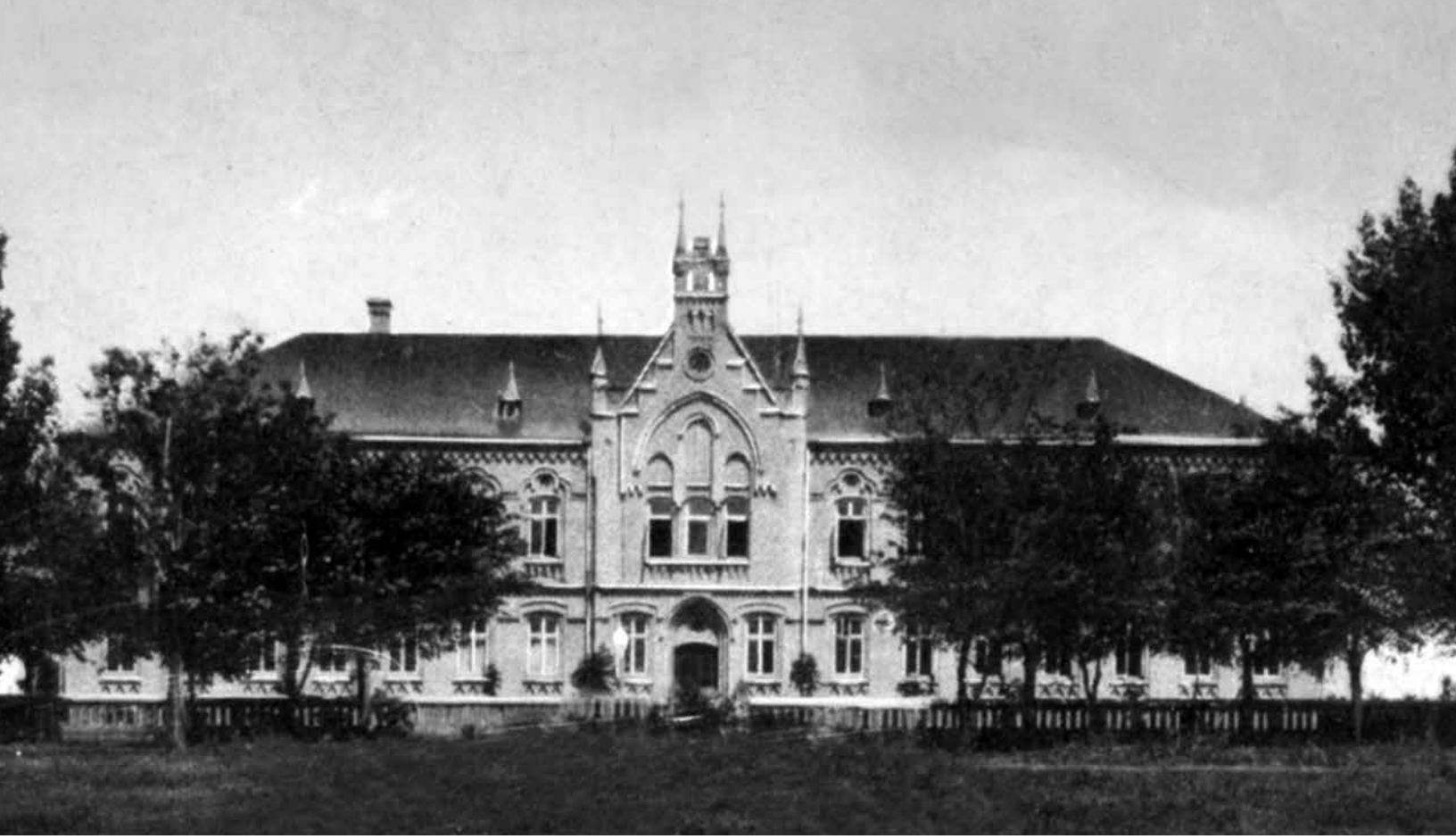
My father, one of the first Mennonites to immigrate to the Molotschna River, settled a still empty hearth on 65-dessiatin of land in the A. village in 1808[1]. I was two years old at the time, so I can no longer remember the hardships of settling on a deserted steppe, but from my fourth year onward, everything remarkable has remained in my memory. For example, how my mother prepared me for school (my father died an unusual death during our settlement). We had a 150-year-old picture Bible, and I have had a passionate love of pictures for as long as I can remember. My mother explained some of the pictures, what they meant, and said that when I could read for myself, then I would understand more. So I made it my business. "You must learn to read." "Mother," I said, "buy me a primer, I want to learn to read." "Yes, first you must know the letters, you can't read before that." "I want to learn, you just have to tell me," was my answer. I bought a *Hahnenfibel* [rooster primer], which I put in its own box in the evening, so that the rooster could reward me for my diligence without being disturbed, and almost every morning I had the pleasure of finding a five- or two-kopeck coin from the rooster. When I was six years old, I could read the Bible and understand some of the stories in it, such as David and Goliath, Joseph's story, etc., for which the pictures helped a lot.

In passing, I want to describe the school as it was furnished at that time: The building, small and low, was held together with clay. In the classroom there was no furniture other than two benches along the length of the room and between them a table two feet wide and a chair for the teacher. The boys sat on one bench and the girls on the other side; the teacher sat at the end of the table. Under the table, the pupils of both sexes would get up to a lot of mischief, especially when the teacher's eyes were



MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (MHA). 055-103.0

An excerpt from a German primer ca. 1890.



The Nikolaipol Zentralschule (secondary school) in Yazykovo settlement. After the emigration of the 1870s, Mennonites remaining in imperial Russia continued to develop institutions of higher learning. MAID: MHA, 061-27.0

closed. The latter, often a Low German, did not teach and was not allowed to teach the children any other pronunciation of the letters than the Low German way, e.g., instead of *a*, *h*, *k* one said *oa*, *hoa*, *koa*, etc. The teacher did not know anything about orthography, which was not held against him, because it was generally believed that this would instill pride in the children, and so on. I attended such a school for six winters; in the mornings and evenings, when I came home from school, I had to feed the cattle and clean the stable. In spring the holidays started, i.e., when one began to plow, and they ended only around St. Martin's Day. Compare the schools of that time with the schools of today, and I will not be reproached for my style, as I never enjoyed any other lessons than those in that village school.

Just as the schools have improved greatly since then, so too has prosperity increased. In those days, people wore clothes made of Spanish sheepskins in winter and coarse white linen in summer: for Sunday dresses, striped linen was bought; the yellow-striped was preferred. Skirts? Some people had brought Sunday skirts with them from Prussia; others bought from the market the kind the Russians still wear today, of coarse grey cloth!

Everything has been improved since then, and with the passage of time one would think that the same has also happened morally; but about this one can rightly say: "the good old days." There was more faithfulness and belief, and although politeness and education were lacking, many more were brought to their senses through harsh reprimands than is now the case with corporal punishment; the clergy in particular had more weight and influence than at present. The preaching profession among us is in need of improvement, for one reaches out to another; however, very few Mennonites want to know anything from a theologian or learned preacher.

For all their limitations and narrow-mindedness, Mennonites are not as closed-off as they used to be. I remember when a person of another confession came into a Mennonite's parlour, he was not welcomed or invited to sit. This isolation also contributed a great deal to the delay in letting the children learn the national language, and even today there are some who are concerned and worried that we may become Russified if our children have to learn the national language. This is incorrect thinking. If we love our neighbours, which the Russians are, we will set a good example by respecting them and by keeping in mind the verse, "The first will be last and the last first," and then we have nothing to fear from Russification. Yes, I love the Russians, I love the country where I was born and grew old and where I have my bread. Many are afflicted with false prejudices against Russia and prefer to emigrate to America because they think that they will find their salvation there. They have forgotten the verse: "Do good, dwell in the land and verily you shall be fed."

Lukas Thiessen has an MA in Cultural Studies and is employed as a research analyst on Métis issues.

---

1 Written by a correspondent from Gnadenfeld, identified as D. R. "Zur Zur Erinnerung fuer die nach Amerika auswanderungstigen Mennoniten," *Odessaer Zeitun*g, May 31/June 12, 1879, 2.

A Visit to the Colonies in Belize

Kennert Giesbrecht

In early December, the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation board travelled to several Mennonite communities in Belize: Blue Creek, Shipyard, Little Belize, Neuland, Spanish Lookout, and Lower Barton Creek.[1] The purpose of the trip was to connect with local Mennonites and give members of the board insight into Mennonite life in these communities, which have historical connections to the 1870s Mennonite migration from imperial Russia to Manitoba.

Belize is a small country, with an area of less than 23,000 square kilometres. From the northern border with Mexico to the southern border with Guatemala is only 290 kilometres. From the Caribbean Sea in the east to the western border, again with Guatemala, it is only 110 kilometres at its widest point. In this comparatively small area live nearly 450,000 people. Of these, over 11,000 are Low German–speaking Mennonites. However, the descriptor "Low German" should be used with

KENNERT GIESBRECHT

The Plett Foundation board crossing the river that lies between Spanish Lookout and the Cayo Deaf Institute on a ferry.

A meetinghouse in Shipyard colony. The Sunday church service begins an hour after sunrise. KENNERT GIESBRECHT

caution, because in a few colonies or communities, especially Blue Creek and Spanish Lookout, people speak more English than Low German. High German is in danger of extinction in these two colonies, as only a few of the younger generations still speak the language.

We began our visit with a two-day stay in Blue Creek, where the board spent a day having its semi-annual meeting. This community, founded in 1958 by Mennonites from Mexico, is in the very northwest of the country. The lands of Blue Creek border directly with Mexico. In the small village of La Union, you can walk through an almost empty riverbed to Mexico in the dry season. In the rainy season, you have to cross this border river by boat or by swimming. The community has a population of approximately eight hundred. Something unique about this community is the way in which the villages have been laid out. Many people have built their homes on top of a hill. You need quite a bit of horsepower to drive up there. In terms of church life, the vast majority belong to either the Kleine Gemeinde or the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church. However, there are also more and more people who do not belong to any congregation. Economically, they are largely dependent on agriculture. Most people farm and raise livestock. Many people in Blue Creek work in chicken farming. There is a chicken hatchery and a slaughterhouse where thousands of chickens are slaughtered every day – some days over twenty thousand. In the centre of Blue Creek are shops, a hotel, restaurants, a retirement home, churches, and schools.

From there, we spent a day visiting Little Belize and Neuland. Little Belize, founded in 1978, is an offspring of Shipyard colony. It is located about 25 kilometres northeast of the town of Orange Walk, and about 45 kilometres northeast of Shipyard. If the road to Little Belize was not so poorly maintained, you could probably drive there from Orange Walk in less than half an hour. At the time of our visit, the sowing of soybeans had been completed. The winter sowing will generally be done in November. The fields looked promising, as there had been plenty of rainfall, and farmers were optimistic that there could be a good harvest.

Neuland is also an offspring of Shipyard, founded in 2011,

KENNERT GIESBRECHT

Children walking home after school in Neuland colony.

making it one of the youngest colonies in the country. This colony is located fewer than 10 kilometres from the Caribbean Sea. Twelve years ago one could see only dense forest; now there are several villages, with a total population of one thousand people. When I travelled to Neuland for the first time in 2015, some of the villages had not yet been built and there was still a lot of forest. Today, the area has been transformed, with the forests replaced by the fields and farms of the settlers.

In both colonies, we were given a friendly welcome. We were curious to learn more about life in the colonies and their history, and the Mennonites of the colonies were curious to hear more about the work of the Plett Foundation. This often resulted in very lively and animated conversations. In Neuland, we visited a lending library that the foundation helped to establish by providing books and financing.

On December 10, we got up early in the morning and attended a church service in Shipyard colony. Afterwards, we spread out to have lunch with several families. This gave us the opportunity to have more personal conversations. Many thanks to all those families who opened their homes to us.

Shipyard was one of the first three colonies founded in Belize in 1958. These settlers also came from Mexico, mostly from Durango. The colony is located slightly southwest of Orange Walk, in the north of Belize. Until a few years ago, all the Mennonites of Shipyard would have belonged to the Old Colony church. Today there is a small group that has split off from it. Although the majority of people still make their living from agriculture, businesses and factories have sprung up in recent decades. Another striking feature is the number of sawmills that can be seen in this colony. The logs that are processed have to be transported from farther and farther away, as there are fewer forests nearby. The wood is not only sawn here, but also largely processed. There are several furniture manufacturers and builders in the area. From this colony there have been numerous emigrations, resulting in the formation of offspring colonies: Nueva Esperanza in Bolivia, Little Belize and Neuland in Belize, and Shipyard in Peru. Recently there has been great interest in founding an offspring colony in Suriname. Land has

been inspected by delegates from Mexico, Bolivia, and Belize, and purchased. At the time of our visit, Suriname had approved a pilot project that would allow the settlement of fifty Mennonite families, but in February the government decided to rethink this project, which was opposed by conservation groups and Indigenous communities.

The next stop for the Plett Foundation board was Spanish Lookout. Among the colonies of Belize, Spanish Lookout has experienced the most drastic economic growth. This colony was founded in 1958 by Mennonites from the colony of Los Jagueyes, Chihuahua, Mexico. Under difficult conditions, they were able to build a thriving and economically successful community. Initially, most of the community probably belonged to the Kleine Gemeinde. Today there is an array of church groups here, and it is said that only around 60 to 65 percent of the 3,000 people still belong to the Kleine Gemeinde. As in Blue Creek, there are paved roads all the way to the community. But several asphalt roads also run through it. Since Spanish Lookout has numerous factories and larger businesses, many workers are needed from outside the colony. It is estimated that between 2,500 and 3,000 non-Mennonites come to work in Spanish Lookout every day from San Ignacio or from the outlying settlements around the community. They live in a similar way to those in Spanish Lookout: everyone has a house with a yard, there are schools, small shops, etc. As the government does little to educate this population of workers, the Kleine Gemeinde has financed missionary schools for decades. Hundreds of non-Mennonite children are educated in these schools and prepared for the world of work in Spanish Lookout. These schools are Christian, and aim to teach students about the Bible and instill Christian values. Most of the teachers come from Spanish Lookout.

We visited the Cayo Deaf Institute (CDI), where deaf children from all over the country are housed and taught. At this school, many children learn sign language for the first time. The school and all the facilities at CDI are largely maintained by donations from Spanish Lookout and volunteers from far and wide. When we visited, fifteen deaf children resided at the school. There were also three children who were not deaf but had deaf parents. The aim is to teach these children sign language so that they can communicate better with their parents. Some of the employees' children also take part in the lessons.

On our last day, we visited the community of Lower Barton Creek, accompanied by Isaak Friesen from Spanish Lookout. Most of the people in Lower Barton Creek originally came from Spanish Lookout. The community was founded in the 1960s when a few dozen families left Spanish Lookout, about 20 kilometres away, because it had become too progressive for them. Many practices have taken a big step back here. All work is done by hand or with horses. Motorized or battery-powered machines, equipment, or vehicles are not allowed. The men wear beards; the clothes are homemade and simple. The farms are small, generally only a few hectares in size. The Mennonites of Barton Creek live off the land. They grow vegetables, breed pigs and cattle, and sell these at the local market. They drive out to the market every week because they don't want the traders or buyers to come into their community. In many ways, the Mennonites of Lower Barton Creek are similar to the Old Order Amish.

Our visit to this small settlement took place under rainy conditions. This was a problem because the roads in this colony are only intended for horse-drawn vehicles. They are narrow, muddy, and slippery when wet, which made it difficult to see much of the community. We met up with several people from the colony under a roof where they often slaughter cattle and pigs during the week. The conversations were lively, but very respectful. Walter Friesen and others from Barton Creek were willing to answer questions from the curious Canadians.

Every time you travel to a Mennonite colony, you learn something new. On this trip, one of the things I learned was that most colonies in Belize no longer call themselves "colonies." They use the English word "community" to describe themselves. In German, one would use the word *Gemeinde* or *Gemeinschaft*. In this case, however, it has nothing to do with the ecclesiastical *Gemeinde*, as it is known in our Mennonite circles. It is more about a living community, a group of people who live together on a certain area or piece of land.

In conversations in the colonies, we heard many times how difficult it was in the beginning. People had to fight against vermin, poor driving conditions and impassable roads, the often-stifling heat, sometimes too little and sometimes too much rain, the almost impenetrable forest, dangerous wild animals, and much more. There was hardly any economic progress to be seen in the first decades. This has changed. Progress can be seen in all "communities" in Belize. Prosperity can also be clearly seen in some colonies. Harry Letkeman, one of the three administrators of Spanish Lookout, said that the first twenty years were a struggle for life. "It was about clearing the forest and building an economy. In the following twenty years, [we] tried to improve the infrastructure, such as roads and buildings. Today, many in the community live in prosperity," Letkeman said.

Generally speaking, Belize is a poor country. The country's economic, political, and military development have lagged in comparison to other places. Within this context, Mennonites have made a tremendous contribution to food production, growing beans, corn, rice, and soy, breeding cattle, and promoting chicken and milk production. Today, a Belize without Mennonites is unimaginable.

Belize has a good mix of Mennonites in a relatively small area. There are conservative communities, but also progressive ones. There are those who cling firmly to their traditions and those who are open to new ideas in almost all areas of life. As I've joked before, you get the best Mennonite salad in Belize.

Kennert Giesbrecht has been a Plett Foundation board member for twenty years and recently retired from editing the newspaper *Die Mennonitische Post*.

---

[1] This article contains reporting published as "Delbert F. Plett Stiftung: Besuch der Kolonien in Belize," *Die Mennonitische Post*, Jan. 5, 2024, 1–2, and "'Mennoniten-Gemeinschaften' in Belize," *Die Mennonitische Post*, Jan. 19, 2024, 1–2, 4.

Remembering Larysa Goryacheva

Marina Unger

In October 2021, Larysa Goryacheva contracted coronavirus and died, a shattering loss for her family, colleagues, and friends. My husband Walter and I first met Larysa in 1994, while researching and developing possibilities in the Zaporizhzhia region for the Mennonite Heritage Cruise. At the time, we had no way of knowing how important she had been and would be to the ongoing discovery of the Mennonite story in Ukraine. Nor did we know what a close bond and friendship would develop between us over the next twenty-seven years.

Larysa was born on May 3,1940, in Zaporizhzhia, to Elena Litsenko, a kindergarten director, and Vladymir Goryachev, a soldier in the Soviet Army. Sadly, her father died in 1941, during the Second World War, leaving her with no memory of him. In 1962, she graduated with honours from Zaporizhzhia

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Over the years, Larysa was the ultimate fixer for any problem tourists encountered in Ukraine.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

The last Mennonite Heritage Cruise leaving Odesa in 2018.

Pedagogical Institute, having specialized in literature and languages in the Department of Russian and English. That same year she started work as a guide and English interpreter for Intourist, the Soviet state tourist company. She remained involved in tourism until she died on October 11, 2021. There was a brief hiatus of seven years when her husband accepted a job in the city of Norilsk, north of the Arctic Circle. She joined him with their family of three boys (a son and two stepsons), and took a position as deputy head of Norilsk's External Relations Department. In 1982, they returned to Zaporizhzhia, where Larysa soon became head of the Department of Guides and Interpreters at Intourist. In 2003, Larysa and several partners founded their own company in Zaporizhzhia, calling it Intourist Travel Agency.

Larysa was introduced to Mennonites when assigned to guide a group for Gerhard Lohrenz in 1967. She was intrigued with the maps and information they brought with them, and how they ran in every direction in search of particular houses or landmarks. Larysa would later say, "I adore Mennonites, they don't forget their roots." She was devoted to them. Over the years, Larysa tirelessly did research for inquiring tourists, approached local officials when necessary, helped arrange conferences, developed valuable contacts in the archives, trained the guides, arranged transportation, and was the ultimate fixer for any problem tourists encountered in Ukraine. The Mennonite Heritage Cruise benefited enormously from her knowledge, creativity, and commitment.

On the 2010 Mennonite Heritage Cruise, Larysa reflected on her decades of work with Mennonites seeking a connection with their ancestral past: "Thinking of Mennonites, I see the coloured lines of automobile and railway roads on the map of Ukraine and blue line of the Dnieper River. From the pilgrimage tours in the late '60s of the last century to the Mennonite Heritage Cruises of current century; from the pioneer tours started by Gerhard Lohrenz to the pioneers of Mennonite Dnieper cruise started by Walter and Marina Unger – between these landmarks lies my whole life."

The escalation of the war would be heartbreaking for Larysa. When interviewed by film director John Morrow on the last Heritage Cruise in 2018, she stated emphatically, "I hate war." She respected the pacifist position of Mennonites and acknowledged she had been deeply influenced by a book Gerhard Lohrenz gave her on Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld massacre. Larysa was quick to say she was from Odesa and her heritage was Russian, but she considered herself Ukrainian and supported Ukraine as a nation.

Talented, energetic, creative, loyal, kind, wonderful sense of humour, loving mother and grandmother – all this and more could be said of Larysa. Mennonites can be grateful to have had her as part of their destiny. I will always miss her, but her warm, honest, and generous spirit is a gift that will remain with me.

Marina Unger was born in Kitchener, Ontario, to Russian Mennonite immigrant parents. She and her husband of fifty-three years, Walter Unger, founded the Mennonite Heritage Cruise, which played a pivotal role in reconnecting Mennonites with their ancestral roots in Ukraine. Marina is still committed to supporting Ukraine.

A Mennonite Encyclopedia: Victor Penner

George Dyck

Many of us got to know Victor Penner through the tours he led in Zaporizhzhia and to the former Mennonite settlements in Ukraine. Over the years, Victor researched their history and geography to become a walking encyclopedia of knowledge. On June 30, 2020, he passed away in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine.

Victor's great-grandfather, Mennonite minister Peter Johann Penner, applied and received permission in 1922 for his entire family, including married sons, to emigrate to Canada. Unfortunately, Peter died in December 1922 and plans to emigrate fell through, as many thought that Lenin's New Economic Policy would improve their lot in life. Of the ten Penner children, only sons Jacob (in late 1923) and Rudolf (1927) left Chortitza to start a new life in Canada. Many of the remaining clan would perish in exile.

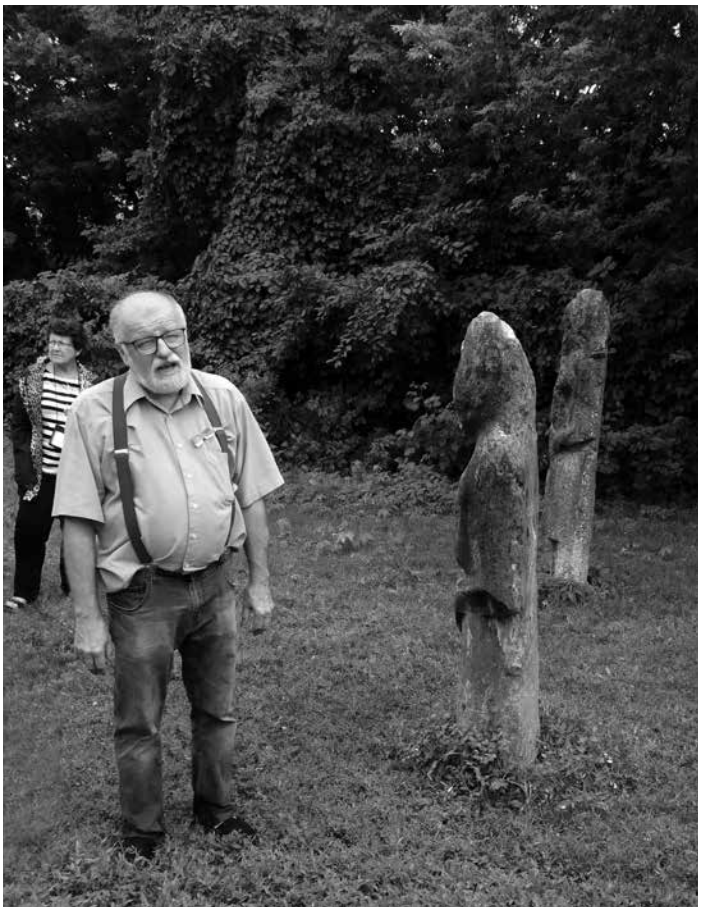
GEORGE DYCK

Victor hugging the oak tree at Juschanlee, Johann Cornies's former estate.

Son Nikolai, Victor's grandfather, was arrested and shot in 1937, leaving his young Ukrainian wife and their only son, Oleg, to fend for themselves. Unfortunately, officials saw Oleg as "guilty by association," being the son of an "enemy of the state," and this would limit his potential future. Recognizing this, he joined an orchestra as a means to gain acceptance into the medical university in Dnipropetrovsk, where he studied from 1948 to 1954. In 1953 he married his Ukrainian wife, Alexandra. Both were doctors. The stigma of his father's arrest in 1937 forced Oleg and his wife to accept work in Kazakhstan. When the time came for their first child to be born, they decided that Alexandra should go back to Ukraine for the birth. And so it followed that Victor Penner was born in Melitopol in 1956.

The family moved to Zaporizhzhia, where Victor attended school and graduated in metallurgical engineering. Victor fell in love with Ludmila and they married in the spring of 1979. Their son Nikolai was born in 1981, and Pavlo in 1988. Meanwhile, Victor worked towards his second university degree, in English language studies. This resulted in work as a translator of manuals involving machinery. Victor was obligated to serve in the military, which he did as an artillerist. All the while he found it difficult to provide comfortable housing for his growing family, as they were housed in one room in an apartment. Winter clothing was hard to get.

Work as an engineer did not pay well. Inflation after Ukrainian independence often meant that by the end of the week one could only buy a fraction of what one could have bought at the beginning. At times pay was delayed for many weeks, and by then it did not buy anything. Lines for purchases of food and other items were exceptionally long, and one bought whatever was on the shelf or one would get nothing. During this period, Victor's entrepreneurial instincts led him and a friend to start their own



SHARLENE CHRISTIE

Victor enjoyed sharing his vast knowledge of Mennonite history with tourists who visited the region.

business manufacturing aftermarket car parts. By 1991–1992, he was melting metals in his kitchen oven and pouring them into moulds to produce parts he would retail at local open-air markets.

During 2001–2002, Victor's second cousin Paul Penner, who lived in Toronto, encouraged Victor to start a bed and breakfast in Zaporizhzhia. This enabled a growing number of Mennonites from overseas to enjoy a safe place to stay and benefit from Victor's ever-increasing knowledge of our Mennonite heritage in Ukraine. Ludmila served incredibly tasty meals to many of us over the years. In addition, he took many pilgrims of the Mennonite Heritage Cruises on private tours of their ancestral villages and estates. He endlessly researched our history and passionately shared it with anyone who would listen. He led weekly tours for Ukrainians in Zaporizhzhia who were eager to learn of their city's past.

Victor had a good heart and was very interested in social justice issues. He participated in the Orange Revolution demonstrations in late 2004 and in the Euromaidan protests in 2014.

After Ludmila retired she emigrated to Canada to be with her sons and their families. Their two sons emigrated to Canada as students. Presently, Nikolai is a professor in the Department of Linguistics and Languages at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and Pavlo is a mechanical engineer with Magna Structural Systems in Brampton, Ontario.

Olga Rubel, Zaporizhzhia manager of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine, writes: "Victor Penner passed away for a better world, but he left such a powerful footprint on this earth that many people keep remembering him. And I am one of them. Recently I met with Victor's widow, Ludmila. We talked about Victor for more than two hours and we could not stop. As Ludmila put it, Victor was a multifaceted personality. Besides the well-known fact that Victor was an exceptionally good historian, he also planted trees and flowers, he baked bread and fed his owls, he fixed furniture and made people laugh. Ludmila mentioned that she married him because of his sense of humour. I will not even try to describe Victor in full, for it is a task beyond my abilities. I will share one episode from his life which speaks for itself and speaks very loudly.

GEORGE DYCK

Victor had a good heart and was very interested in social justice issues. He participated in the Orange Revolution demonstrations in late 2004 and in the Euromaidan protests in 2014.

"When the war started in 2014, there were many internally displaced people all over Ukraine. Some of them were fortunate to get a place to live in a dormitory. I will not describe those old Soviet dormitories. Whatever picture you have in your mind, the reality probably will be worse. The furniture there was falling apart. As soon as Victor learned about the problem, he was there with his tools to fix it. This is how he met an old grandma with two grandchildren – Tolik and Lena. The next two or three years, Victor was the one who supported the family, in many ways. Tolik was very curious. He was always next to Victor, whatever he did. Two or three years passed and Tolik went to school. And when the teacher asked him what he wants to become, Tolik answered: 'I want to be a "Victor Penner."' Nothing more needs to be said."

George Dyck grew up listening to endless stories of the 1940s flight to the West. This fostered an interest in Mennonite history that led to the many adventurous trips he took with Victor.

An Honorary Mennonite: Max Shtatsky

Werner Toews

In the early morning hours of February 14, 2024, I received a message through Facebook Messenger that stated, "Sorry for the terrible news . . . Max Shtatsky died in battle."

The message was from Maxym Ostapenko, the former director of the Khortytsia National Reserve (KNR), located in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. Max Shtatsky was a senior research scientist at the KNR up until March of 2023, when he joined the Ukrainian military.

Max joined the military because he felt it was his duty to take part in the defence of Ukraine against the Russian invasion of February 2022. Just prior to his tragic death, he had been home on leave to visit his wife Darya, his young daughter Vasilisa, and his family.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Max Shtatsky was a senior research scientist at the Khortytsia National Reserve up until March 2023, when he joined the Ukrainian military.

MENNONITE CONNECTIONS

Who was this young Ukrainian historian and how did he become interested in Mennonite history? I came to know Max in 2017 through email correspondence. We shared an interest in the history of the Mennonites of Chortitza (Khortytsia) and the fate of the Mennonites during the height of the Great Terror in 1937–1938.

During our many conversations, he related that he was born and raised in Upper Chortitza, which was once was part of the village of Chortitza, and one of the first villages established by Mennonite settlers in 1789. The village and surrounding area are now a suburb of Zaporizhzhia.

His interest in studying and researching Mennonite history and the Mennonites who lived in the village of Chortitza started at an early age. Max recounted that during his childhood he observed several buildings in Upper Chortitza that did not fit into the Soviet style of architecture. Listening to stories from residents in his neighbourhood, he learned that in the past Upper Chortitza was home to a group of colonists that spoke German and had traditions that were foreign to him. He also discovered that in the 1930s the Soviet authorities had tried to erase the history of these colonists who called themselves Mennonites. His childhood curiosity would lead him to a career of studying and resurrecting the history of the Mennonites in Ukraine.

After completing high school, Max attended Zaporizhzhia National University, where he earned a degree in history. After receiving his degree, Max was hired by the Khortytsia National Reserve in 2010. In 2011, after attaining the position of research scientist, Max began conducting research on the history of the Mennonite colonists of Chortitza. It quickly became apparent to him that the Mennonites had made a significant contribution to Ukrainian culture, life, and agriculture. This revelation inspired Max to continue his research and uncover the past of the former inhabitants of Chortitza.

CHORTITZA HEADSTONE PROJECT

Over the next eight years, Max continued, along with his other duties at the KNR, to research and educate himself on Mennonite history. His research also included many field trips to Mennonite landmarks in Upper Chortitza and other historically significant locations in Zaporizhzhia.

All of his knowledge and education were put to use in July of 2019. During the 1970s and early 1980s a rumour had circulated through Upper Chortitza that a building in his neighbourhood contained gravestones from the former Chortitza Mennonite Church cemetery. The rumour was based on information from a local historian, who reported that late in the 1930s the Soviet authorities destroyed the Chortitza cemetery. What was not known was the fate of the gravestones from the cemetery. The destruction of the cemetery coincided with the construction of a barn in Upper Chortitza that was built at night. It was suggested at the time that the building was being constructed at night in order to conceal the use of gravestones from the cemetery as building materials.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

In 2019, Max and his colleagues discovered a Mennonite gravestone in the foundation of a building in Chortitza.

Years later, another local historian determined that this building was, in fact, located at 61-A Zachinyaeva Street in Upper Chortitza. This now abandoned and derelict building was situated in the heart of the former village of Chortitza on a lot once owned by Mennonite David Paetkau. Paetkau was killed by bandits on his property in 1919, during the unrest of the Russian Revolution. The remaining family members were forced from the property by the Soviet authorities in the early 1930s.

Max's plan, years in the making, was to excavate the foundation of this building to either disprove or substantiate this rumour. It was his strong interest in Mennonite history that motivated him to embark on this ambitious project.

On the morning of July 22, 2019, Max, historian Roman Akbash, and Mykola Anatoliyovych Svydran, a colleague from the KNR, started the excavation of the building's foundation. It was a hot and humid day, and they used only picks and shovels. It wasn't long before the excavation led to the discovery of many gravestones belonging to the Chortitza Mennonites.

One of the first stones uncovered was a pedestal for a gravestone with no inscription. The second stone belonged to a woman with the maiden name of Siemens (1820–1887). It became quite clear from the start of the excavation that the stones had been cut or broken to create uniform building blocks for the foundation of the building. The top of the Siemens stone was missing and a search for the missing piece and other missing pieces of gravestones would continue throughout the excavation.

As the excavation progressed through July, Max uncovered many gravestones that had been used to construct the foundation of the building. It soon became quite clear that the entire foundation of the building was constructed with Mennonite gravestones and almost certainly from the Chortitza church cemetery.

The excavation continued through the fall, aided by heavy equipment, because of the weight of the stones and the length of the foundation walls of the building. The excavation was completed at the end of November 2019. By that point, over one hundred stones and pieces of gravestones had been excavated and transported to a KNR compound.

Max wrote, "People for over eighty years had passed by these gravestones and for the first time I could finally show them. For years I had dreamed of this project and now it is real. Hopefully we will find relatives of these unjustly forgotten people."

In the ensuing weeks and months, news of the find spread through the city of Zaporizhzhia as well as to North American Mennonites through social media posts and online news reports. Max was now the spokesperson for the project, involved in promoting its next phase through media interviews and local news articles. He never tired of his extra duties, and continued with identifying and recording the names of the gravestones.

The next task for Max was to create a memorial with the newly discovered gravestones. This would require more hard work on his part. The work consisted of fundraising, finding a suitable location for the memorial, and hiring someone to restore the damaged gravestones.

MEMORIAL AND A PANDEMIC

In December 2019, a number of people with Mennonite ancestry, including historians and individuals representing various organizations, formed a group to assist Max and the Khortytsia National Reserve with the creation of a memorial utilizing a number of the gravestones. The group would also assist with fundraising and providing information about the Mennonites who had been buried in the Chortitza cemetery.

Max continued his work identifying the stones by sorting through the many pieces. This arduous work continued over the winter and into the spring of 2020. This took place despite the limitations caused by the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. The initial list of gravestones that could be identified grew, and as of November 2020, contained 118 names.

Max's find generated enormous interest from North American Mennonites. One historian remarked that the descendants of the people who had been buried in the Chortitza cemetery could be counted in the thousands, if not more. Social media posts by

some of the descendants revealed many family connections to the gravestones.

After many discussions with Max and KNR director Maxym Ostapenko involving budget considerations, it was decided that fifteen stones would be cleaned and restored to create a memorial. After further discussions it was resolved that the memorial would be located on KNR property and would be monitored by KNR staff.

The restoration of the fifteen stones was completed in the spring of 2021 and the dedication of the memorial occurred on June 24, 2021. Two years of hard work were celebrated on that day. Speeches were made by Max and many of the invited guests. What was once only a dream by Max had turned into reality on that day. It was obvious that even early in his career, Max had already made a great contribution to the revival of the history of the Mennonites of Chortitza.

HOEPPNER HEADSTONE AND GRAVESITE

The Chortitza cemetery gravestone project was not Max's only successful endeavour. In 2020, he embarked on another Mennonite gravestone project, this one involving Jacob Hoeppner.

Jacob Hoeppner and Johann Bartsch were the two delegates sent by the Mennonites of Prussia in 1786 to seek possible immigration opportunities in what was then called New Russia. As a result of their journey and negotiations with tsarist officials, 228 Mennonite families migrated to New Russia in 1789. This led to the establishment of the Chortitza Mennonite settlement, located in what is now the Zaporizhzhia region.

In 1890, to honour the two delegates on the centenary of the migration from Prussia to the Ukrainian lands of imperial Russia, granite obelisks were erected on the graves of Hoeppner and Bartsch.

Max learned that, in 1973, Jacob Hoeppner's memorial monument, along with two Hoeppner headstones, had been purchased and taken to Steinbach, Manitoba. The monument and headstones were then put on display at the Mennonite Heritage Village. The Hoeppner monument and headstones were originally located on Chortitza Island on land that had once belonged to Hoeppner. Buried at the site were Jacob Hoeppner, his wife Sara Dueck, their youngest son Jacob, and his wife Anna Brandt. Each couple's headstone was engraved with the name of the husband on one side and the wife on the other.

Max discovered that the gravesite in Ukraine was now abandoned and had no markers or landmarks. "I was very surprised to find out that the issue with the grave of the founder of the Mennonite colony on Khortytsia, as well as all other colonies in southern Ukraine, Jacob Hoeppner, was still not resolved," wrote Max. "This came as a complete surprise to me. The reason why the graves were abandoned without headstones was unclear to me. Jacob Hoeppner was without any doubt a historical

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Max's hard work resulted in the restoration of fifteen gravestones and the creation of the memorial on the island of Khortytsia.

figure who had a great influence on the development of the Zaporizhzhia region. This is where our project began."

Max, Dmitry Kobaliia, R. B. Kobaliya, S. G. Krivonosova, and M. A. Svydranya started the search for the gravesite in June 2020. Aided by old photographs, archival documents, and information from local residents, it was soon found.

During the months of June and July the gravesite was cleared of debris and brush. This led to the important discovery of the concrete base that was used for the monument. Using historical photographs of the gravesite and the location of the monument base, Max discovered where the original headstones had been placed.

Upon discussions with Max and Dmitry Kobaliia, head of the Department of Monument Protection and Archaeology at the KNR, a plan was formulated to create replicas of the original Hoeppner headstones. Both stones would then be placed at the gravesite along with a storyboard on the legacy of Jacob Hoeppner.

To ensure the headstones were exact replicas, Max obtained photographs and the dimensions of the headstones from Andrea Klassen, curator of the Mennonite Heritage Village.

In October 2020, Kobaliia made arrangements with a local quarry to create two headstones with the exact dimensions of the original stones. The stones were then inscribed with the text found on the original stones by Lyudmila Yeletskaya.

At the beginning of November, the replica headstones were secured with steel-enforced concrete bases and were placed in the positions of the original headstones. A storyboard with a narrative about the legacy of Jacob Hoeppner was later added to the gravesite.

Max concluded, "We restored historical justice and returned the Hoeppners not only their tombstones, but also the respect they deserve."

SEARCHING FOR THE CENTENNIAL MONUMENT

In 1890, to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of their settlement, the Chortitza Mennonites resolved to build a monument made of granite stones and have it placed in a prominent area of the village.

An announcement about the planned monument was published on page 2 of the June 11, 1890, edition of *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*: "To commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of the Chortitza Mennonite colony, the Mennonites in the government district of Jekaterinoslav will be erecting a granite monument in the village of Chortitza. The estimated cost of the monument will be 4–5 thousand rubles. The monument will be funded by donations from Mennonites."

After the construction of the monument was completed, it was placed at the intersection of three streets in the village of Chortitza. The monument was constructed with twelve grey granite stones and featured an impressive towering obelisk.

The monument sat at its location relatively unscathed until 1938. In 1995, Johann Epp, the last *Oberschulz* (district mayor) of the Chortitza settlement, who was then living in Germany, provided his recollection of events surrounding the disappearance of the monument: "It was not soldiers who destroyed the monument; it was a group of workmen directed by the NKVD (KGB) in 1938." Epp went on to say that after the monument was dismantled, it was buried in the courtyard of the Wallman residence.

MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES, PP-4-044-8.0

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Top: The Jacob Hoepnner memorial monument and family headstones on Chortitza Island. Bottom: A replica of the original Jacob and Sara Hoeppner headstone, installed at the gravesite in 2020. Right: Just prior to his tragic death, Max had been home on leave to visit his wife Darya, his young daughter Vasilisa, and his family. PRIVATE COLLECTION


ТУАЛЕТ

During the Second World War, the German army occupied the village of Chortitza from 1941 until 1943. It is reported that during the occupation all the stones were located and the monument was reassembled. It is believed that after the Mennonites of Chortitza left with the retreating German army in 1943, the monument was again taken down by local authorities. From that time onward, no one was interested in discovering the fate of the monument until 2011.

This was one of the projects Max started working on early in his career. It was another mystery that he was determined to solve. A search for information from local and state archives was met with negative results. The only piece of information located by Max was a handwritten note in a book he found at a local library. The self-published book exploring the history of Upper Chortitza was written by a local historian. The note indicated that the monument was destroyed in 1950. Time passed with no leads or further information, but the fate of the monument stones was always top of mind for Max.

The search was reignited in 2021, when Max and a group of local citizens were inspired by a photo that was taken in 2004. The photograph, believed to be the monument base, was taken by Ms. Ella Federau, who was in Ukraine acting as an interpreter for a Mennonite mission group from Canada. The photograph was later published in the book *Building on the Past* by Rudy Friesen. In the black-and-white photo, the square stone, partially buried, was clearly visible and appeared to be situated in a wooded area in Upper Chortitza.

On March 11, after a search of an area approximately ninety metres from its original 1890 location, Max located the piece of the monument that had been photographed. It had been buried in a wooded area and had most likely been moved from its 2004 location. The granite piece was estimated to weigh approximately 1.8 tons. Two inscriptions were visible on the stone and were identified as "Zum Andenken" (In memory) and "первые поселенцы" (First settlers). A few days later, Max hired a truck with a crane and the piece was transported to the KNR property on Khortytsia Island. Upon further investigation by Max and discussions with historians from Canada, it was determined that this piece of the centennial monument was in fact one part of the three-piece upper section.

With this piece now safely stored at the KNR, the search for remaining sections of the monument became a priority for Max. It was his intention to continue the search for the remaining pieces. Sadly, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine prevented him from further searches. To date, no other pieces of the monument have been discovered.

REPRESSION FILES FROM THE GREAT TERROR

It didn't take long for Max to become well known to European and North American Mennonites because of his work on the history of the Mennonites in Ukraine. Social media provided him with broad exposure and connections with Mennonite historians and people with Mennonite roots in Ukraine.

Along with searching for lost gravestones and other research projects, Max found time to visit state archives to retrieve NKVD police files for the relatives of Mennonites who were the victims of political repression.

The years 1937–1938 in the Soviet Union were a time when the authorities were mandated to seek out and arrest German spies and anti-Soviet elements. During this period, many men in Mennonite villages, considered to have German origins, were arrested, never to return home. For many years, and still to this day, many families have never learned the fate of their husbands, fathers, or grandfathers. These missing men were classified as exiled and were presumed to have been taken to labour camps, where they disappeared.

In 2015, the Ukrainian government enacted legislation that opened the NKVD/KGB files for review by relatives and scholars. This opened the door for families to finally discover the fate of their family members.

Max had a personal connection to the repressed, as his own great-grandfather, Klim Ivanovych Shtatsky, was sent to a labour camp for three years in 1929. The Shtatsky family was living in the village of Mykhailivka at the time Klim was arrested. After his arrest the family was expelled from the village and subsequently moved to Chortitza. After completing his sentence, Klim joined his family in Chortitza.

With his knowledge of the period and experience in the archives, Max helped many Mennonite families of the repressed discover their fates. These are the words from one of those family members Max assisted by obtaining the files of her grandfather: "Two days ago, I got my grandfather's death certificate from Max Shtatsky. My hands were shaking and tears were streaming down my face. I never expected this to hit me so emotionally. My family, especially Grandma, who had been dead for thirty years, had suspected for many years that her husband was shot. But reading in black-and-white that his body is somewhere in Melitopol-Zaporizhzhia makes me want to do something to erect a memorial to him. Of course, I really hope and believe I will meet my grandfather in heaven someday."

LEGACY

There is no doubt that Max Shtatsky made a profound contribution to uncovering the history of the Mennonites in Ukraine. He had the boundless energy to tackle not only decades-old mysteries but the physical strength needed to find long-forgotten Mennonite landmarks and objects. I believe that, had he survived the war, he would have continued to uncover the past of his long-forgotten neighbours. Max deserves to be recognized for all his work on Mennonite history and, as a result, I bestow upon him posthumously the title of Honorary Mennonite.

Rest in peace, my friend.

Werner Toews was the chairperson of the Chortitza Headstone Project and worked closely with Max Shtatsky on the project for over two years. He has published articles in several publications on Russian Mennonite themes and is the author of the book *Sketches from Siberia: The Life of Jacob D. Sudermann*.

Echoing Notes

A Tale of Two Melodies

John Giesbrecht

It was July 1996. Our cruise ship, *Dniepr Princess*, had just tied up dockside in Odesa, Ukraine, the terminus of our two-week Mennonite Heritage Cruise. Kyiv. Odesa. Our cruise director, Walter Unger, had just informed the "pilgrim" passengers that tomorrow, Sunday morning, before flying home on Monday, we would have the option of attending a Ukrainian Baptist church service or a Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral service. My wife Agnes and I immediately opted for the Orthodox service, being lifelong aficionados of that tradition's beautiful a cappella liturgical choral music. The next morning, I harnessed up for the shore excursion with my small backpack (camera, etc.), and we were off!

Orthodox churches in Ukraine demand "attention." You stand throughout the two-hour or longer service. As we listened eagerly to the fine choirs intone their invitations to the congregants to respond in kind, Agnes nudged me with her elbow and whispered, "Do you hear that fine soprano voice behind us?" I nodded and at the same time craned my neck around to see where this voice came from. I noted it was from a beautiful, twentyish young woman, and not wanting to be thought of as "ogling," I quickly turned back, "eyes front." A moment later, I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder from the young woman! Surely, I thought, she is not making me, an old man with my wife standing next to me, the object of her attention – and then yet in church. My ego proved wrong when, in excellent English, having noticed the small Canadian flag on my backpack, she asked: "Would you like me to interpret the service for you?"

What an offer. We immediately parted ranks and she stepped forward and, in Oxford or Cambridge English, gave us a running account of the service. When it concluded, having established that she was a finalist in English studies at a university in Odesa, we asked her if she might have time and inclination to take us on a short walking tour in the vicinity. She agreed. By this point it was lunchtime back on the ship, and we decided to push our luck further by asking her if she would like to accompany us for lunch on board. We hailed a cab and were soon in the ship's dining room, where an accommodating hostess set an extra plate and we began to unravel our backgrounds.

LC-DIG-STEREO-1s36485

In Odesa, Agnes and John attended an Orthodox service, being lifelong aficionados of that tradition's beautiful liturgical choral music. Following page: Fort Frances in the early twentieth century.

That afternoon, the Ungers had scheduled a brief memorial service dockside for some Mennonite young men who had lost their lives while serving as medics during wartime in the Black Sea. I asked our companion – we had by now established her name as Anzhelika Kuznetsova – if with her fine voice she might wish to add to this service in some way. "How?" she asked. Agnes and I recalled attending concerts of the world-famous Don Cossack Choir under Serge Jaroff. They frequently included in their repertoire the liturgical "Otche Nash" (The Lord's Prayer). I asked Anzhelika if she might feel comfortable gifting us an a cappella rendition of this. She agreed, and the Ungers incorporated this into the event.

That evening we were scheduled to attend an operatic performance of *Carmen* in the opulent Odesa Opera House. Anzhelika joined us there for a memorable evening before saying our farewells and exchanging addresses. Agnes corresponded with Anzhelika until my wife's untimely death in 1999. I was unable to find an address to notify Anzhelika of our family's tragedy until some months later, when I discovered it while rummaging through one of Agnes' desk drawers. I wrote to her and she responded with sincere empathy. I took up correspondence, but mostly by telephone.

In late 2001 or early 2002, my four children and I agreed to a family heritage trip to Ukraine and Russia. I secured rental of a large van in Kyiv (as none were available in Odesa), but we needed a guide-translator and, importantly, a chauffeur. Anzhelika had in the meantime married an artistic and practical young man named Alexei. She would serve as our guide-translator, and he as our driver, taking us on a ten-day tour of our Mennonite areas of history in Crimea, Molotschna, and the Old Colony, including several overnights in my mother's birth house in the village of Snihurivka (Schoensee) with all the hospitality only Slavic people

so readily offer. Thank you, Maria and Pyotor Novosad.[1]

This hospitality was again evidenced in an evening's dinner at Anzhelika's grandparents' house in a village outside Odesa. During the course of the evening, the grandfather (*Dedushka* Ivan), through Anzhelika's translation, told us a fascinating family tale. He told us how, in 1929, his father, like so many Ukrainian immigrants, left him and his infant sister with their mother in central Ukraine and travelled to Canada, to northwestern Ontario's Fort Frances region, to work in the pulp and paper industry and earn enough money to bring his family after him. Sadly, the Second World War and the Iron Curtain made this impossible. Hard work and thrift had permitted him to put aside a tidy amount toward that goal, but fate chose otherwise. He died in Fort Frances. We were shown a picture of the tombstone there with his name, Tony (Trichim) Kiriluk. His "bucket list" – at his age, similar to mine – had one item on it: to do his duty as a sincere Orthodox Christian by physically paying respect to his father's gravesite. To this end, could we help? My children and I gathered in a huddle and discussed this possibility. Before parting, we eagerly told the family we would try to make it happen.

ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO, I0052856

I contacted Immigration Canada the next winter and was informed of the volumes of documents I would need to submit to support their visa application. They would need to bring these with them when they went to apply at the Canadian embassy in Kyiv, which they did. Regrettably and unfeelingly, when the Canadian visa officer asked about the purpose of their visit, and they replied that they wanted to visit Dedushka Ivan's father's gravesite in Fort Frances, they were rudely refused. Their money, non-refundable, and their hopes for Anzhelika, her husband Alexei, and grandfather to visit us were dashed.

Sometimes in my life I have realized in retrospect I should have been less persistent. In this case, however, my persistence paid off. I assembled another folder of documents, and cautiously suggested to Anzhelika that when she applied again next year, she might consider leaving her husband at home. This might alleviate concerns from Immigration Canada regarding the possibility of a family group overstaying their visa. While I was gathering documents, I happened to spot on the history shelves of our local library a book by a University of Alberta academic about Ukrainian immigrants in Alberta, of whom there were so many. I opened it to a page where a paragraph jumped out at me about the importance for Orthodox believers of paying respects at the gravesites of one's antecedents. I immediately photocopied and referenced this section and included it with the other documents, which I sent to Odesa for Anzhelika to take again to the Canadian embassy in Kyiv, this time accompanied only by Dedushka Ivan.

At 3 a.m. – 9 a.m. in Kyiv – I was awakened by a tearful call from Anzhelika. They had entered the embassy compound, but Anzhelika had not noticed a sign prohibiting cell phones. Security had noticed her cell phone and peremptorily ejected her and told her she would not be readmitted. What to do? I asked if she had the telephone number of the embassy. She read it to me from a sign on the security fence. I called, but before I could finish my request for her re-admittance, I was abruptly told that she was aware of the circumstances and Anzhelika would not be let back in. In the meantime, Dedushka Ivan was inside with the documents, but could not be expected to pursue the application process on his own. Again, what to do?

For many years our family and the Abram H. Harder family had close ties, going back to Ukraine where Abram and my father Gerhard Giesbrecht taught school together. One of the Harder grandsons, Peter Harder (now a senator), was then deputy minister of foreign affairs. I knew him and in fact had his personal home telephone number in Ottawa. I had some idea of how to bluff from some poker card games in my "misspent youth" and decided that, if necessary I would attempt it or even follow through. I called the embassy number again and reached the same official and told her of our family's close association with her top boss, Deputy Minister Peter Harder, and that I had his personal home telephone number. It was 3 a.m. in Ottawa and I doubted if Peter would welcome a call at this time. There was a pause, and then I was told Anzhelika had already been let back in. Late that day they received their visitor's visa. They arrived in Toronto later that summer.

We showed them Ottawa, overnighted at our cottage near Huntsville, and then daughter Pat and I with Anzhelika and Dedushka Ivan in tow drove around Lake Superior to Fort Frances. I had already made arrangements there with a relative of Anzhelika to have a local Orthodox priest available for a short graveside service. Everything worked out. I will always remember Dedushka Ivan standing at the graveside with tears silently rolling down his cheeks. He had accomplished what he set out to do and we were happy to have been "bit players" in this drama. We then travelled to Manitoba, where they visited distant relatives in Gimli, and my relatives in the province, and returned home. A church service in our Vineland Mennonite Church, in which they participated, followed, and attendance of a Sunday service in St. George's Ukrainian Orthodox Church in St. Catharines was arranged. This was their first visit to us, and of course they left for home within the limits of their visa. Dedushka Ivan died in Odesa some years later.

Many small groups of relatives and friends have in subsequent years been shepherded and transported to many destinations in Ukraine by Anzhelika and Alexei.

In June 2016, Anzhelika and her son Yelysei, by this time nine years old, visited us for two weeks. During their stay they participated musically in a garden party at the David and Terri Dick "estate" in Virgil. Yelysei, a budding violinist, entertained us with music from *Fiddler on the Roof* and became acquainted with my oldest great-granddaughter, Jordan, and spent some time with her at her school in Dunnville.

We have accompanied each other in thought through the many happy and sad episodes in our lives as friends do. The passing of Anzhelika's Dedushka Ivan and her mother were notable. Yelysei's progress in school and his musical development, and Alexei's wonderful artistic creations, which have graced our family spaces and occasionally more public displays, have brought our cultures closer together by the best of grassroots diplomatic means. Yes, and Anzhelika, your vocals accompanied by guitar evoked the long-thought-forgotten echoes of our parents' stories of Ukrainian seasonal workers' impromptu folk music sessions.

Yes, and now at my ripe age, I have the prospect of the visit by you, Anzhelika and Yelysei, to take part in the planned October 13, 2018, "Remembering and Thanksgiving" event for the centennial of the cataclysmic event in Russia-Ukraine that propelled our people leaving that part of the world, and now our again being able to stick together in a tie of families.

I hope the harmonies of these two melodies will continue to thrive.

John Giesbrecht worked for the Bank of Nova Scotia and dedicated much time and effort to Mennonite causes. In 2018, he organized an evening of remembrance and thanksgiving for those survived the changes engendered by the 1917 revolution in imperial Russia. He passed away in 2021.

---

1 Sadly, Maria Novosad was killed by a Russian missile attack on March 23, 2024

Johann Eitzen

Kulak and Minister

David F. Loewen

Johann Eitzen (1838–1915), born in Berdiansk, present-day Ukraine, and married to Helena Eitzen, initially settled in Orekhov.[1] Their thirteen children, five of whom died in childhood, were all born in the vicinity, with Schoenwiese being the place common to most of their family events such as births and baptisms.[2]

In 1905, Johann and Helena moved to the village of Suworowka (Suvorovka) in the newly established Orenburg colony, in present-day Russia. The 1923 Orenburg census states that only two of their children, Daniel and Anna, joined them in this move. At about the same time, daughters Maria and Margaretha moved to the village of Pretoria with their families. Helena, Aganetha, and Katherina either remained in or later moved back to Ukraine with their spouses and families. Their son Johann (1865–1933), with his wife Maria and family, settled in the Saratov province, east of the Volga River, where he acquired a *chutor* (estate).[3]

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Johann and Helena Eitzen family, with mother, Anna (Von Niessen) Eitzen, ca. 1880. *Back right*, son Johann (b. 1865); *front*, between her parents, daughter Maria.

In the fall of 1926, Johann and Helena's daughter Maria and her husband Abraham Loewen emigrated to Canada. Maria and Abraham left siblings behind, some of whom vacillated over whether to join them. Maria's oldest brother, Johann, had travelled to Pretoria to dissuade them from emigrating. His letter of January 1933, addressed to Abraham and Maria in Canada, recalled that attempt: "I still remember how I once came to you with the intention of talking you out of emigrating, but when I learned that your minds were set, every one of you, I had to keep quiet, and to see your intentions as God's will. And how beautifully it turned out."

Not long after, Johann had second thoughts about emigrating. In July 1927, he wrote that he and his wife realized they might have waited too long, and that a degree of uncertainty had delayed a more timely decision. They had not felt an urgency to leave earlier. In the summer of 1927, they had paid a farewell visit to their former homeland in Ukraine and came away with the realization that, notwithstanding the cost of leaving, staying held little future promise:

> As expected, we were on the trip south, from June 9 to July 15. After a two-year delay of our desire to visit our homeland, my wife and I took this trip. In addition, we hoped to find more potential buyers for our chutor, which also was part of our reason for making the trip, allowing us to make a more informed decision as to whether to emigrate or buy something here.
>
> If I assume and believe that what we are experiencing now will continue into the future, I must conclude that this place is not our home, despite so many ties that should keep us here. It is and remains our homeland, but we have become alienated from it, and it holds little future promise for us; that's why we want to leave, because it's still possible. Much is already lost by leaving, but now it is still possible; so forward before it is too late.

Johann's letter gives the distinct impression that they regretted not having made a decision to emigrate earlier: "We are waiting

for buyers, and as soon as the buildings are sold, the work begins; we will have hope. Too bad we didn't leave in 1925; but with God it is not yet too late. We expect to make our decisions within a short time period."

He then commented on the process involved in securing permission to emigrate to Canada:

> One more question: Are you aware that the Board [Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization] has a competitor, Mennonite Immigration Aid, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada? I have a letter promoting British Columbia through the company mentioned. It is supposed to be an association, and under the protection of the Canadian government, but operated by Mennonites. The president is a Doctor Gerhard Hiebert in Winnipeg, and the secretary is a Mennonite lawyer, Abram Buhr. . . . This society does not involve itself in missionary work but is organized for the purpose of settling Canada, and is a competitor of the board in Rosthern. . . . I ask for clarification on this.

MAID: MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES (MHA), PP-4-044-238.0

In 1905, Johann and Helena moved to the village of Suworowka (Suvorovka) in the newly established Orenburg colony, in present-day Russia.

In his letter, Johann included the usual updates on common acquaintances, family activities, the weather, the harvest just completed, and a few questions related to his curiosity about life in Canada. Mostly he related experiences from the five-week journey he had made with his wife to the southern lands of Soviet Ukraine. His comments suggest they had begun to separate themselves, mentally and emotionally, from life in the Soviet Union in preparation for the anticipated emigration:

> In Niederchortitz, we stopped in to visit Mrs. Funk. Peter Loewen, who lives with her, drove us via Ebenfeld to Heubuden. My wife and I visited Ebenfeld's churchyard and examined everything. The whole cemetery was in disarray; only the gravestone of my oldest ancestor was still standing, but our graves were even then in somewhat better condition. The mass grave is 10 steps long and 3 steps wide. Pain pierced my breast. That place was once so dear and precious to me, but now I could not bear to stay. I cast one last farewell glance before I left, probably never to see it again. At Blumenhof I gave a sermon,[4] as we were staying, and it was requested by old acquaintances.
>
> My general impressions from our journey[:] I would say that we have come to the conviction that the South [Old Colony] offers us Mennonites nothing more than the remembrance of the past, now and hereafter.
>
> Finally, we arrived home on July 15, happy. We thought we would still be in time for the harvest; however, they were already threshing and had been interrupted by the rain. Saturday, July 23, at noon, we finished the threshing.
>
> As for the harvest in the South, people hoped for a medium harvest. We have harvested curlew rye 45 poods per dessiatin, common rye about 15 poods, and wheat on average at 15 poods per dessiatin.[5] Potatoes are fine. We did not plant much because we expected to emigrate.
>
> What about the disagreement[6] between you and your companion? Can you separate? What does "Fenz" mean? Is it meant to fence the cattle pasture? Do you also have a shepherd? What about English and German innkeepers? How is it that the farmers sell the farm and move to the city? Surely they also have children who are able to farm there, or is the farm not profitable?
>
> We have no letters from Orenburg. Martin Loewen[7] is doing well. He also has children who want to emigrate. He writes and tells us where we should go [in Canada] if we were to emigrate. We are depending on the Board in Rosthern. As I write, my wife is in bed. She has pain in her body. The Lord be with you. Greetings to all Eitzens.[8]

There is no record of any further correspondence from Johann Eitzen to the Loewens in Canada until a letter dated February 7, 1929. It appears from that letter that their departure was imminent, or at the least, that they were optimistic:

> Letting you know that we are all well, only I suffer somewhat in my hearing[9] and head. Think that when the coming trip actually happens everything will be better. Already the hope of lying down has made me happier and stronger. Particularly since February 4 when we received your letter of January 6, we've "been on a high." From early to late, we are working, so that when the time comes, we are ready to emigrate.

It would also appear that Johann had moved past any hope of circumstances improving in the Soviet Union to the point that he would choose to stay. He recognized that, notwithstanding any challenges Abraham and Maria Loewen faced with in Canada, they had persevered, and there was hope of a better life: "From your dear letter we see that you are established. You arrived and made it through even though it seems difficult and with the outstanding debt. It's a comfort to me that the Board sees it differently and offers hope."

Much had changed in the Soviet Union in a short period of time. After the death of Vladimir Lenin in 1924, Stalin had worked to consolidate his authority, both within the Communist

Only part of the Eitzen family was able to leave Moscow for Germany in 1929. MAID: MHA, PP-8 - PHOTO COL. 500-526.0

Party and over the country at large. In 1928 he countered Lenin's New Economic Program with the first of a series of Five-Year Plans, which would revolutionize Soviet society. The first Five-Year Plan introduced the collectivization of agriculture, accompanied by a repressive and relentless policy of dekulakization that resulted in mass dispossession of land and forced relocations eastward of so-called wealthy landowners (kulaks) to provide the cheap labour force required to accomplish Stalin's goal of rapid industrialization.

In a letter dated March 12, 1929, Johann expressed concern about the arrival of necessary entry permits to Canada: "We are wondering why the entry permit, even though you write that it has already been sent by the Board to the CPR, hasn't yet arrived. Heinrich Ewerts, Klassen's in-laws, also haven't received their entry permits. This worries us as well."

Johann also expressed anxiety resulting from dwindling resources. Whether he still owned his chutor or was living on property by this point claimed by the state is not clear:

> Your letter of February 1 arrived on March 3. You can't imagine how happy we were and how it brought us renewed hope and courage.
>
> Our assets are rapidly shrinking with no end in sight. At the same time, one notices the raging destruction of what has been and what is to come, in full swing. There seems to be an urgency about it. To sum up: desolate conditions exist everywhere for us Mennonites. That which our fathers achieved and passed on to us and to which we have added is now in ruins.
>
> We could have sold our tractor for a market value of 1,500 rubles. Not long ago a requisitioning commission was at our place and tagged the tractor at 850 rubles. Until now, we have heard nothing as to whether we would be able to keep it or have to give it up. If this is what will happen to what's left, it can work out for us, but in the former case it screams "gone."

A letter from Johann dated April 18, 1929, indicates the family's tractor had been confiscated: "There is no excuse for such a tractor being taken away. We miss it very much. We don't want to keep workers this year; we have to do everything ourselves. And yet many are crying out for work." In the same letter, Johann states that three letters had gone unanswered (they may have been "lost" along the way). This would indicate that between February and April he had been writing letters often, and furthermore that he was anxious about their fate.

Even though the main subject of his April letter was the question of emigration and the securing of permission to leave (of which they retained a faint hope), the letter contains a tone of resignation to the fact that they might well have to remain:

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Johann and Maria Eitzen family, ca. 1928. *Standing*: Abram, Maria, Peter, Anna, Daniel, Helena, and Johann. *Sitting*: Minna (Klassen) Eitzen, Maria and Johann Eitzen, Margarete (Kroeker) Eitzen, with Margrete. Maria, Peter, and Liese.

> We also received a reply from Moscow today regarding my enquiry of March 26 about freedom of entry. They report that they have not yet received an entry permit from the Board for us, but that they will send it to us as soon as it arrives. I fear something is wrong again, so I'm writing to you right away to ask you to be so good as to check what's wrong.
>
> It seems that we are to stay here, but we cannot afford to do so. And as long as there are any possibilities, we will manage, because staying here is nothing but a loss of time and effort. But we are afraid that our resources will not suffice for the journey, due to a sharp downturn and new laws. And then what? But hopefully, we will still be successful.

Johann signed off: "A letter to the Board is also going out with this letter. I have not yet finished writing to Herr Klassen. I will write to him when I get home. Greetings from us to acquaintances and relatives."

I am not aware of any further communication between Johann and his Canadian family between April 1929 and the failed attempt of the Eitzen family to exit the country in November 1929. One can only surmise that one last harvest was taken and that attempts were made to sell off what assets were still available to him. Furthermore, the material goods assembled over the previous months[10] were packed in preparation for the flight to Moscow that took place in late fall.

We are not aware of when and how Johann Eitzen notified his Canadian family[11] of their failed attempt and of his place of residence. We are only aware of a letter dated January 24, 1933, from Johann to the Loewens in Alberta, in which he acknowledges a letter received from them, dated December 1932. It is through a recently published book and the memoirs of Margarete (Kroeker) Eitzen that the details of November 1929 and the following years in Johann Eitzen's life are revealed.

In early November 1929, three generations of Eitzens – Johann

and Maria with three daughters and four sons, including Johann Jr. (1893–1944), with his wife Margarete (Kroeker) and their five children, and Abram, with his wife Minna (Klassen) and child – travelled to Moscow. Johann Jr. had arrived earlier to begin the process of securing travel documents. Margarete's two sisters and their families, Lena and Jakob Krause, and Liese and Jakob Schellenberg, joined the Eitzens. Margarete's parents, Peter and Elizabeth (Thiessen) Kroeker, and children were waiting in Moscow as well.

Plans were put on pause as both Canada and Germany appeared unwilling to take the refugees waiting in Moscow. On November 20,[12] Johann Eitzen and his son Johann Jr. were both arrested. A week later, both Johanns were reunited with their wives and children at the train station, from where all but Johann Jr. and his wife Margarete were sent back to Saratov. Margarete had gone into labour with their sixth child and was taken to a nearby hospital along with Johann Jr., who stayed with her for the night. Their five children, all sick with the measles by now, were returning to Saratov with their grandparents. Somehow, Abram and Minna and their daughter did not fall victim to arrest and forced return.

Then, as if the sea had parted, approval from Germany came. In the midst of this melee, Abram and Minna (Klassen) Eitzen and their daughter, along with the Krause and Schellenberg families,[13] managed to depart for Germany. Within days, Johann Eitzen Jr. obtained his exit visa as well. Abram and Minna would be sponsored by Johann Eitzen's brother-in-law and sister, Abraham and Maria (Eitzen) Loewen, who welcomed them in Simons Valley, Alberta, on February 12, 1930.

Johann Jr. managed to meet his Kroeker parents-in-law, who were waiting aboard the train, also ready to depart for Germany. He agonized with them about whether to join them and expect his family to follow, but realizing that emigration was for the benefit of his children, he bade the Kroeker family farewell. They succeeded in exiting the country and would find a home in Paraguay.

Johann Jr. followed his five children by train, hoping to retrieve them and return to Moscow where his wife and baby Abram would be waiting. After finding his children at a station near Saratov, permission to take them was denied. Johann Jr. was imprisoned and his travel documents and money and valuables were confiscated. His brother Daniel was dispatched to Moscow to get Margarete and her baby. Johann Jr. was only released after his exit permit had expired. Emigration was no longer an option.

Once he was released, Johann Jr.'s first priority was to ensure the safety of his parents, Johann and Maria Eitzen. Because of his father's status as a former estate owner and a minister, it was decided, out of concern for their safety, to relocate them to another province where he would not be known.[14] As a result, Johann and Maria, along with their children, found their way to Zentral, located in the Russian province of Voronezh. They were among the first settlers to arrive during the early years of collectivization, fleeing dekulakization and possible arrest. From their large chutor, east of the Volga River, via Moscow, they moved into a small shack at the entrance to the village.

PRIVATE COLLECTION

Johann Eitzen being released into the care of his son Daniel in 1933.

Susanne Isaak writes: "They [the Eitzen family] are said to have come to Zentral very late, according to old-timers. It could have been during the collective farm period or just before. The many beautiful pictures of the private farm of the Eitzen family (threshing machine, cattle, hackney carriage with horse and cart, etc.) have been left to the 'Mennonitische Forschungsstelle e.V.' [Mennonite Research Centre] so that they can still be of use for later generations. . . . I myself can still vaguely remember 'Onkel' Eitzen. I remember that he visited our father. Since Onkel Eitzen was hard of hearing, my father spoke into a rubber ear trumpet when he talked to him."[15] It is likely the Eitzens arrived at the end of 1929, immediately following their failed attempt to emigrate. Isaak also recalls that the Eitzens arrived in Zentral with camels.[16]

Johann Eitzen was living in Zentral at the time of his second arrest and imprisonment in Borisoglebsk, Voronezh province. He was arrested for the crimes of being a minister and having had contact with the German embassy. He was one of thirty individuals arrested at this time for counter-revolutionary activities, specifically the organizing of mass emigration of the ethnic Germans in Zentral.[17] Johann was arrested on February 28, 1933, following which he was imprisoned and tortured, according to family sources.[18] On the reverse side of a photo of him and his son Daniel, a time span for Johann's imprisonment is given: "1933, 1 March, to 1933, 20 June." Johann was the oldest of the prisoners. Isaak states that Daniel had been instructed to fetch his father from the prison.[19] He died within days of being

released, on June 17, 1933,[20] at the age of nearly sixty-eight. His wife Maria died one month later.

Johann and Maria's children Lena and Peter, and Peter's wife Maria, were eventually deported, like all the Zentral Germans, possibly to Siberia or Kazakhstan.[21] Their son Daniel was arrested within days of Germany's invasion in 1941, likely suspected of "espionage" or "treason," due to his German ethnicity. Of the ten men from Zentral who were arrested at that time, one was executed, one released, and the other eight were sentenced to five- to ten-year terms in the Gulag.[22] Daniel Eitzen was one of only two who survived. At some point he married brother Peter's widow, and eventually emigrated to Germany, where he died. The fate of his sisters is unknown.

After getting his parents settled in Zentral, Johann Jr. gathered his family and moved into the Kroeker house in Arkadak, Village No. 6. At the time of saying their last farewells aboard the train in Moscow, his father-in-law told Johann Jr. and Margarete: "Just move into our house, which we left with everything except that which we could put into our suitcases. There are still smoked hams hanging from the ceiling, and there's plenty of flour."[23]

But when they got there, everything had been emptied. There was nothing left. In Arkadak they joined the *kolkhoz* (collective farm), where Margarete worked first as a milkmaid and was then promoted to inspector, as she was fluent in Russian. Johann Jr. was given administrative duties. In 1937, Johann Jr. was arrested a second time. Margarete recalled: "We had settled in quite well when one night in 1937 the police came to the house, arrested my husband, and put him in prison. I was allowed to visit him in 1938 and again in 1939, each time only for a short time in the administration office. I had to travel about six hours by train."[24]

A fourth son, Jakob, was born shortly after Johann Jr.'s arrest, but he never saw his father. Johann Eitzen Jr. died in exile in 1944.[25] In 1941, Margarete and her children were "moved" to the northern Urals, where she and her children survived against all odds: "Here we lived very poorly and starved for almost three years. Our main food was herbs, nettles, and onion leaves, which grew wild everywhere. We mashed it, boiled it, and poured a little milk on it, which we were given. Due to the hardships and hunger, many people died here."

In the mid-1950s, she and her children were allowed to move, as long as they remained in Asiatic Soviet Union. They opted for a more pleasant climate and settled in Frunze, near the Afghanistan border, where other Mennonites had also chosen to live. They joined a collective and were able to purchase a house. Life became much more comfortable. In the late 1980s, she joined family members in moving to Germany. When asked why she chose to move again, Margarete replied, "The constant uncertainty, also the uncertainty for the future, drove us, because as Germans we were always disadvantaged."

In 1989, Margarete Eitzen could travel to Paraguay for a reunion with her Kroeker siblings, and three years later, she died in Pfungstadt, Germany, at the age of ninety-three. Of her six children, three are known to have emigrated to Germany, and possibly more.

Dave Loewen is a first-generation Canadian, born and raised in Abbotsford, British Columbia. He is a retired teacher and school administrator and has been serving as an elected councillor since 2005 on Abbotsford City Council. Dave has a keen interest in family history and genealogy, both of which occupy some of his leisure and volunteer time.

1 Peter Eitzen obituary, Ancestry.ca.

2 The story of the Johann and Maria Eitzen family would have remained incomplete without the invaluable research done by Susanne Isaak and Peter Letkemann. Their books are rich in content and honour the memory of so many, including the Eitzens. In addition, the memoirs of Margarete Eitzen have revealed information about the Johann Eitzen family that was previously unknown to most.

3 The size and exact location of the Eitzen chutor is not known. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization record for Johann's son Abram indicates he lived in Saratov, Andrejewka, until the day of his departure for Moscow in the fall of 1929. Lending credence to the conclusion that Johann was an "affluent" landowner, his letter to his sister in 1927 states that they returned home from a month-long trip to find the harvesting almost complete, implying that he had employees who did this work for him. The same letter states that several days were spent in Saratov, en route home, for his wife to have dental work done.

In a letter to sister Maria in Canada, dated Feb. 7, 1929, Johann Eitzen gave his "current address" as Ozilki Pugachevsky Region, Oziovsky Rayon Novoandreevka. According to Andrei Peters (Feb. 2024): "In 1925, a total of 13 inhabitants lived in the Chutor Nowo-Andrejewka. The village of Osinki was the administrative district centre in 1929. To send a letter, inhabitants had to travel 27.5 kilometres to Osinki if they did not have a stamp at hand." (The figure of thirteen inhabitants corroborates the size of the Eitzen family at that time.)

In her account given to *Mennoblatt*, Margarete Eitzen stated: "He [her husband] was the son of the landowner Johann Eitzen. Father Eitzen was a preacher. Since he had enough land and also housing, we moved to the estate of my parents-in-law and worked together with them. Here we had five children." Margareta (Kroeker) Eitzen, "Aus Moskau zurueckgeschickt," *Mennoblatt*, May 16, 1989, 7–8.

4 Johann Eitzen was a lay minister.

5 A pood was an imperial Russian measure of weight, equalling 36.1 pounds; a dessiatin is equal to 2.7 acres.

6 Abraham Loewen entered into a partnership with another family in purchasing a farm in Simons Valley, Alberta, in 1927. The partnership collapsed soon thereafter.

7 Martin Loewen was Abraham's older brother, who also failed in an attempt to emigrate in 1929. He was eventually dispossessed of his large landholdings and exiled to the Ural Mountains, where he starved to death in 1932. Martin Loewen's oldest son, Johann, along with his family, emigrated to Manitoba in 1925.

8 Reference to members of the extended Eitzen family that had emigrated earlier.

9 Johann Eitzen had a significant hearing impairment, which had been referred to in other communications.

10 In a letter to sister Maria in Canada, dated Mar. 12, 1929, Johann Eitzen writes: "Don't rightly know at the moment what would be difficult to take and whether everything we wish to take will actually go. Have lots of duvets and pretty camel wool blankets and mattresses. Of camel wool, 4 pud in blankets and mattresses; pillows, blankets, beds, geese and duck feathers, 8 pud. Write whether it's worth taking or becoming too expensive."

11 Very likely he would have notified his children, Abram and Minna Eitzen, who had managed to emigrate in November 1929.

12 Eitzen, "Aus Moskau zurueckgeschickt."

13 The Krause and Schellenberg families were accepted into Canada.

14 Peter Letkemann, *A Book of Remembrance: Mennonites in Arkadak and Zentral, 1908–1941* (Winnipeg: Old Oak Publishing, 2019), 243.

15 Susanne Isaak, *Das Dorf Zentral: Unser plattdeutscher Heimatort im Gebiet Woronjesh/Rußland* (Meckenheim: self-pub., 1996), 153, 155.

16 Helena Isaak (daughter of Susanne Isaak), email to author, June 2022.

17 Letkemann, *Book of Remembrance*, 273.

18 Email exchange with Anne (Eitzen) Regier, Nov. 2021. Johann's son Daniel eventually emigrated to Germany and visited his Eitzen relatives in Canada in 1972. He shared with his nephew Abe Eitzen (Alberta) how his father had been tortured in prison.

19 S. Isaak, *Das Dorf Zentral*, 154.

20 Letkemann, *Book of Remembrance*, 275.

21 H. Isaak, email.

22 Letkemann, *Book of Remembrance*, 301.

23 Eitzen, "Aus Moskau zurueckgeschickt."

24 Ibid.

25 Letkemann, *Book of Remembrance*, 346.

Климатъ умѣренный

Гербъ губерніи

Народонаселеніе губерніи состоитъ изъ Малороссіянъ Великороссіянъ, Сербовъ, Поляковъ, Грековъ, Армянъ, Волоховъ, Молдаванъ Нѣмцевъ, Евреевъ и Цыганъ.

ЕКАТЕРИНОСЛАВСКАЯ ГУБ:

Пространство земли: 58,360 квадратныхъ верстъ.

А

Рѣки:
Днѣпръ и Донъ.

Почва земли: черноземная, глинистая, песчаная и каменист.

Въ губерніи 870,100 душъ обоего пола.

Mennonite Reflections

Arriving In Manitoba 150 Years Ago

This exhibit at MHV explores how Mennonites first settled in Manitoba.

Exhibition Open August 2024

Mennonite Heritage Village
231 PTH 12 N, Steinbach, MB
Phone 1-204-326-9661

mennoniteheritagevillage.com

Hours: May – September
Monday – Saturday 9 AM – 5 PM
Sunday 11:30 AM – 5 PM

Hours: October – April
Sunday and Monday closed
Tuesday – Saturday 9 AM – 5 PM

PLETT FOUNDATION
A project supported by the
Plett Foundation's Grants Program