

**JACOB J. DYCK  
AM TRAKT TO AMERICA**

**A History and Genealogy  
For The Descendants of Jacob J. Dyck  
and Marie G. Harder**

by  
**D. Frederick Dyck**



**SIXTY YEARS OF SILENCE**

**The Dyck Family in Soviet Russia**

by

**Alice Sitler Dyck**

**The Memoirs of Gustav Dyck**

Translated by Herbert C. Dyck

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**JACOB J. DYCK: AM TRAKT TO AMERICA**

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**231 West Third Street, Washington, KS 66968**

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## ABOUT THE BOOK . . .

Part I, Am Trakt to America, not only tells the story of Jacob J. Dyck, it traces the history of the religious movements, which culminated in the formation of the Mennonite religion. It begins with the Anabaptists in southern France and moves through Austria, Germany, and finally, to Holland and Flanders. Research on the history of the family names provided additional information regarding their origins in Germany and the Low Countries. The Mennonite immigration to the Vistula Delta southeast of Danzig (Gdansk) in West Prussia (now Poland), provided further information not only on the families, but also on the involvement of some of the Mennonite congregations associated with the Dyck ancestry and related lines. Some members of these congregations came to Kansas in the 1870s. Others of the Vistula Delta had elected to settle in Russia instead. Jacob Dyck went to Russia about 1855, going to a Mennonite settlement called Am Trakt on the Volga River. It was here that Jacob J. Dyck was born in 1881. Economic and family circumstances convinced him to leave his homeland in 1907 and go to Kansas in America where his stepbrother, Peter Penner, had gone some years earlier.

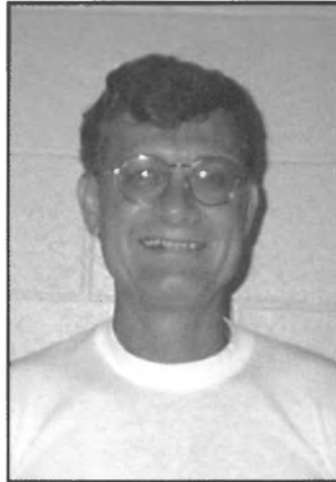
There is much Claassen and Harder history, too, because of the marriage of Jacob J. Dyck to Marie Harder. The Abraham Claassen family had come West Prussia to Kansas in 1876. Jacob Harder came soon after in 1878, married Anna Claassen in 1881 and a few years later built the stone house in rural Whitewater, KS where four generations of family have lived. A great-granddaughter of Jacob and Anna Harder recently moved to the old house where much repair and restoration has been done. Other maternal lines associated with the Claassen and Harders also cited.

Part II, Sixty Years of Silence, tells what happened to those who remained in Russia. Some contact was maintained with family members for a time after Russian Revolution in 1917. After 1930, however, many family members seem to be lost in the secrecy of the closed society imposed by Joseph Stalin. It was not until 1990 that contact was made with a cousin, Johannes "Hans" Dyck, who was living in Omsk, Siberia, which the mysteries of sixty years of silence began to unfold. Upon his death not long after, a correspondence began with Han's younger brother, Gustav. After Gustav moved to southern Germany in 1994, personal visits ensued and strong family bonds, never really broken strengthened.

*Continued on back cover*

Part II also includes the memoirs of Gustav of his years in slave labor camps as well as a biographical sketch of Hans. There are appendices, which may give some persons new information concerning the fate of their relatives or loved ones who were living in Am Trakt in the years after the Russian Revolution.

## THE AUTHORS



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Cover Design by Charles Dyck  
Book Format by Eric Dyck  
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231 W. Third Street  
Washington, KS 66968  
Printed in U.S.A.

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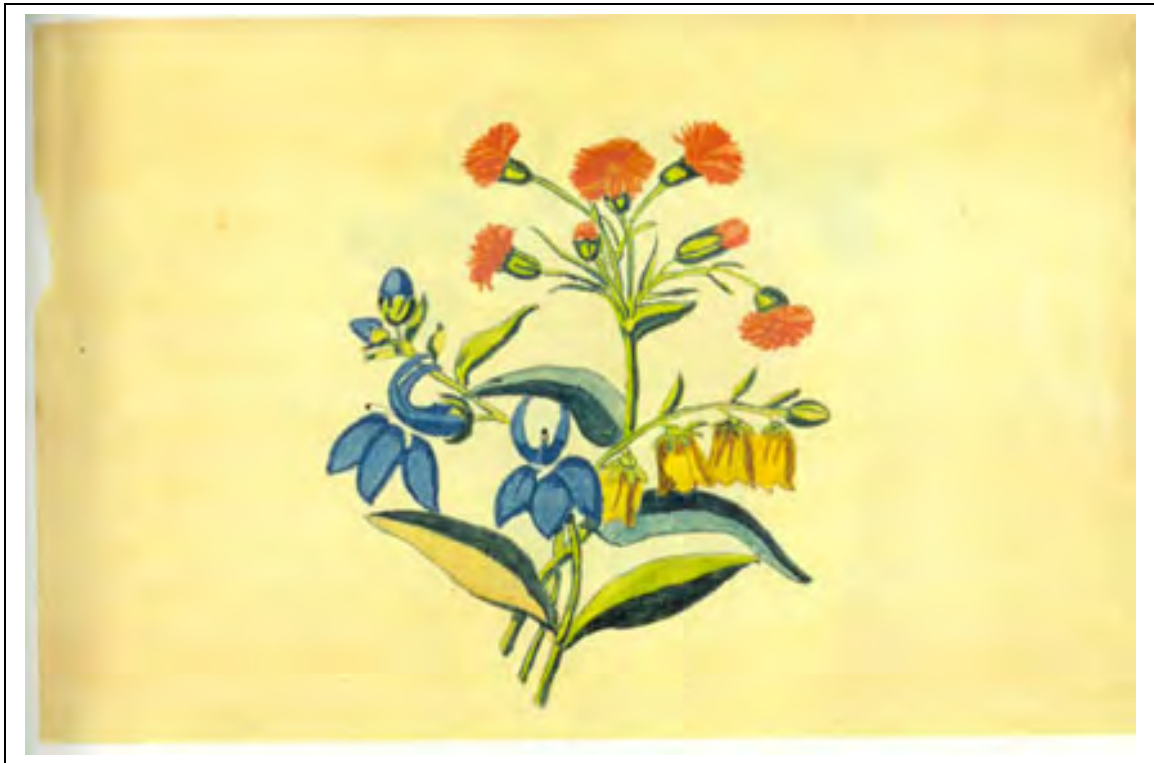
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# Jacob J. Dyck Am Trakt to America

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by  
D. Frederick Dyck



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

When our Lord created flowers,  
Each stood there according to its calling, and even the smallest came  
And asked eagerly for its name.  
The Lord named a thousand forms  
And commanded them to remember their names.  
At the end a little flower returned  
And complained with tears in its eyes:  
“In this large company of flowers,  
Lord, I have forgotten my name.”  
The Lord, in beautifully transfigured glory  
Turned to the little flower and gently spoke:  
“Forget-me-not.”

Found in the papers of Marie G. Harder, written on a small piece of lined paper and signed by Jacob J. Dyck. Translated from German script.

When in future times  
You reread the pages of this album  
They will recall bygone times,  
Times when young years were astir.

In future days your heart  
Will be filled with other feeling.  
May joys accompany you  
Through both trials and pain.

Then you will choose many a page  
Written by a loving hand  
And will recall to memory  
What your mind has long forgotten.

And should someone then ask the question,  
What was she like who wrote this?  
Then think of me and say:  
The writer loved me!

God keep you in this life  
With a truth pure and true.  
Let the angels who hover about you  
Be the guardians of your heart.

Found in the papers of Marie G. Dyck, written and signed by Marie G. Harder. Translated from German script.



For:  
Emma Harder (1888-1988)  
And  
Arthur Paul Dyck (1924-1991)



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

## Acknowledgements

Inspiration for this book came from two primary sources. First and foremost, my mother Alice Sitler Dyck. Beginning in my grade school years she enthralled me with stories of my ancestors, urged me to read history, and encouraged my first tentative research. Second is Ernest Claassen and his book, *Abraham Claassen, Vistula To Plum Grove*. Since I acquired my copy nearly 25 years ago I have read it many times and have never tired of looking at the photographs in it.

For this book I borrowed from Ernest Claassen's idea and have expanded it to include the direct genealogy of Jacob J. Dyck and Marie G. Harder, as well as all the information I could gather about their ancestors. My fascination with the photographs in Ernest's book led me to try and include as many unpublished, old photographs as I could find, as well as those of a contemporary age.

Credits and acknowledgements for help in compiling this book are numerous. Noting them here is not only a way of saying thank you, but also gives those interested in our family history a source for future and further research. Again, first and foremost is my mother Alice Sitler Dyck. Her forty plus years of correspondence relating to Dyck and Harder family history is a treasure trove of information, as is her remarkable memory for facts and dates. Her well known interest within the family made her a repository for family photographs, letters, and many of the personal items we now consider heirlooms. Whenever I came across something that I thought should be saved, I knew it could be safely entrusted to my mother.

And I found these things at what I came to regard as a living museum of family history, the home and farm of Jacob and Anna Harder, my great grandparents. When I went to live and work there in the summer of 1963 the curiosity of a 13-year-old had been absent from the house for several decades. Everything in the house

and barns seemed old, and indeed much of it was. With great patience, my uncle, Arthur P. Dyck, explained where a particular item came from, who owned it originally, who made it, how it was used. He also taught me a love of farming and the land that has never left me. Living in the house with Uncle Art and Aunt Wanda and myself was my great aunt, Emma Harder. Born in 1888 in the house she lived in for almost 100 years, she was surrounded by family history. Her furniture, dishes, the photographs on the wall, were all lessons in the family history that she willingly told in the smallest of detail. Aunt Emma was extremely proud of her heritage, but without a trace of vanity or aloofness. It was a source of inner strength for her that showed in her twinkling blue eyes whenever she spoke of her parents and grandparents.

Obtaining the necessary books for research would not have been possible for me without the generous help and understanding of librarian Judy Robart of Potosi, Missouri. I am indebted to the Mennonite Historical Library and Archives, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, and The High Library, Center For Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, for allowing me access to their libraries through the inter-library loan program.

I would also like to thank the husband and wife team of Arthur N. and Sheri Claassen for the sketchbook of Abraham Claassen (1825-1910) and permission to use the artwork in this book. Sheri Claassen edited my manuscript and was as liberal with her encouragement as she was conservative with her criticism.

Others in my immediate family I would like to thank are my father, Herbert C. Dyck, for his remembrances and translating many pages of German text to English for me. Aunts Irene E. Dyck Claassen, Esther H. Dyck Schmidt, Louise Dyck, and Linda Dyck were also generous with their remembrances, photographs, and notes. Uncles Walter Schmidt and Ernest G. Claassen deserve honorable mention for their moral support, as does my beloved sister, Christine E. Dyck Sehnert.

The books of authors Dr. Gerhard Driedger, Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, and Cornelius J. Dyck were an invaluable part of my research. Of greater value to me personally was their willingness to correspond with me and grant me permission to reprint portions of their books.

John B. Harder of Abilene, Kansas, grandson of Bernhard H. Harder, graciously allowed me to use many photographs from his extensive collection. In addition to the many old photographs, John supplied new photographs of the Peter Harder dowry chest.

Other Claassen relatives that gave generously of their help are Edith Claassen Graber, daughter of Ernest Claassen (1895-1996), Glen O. Claassen, Sexton of Emmaus Mennonite Church,

and Olin K. Claassen, who loaned many photographs and additional sketch books by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910).

My cousin Charles R. Dyck deserves special recognition for making this book possible. A printer-pressman by trade, Charles gave immediate, positive response to my inquiry of printing a family history book. Throughout the years I have spent researching and writing, Charles has been my constant companion in this venture. Whether I was asking about the possibility of printing old photographs, reformatting maps, using a style of type, a grade of paper, or a color and quality of binding, his answer was always positive. This finished product of the pressman's craft by Charles Dyck is a major contribution to our knowledge of our family history.

Formatting of my typed manuscript for Charles to print was done by cousin Eric L. Dyck. Eric worked closely with his brother Charles in arranging the dozens of photographs, the sketches by Abraham Claassen, and the many maps to properly fit the text. Eric cheerfully mastered the logistical problems of coordinating all of our efforts to bring this project to fruition.

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# Introduction

My grandfather, Jacob Jacobovich Dyck, came to the United States in 1907 at the age of 26. His journey to this country is a continuation of a story repeated many times by many generations of our Mennonite ancestors. Beginning in the late 16th century our Dyck, Wall, and Claassen ancestors migrated from Flanders and Holland to West Prussia. In the coming centuries they would leave West Prussia to establish homes in Mennonite colonies in Russia, Canada, the United States, and South America in search of a homeland where they could practice their faith and live their lives according to that faith. Jacob may have been the first of our Mennonite ancestors to come to the United States more for economic reasons than religious freedom. His life in the Russian Mennonite settlement of Am Trakt was very hard by all accounts, and it appears that not all of this hardship was due to persecution of Mennonites by the Russian government and people. Jacob did not immigrate to the United States with his family, or with a group of fellow Mennonites, as most of the Mennonites did that settled in Kansas. He came alone and arrived in McLain, Kansas, nearly destitute of money and possessions. What he did have was an abundance of optimism, a strong belief in his own abilities, and a secure knowledge that his fellow Mennonites would help him to make his place in the community. Jacob's reliance on his fellow Mennonites was well founded in the history of the Mennonite movement. Mutual aid and assistance has been a hallmark of the Mennonite community since their beginnings in the 16th century.

Jacob J. Dyck's story has its true beginning many hundreds of years before he made his decision to come to America. The history of our Dyck, Wall, Harder, and Claassen ancestors is wedded to the history of Anabaptist-Mennonite movements. So

closely joined are the two that an understanding and knowledge of the Anabaptist-Mennonite history is imperative if we are to truly know our ancestors.

The 20th century brought enormous change to the traditional Mennonite community in the United States. In many families it was no longer possible for the children to remain living and working inside the rural, agricultural-based Mennonite community once they reached adulthood. With each successive generation knowledge of the Mennonite faith and traditional way of life has declined. For the children of our generation, and the generations of grandchildren to come, there is an obligation to provide them with a basic knowledge of the history of the Anabaptists and Mennonites as well as the names of their ancestors and their dates of birth, marriage, and death.

In the general history that follows our known ancestors will not be encountered until the late 17th century. The earliest confirmed names and dates are those of Paul Dyck, born in West Prussia in 1670, Isaak Claassen, born in West Prussia in 1670, Margaretha Bergmann, born 1667 in West Prussia, and Johann Driedger, born 1668. Throughout this book I refer to this history as that of our Dyck-Wall-Harder-Claassen ancestors because I intended from the outset to include the direct lineage of my paternal great grandparents in this history and to follow these four families from their known history in West Prussia to the generation of my father and his brothers and sisters.

**April 14, 1999, D. Frederick Dyck**



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

# 1

## Historical Background

### Early Anabaptist History

Menmonites, as the followers of Menno Simons are known, are adherents to a faith that has its roots in antiquity. One of the tenets of this faith is that baptism is performed upon a confession of faith by adults rather than infant baptism as practiced by the Roman Catholic Church and most post-Reformation Protestant churches. From the earliest of times the followers of this practice of adult baptism were called Anabaptists. This term was not chosen by them, but by the Church of Rome and was to become synonymous with heretic by the 12th century.



In addition to the belief in adult baptism there were other articles of faith that most, if not all, Anabaptist sects held in common from these early times. An example of these beliefs is available to us from the teachings of Henricus Petri Tholossanus, known as Henry of Toulouse, and whose followers were known as Henricians. Henry espoused the doctrine of Peter de Bruis beginning in 1147 and taught as follows:

1. That children may not be baptized or saved through the faith of another; but they must be baptized and saved through their own faith; for baptism without individual faith, saves no one.
2. That individual faith without baptism is also useless.
3. That children that have not yet reached the years of understanding cannot be saved by the baptism of Christ.
4. That those who have been baptized in infancy must, when they become older, be re-baptized, for this, he says, is not re-baptizing, but, much rather, baptizing aright.
5. That the body and blood of Christ are not offered up in the public mass; and that this sacrifice has no virtue to the salvation of souls. Again, that the altars ought to be cast down or broken in pieces.
6. That the doctrine of the forms and of the transubstantiation of the sacrament is false.
7. That the Supper ought not to be administered any more, it having been given once by Christ to the apostles.
8. That the sacrifice of the mass, prayer, alms, and such like, works of the living for the dead, are folly, wickedness and of no avail.
9. That monks and priests should marry, rather than commit fornication, and live continually in lewdness.
10. That crucifixes should not be honored or worshipped; and the many crosses, which tend to superstition, ought much rather to be abolished than retained.
11. That man ought not to build so many costly churches, which are frequently not used for hearing the Word of God and those that are built should be demolished.
12. That by the bawling church singing of the priests and monks God is mocked not reconciled.
13. That flesh may be eaten on Sunday and other days.
14. That they do not receive all the books of the Old and New Testaments, namely those which are called "apocryphal", but the Gospel only.
15. That they believe only the Holy Scriptures, but do not place the writing of the fathers on an equality with them.

Anabaptist-Mennonite historians and writers almost universally reject any notion of a connection between themselves and the Albigenses, Cathars, and the Waldenses. Mennonites point out the differences, of which there are many, but ignore the equally numerous points in common. This commonality strongly suggests an evolution of some ideas and the borrowing of others by the Reformation era Anabaptists and Mennonites from the Albigenses, Cathars, and even more so from the Waldenses. These 15 points show the influence of the Albigenses and Cathars most notably in the numbers 13, 14, and 15. However, Mennonites of the modern era will recognize in these 15 articles of faith many similar ideas present in the Confessions of Faith. For purposes of comparison extracts from the “Third Confession” drawn up in the city of Dortrecht, Holland, April 21, 1632, are now listed.

- VII. Of Holy Baptism. Concerning baptism we confess that all penitent believers, who, through faith, regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, are made one with God, and written in heaven, must, upon such scriptural confession of faith, and renewing of life, be baptized with water, in the most worthy name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, according to the command of Christ, and the teaching, example, and practice of the apostles, to the burying of their sins, and thus be incorporated into the communion of the saints; henceforth to learn to observe all things which the Son of God has taught, left and commanded His Disciples.
- X. Of the Holy Supper. We also confess and observe the breaking of bread, or Supper, as the Lord Christ Jesus before His suffering instituted it with bread and wine, and observed and ate with His apostles, commanding them to observe it in remembrance of Him; which they accordingly taught and practiced in the church, and commanded that it should be kept in remembrance of the suffering and death of the Lord; and that His precious body was broken, and His blood shed, for us and all mankind, as also the fruits hereof, namely, redemption and eternal salvation which He purchased thereby, showing such great love towards us sinful men; whereby we are admonished to the utmost, to love and forgive one another and our neighbor, as He has done unto us, and to be mindful to maintain and live up to the unity and fellowship which we have with God and

one another, which is signified to us by this breaking of bread.

- XII. Of the State of Matrimony. In this manner the apostle Paul also taught and permitted matrimony in the church, and left it free for everyone to be married, according to the original order, in the Lord, to whomsoever one may get to consent.

One of the signatories of this document is worth noting, as his name is variation of the family name Claassen. He is Claes Claessen and he is listed as being “From the Upper Part of the Country, Blockziel”, the Netherlands.

## Martyrs Mirror

There exists a remarkable book from which the early history of the Anabaptists may be learned. It is titled *Martyrs Mirror* by Thieleman J. van Braght and was first published in Holland in the year 1660. The first English translation of this book was published in 1837. The full title of this book gives an idea of the vast scope of this work: *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only Upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Savior, From the Time of Christ to the Year A.D. 1660. Compiled From Various Authentic Chronicles, Memorials, and Testimonies.* From its first printing in 1660 until the 20th century this was the book most read by Mennonites, second only to the Bible. *Martyrs Mirror* is the primary source of what follows in this short history until we reach the 16th century.

Van Braght tells us that about the year 60 A.D. it is recorded that there were known to be such people or sects called Anabaptists. That some of these records were attributed to “papistic writers” is considered remarkable and lends more credence to the authenticity of them by van Braght. Of this time, about 60 A.D., van Braght says the papists complain of the Anabaptists existing since the time of the apostles. For the next 1000 years these people known as Anabaptists existed in relative obscurity without a recognized leader. In the year 1022 A.D. we see the first hint that Anabaptism has some form of organization, and that there are leaders, for it is recorded that 14 persons, “the chiefest of whom was called Stephen, were burned as heretics at Orleans, France.” This is the first recorded instance of death by burning for heresy by the Church of Rome. Van Braght quotes “a very old book” in giving this account and says that the people that maintained this doctrine of adult baptism were known by the Church of Rome as Albigeois and that

they had spread into the French provinces of Languedoc and Gascony.

The 12th century saw a veritable explosion of Anabaptist activity and identifiable leaders. Southern France was the center of this activity and the regions of Arles, Norbonne, Toulouse, and Gascony were noted as being full of Petrobrusians, followers of Peter de Bruis, by Peter, Abbot of Cluny, and that these Petrobrusians were reprovers of the abuses of the Roman Church. Jean Paul Perrin Lionnois mentions in his book *History of the Waldenses and Albigenses* that a manuscript from the region dated 1120 A.D. contains a tract that calls the Pope antichrist because he advocates infant baptism.

About the time 1124 A.D. the writings of Rupert Tuiciensis appear pointing out the “decay and manifold superstitions of the Roman Church... especially with regard to the abuse of baptism, which originally had been administered upon faith, but was now given by them to infants.”

1139 A.D., Arnold at Brescia in Italy taught against infant baptism; as did Peter Abelard, of whom Arnold had obtained his doctrine in France. Arnold was excommunicated by the Pope of Rome and fled to Switzerland. He remained in Zurich where his teachings gained a wide audience.

1147 A.D., Henry of Toulouse whose 15 articles of faith are cited earlier began attacking infant baptism.

1160 A.D., Writes van Braght, “This is the year which, of old, was noted with joy by many pious and well-meaning Christians, who detested popery; and in which, even to this day, not a few of the God-fearing rejoice.” The cause of this joy is told to us by M. Matthias Flaccius Illyricus in his *Catalog, Testitum Veritatis*. He tells of a man named Peter Waldo living in Lyons, France, about the year 1160 who witnessed the untimely death of a fellow citizen. This awful occurrence terrified Peter Waldo to such a degree that he resolved to repent, amend his life, and be more diligent in the fear of God. Peter Waldo set forth an example that many of his fellow citizens of Lyons admired and they began to come to him to hear Scriptures in the common French language. This was unheard of at the time. Latin was the language of the Church of Rome and only priests were allowed to read scripture. Peter Waldo gained many followers and his adherents spread to the surrounding countryside creating a large congregation.

These followers became known as Waldenses and were grouped together with Albigenses of the district of Albi by the Church of Rome because of their similar beliefs. Collectively they were also known as Catharists and Anabaptists. This grouping together of many different sects believing in the same doctrine is confirmed by Jacob Mehrming in his book *History of Baptism*. He writes, “From Berengarius they were called Berengarians; from the

apostles, Apostolics; from Peter Waldo, Waldenses, and so forth. Among us Germans, the papists, Lutheran and Calvinistic pedobaptists still contemptuously call them Anabaptists; in the Netherlands they are called Mennists, from Menno Simons, one of their principal teachers.” When the Waldenses were forced to leave Lyons by the Church of Rome they were stripped of all their worldly possessions and were thereafter called the “The Poor Men of Lyons.” Scattering throughout Europe they were known by many names in as many countries. Most notably for our purposes of family history they were known as Turilupini in Flanders, or Dwellers With Wolves, because of persecution they were forced to live in the wilderness and forest in close proximity to wolves. In Germany they were known as Grubenheimer, Cave Dwellers, because they were compelled to live underground in pits and caves.

That their teachings had spread throughout Europe to the lands of our ancestors is evident from the text of *Martyrs Mirror*. Van Braght writes that in 1182 in Flanders there were put to death many Christians who were called heretics because they condemned infant baptism, the sacrament of the altar, and the sacrifice of the mass, and that these deaths were ordered by Count Philip of Alsace. In the following year, 1183, according to Rigordus, a historian of those times, “very many heretics were burnt in Flanders by the Reverend Bishop of Rheims, cardinal priest of the title of Sancta Sabina, Legate of the Pope, and by Philip, the illustrious Count of Flanders.” Rigordus goes on to say that “over seven thousand Cottarelli (also called Waldenses and Albigenses) were slain in the province of Bourges in this same year.” These deaths at the end of the 12th century were a prelude to the mass extermination of Anabaptists that was to characterize the 13th century.

The “crusades” against the Anabaptists were initiated after decrees calling for their destruction were issued by a succession of Popes of the Church of Rome . In 1184 or 1185 Pope Lucius III issued a decree in the city of Verona, Italy, “In order to eradicate the wickedness of various heresies that have begun to manifest themselves in many countries throughout the whole world, the power of ecclesiastical discipline must be called into requisition.” Innocent III became Pope in 1198. Taking up the cause of his predecessor he wrote his bishops in Aix, Narbonne, Vienne, Arles, Bredun, Tarragon, Lyon, and other regions and appointed inquisitors “to apprehend those who sought to escape the dominion of the Roman Church.” Specifically referring to the followers of Peter Waldo, Innocent III urged his bishops to “draw the spiritual sword against the heretics whom are named to you, allow the lay power to confiscate their goods and banish them from the country, and thus separate the chaff from the wheat.” In the following years of 1209-12, 1225, 1234, the full fury of the Church of Rome was brought to bear against all Anabaptists; Cathars, Waldenses, and

Albigensis wherever they were found. They were found mostly in France and as van Braght states, "It is impossible to relate how great a multitude of these innocent people perished, and under what severe torments, simply on account of their true faith." By all accounts the numbers massacred ran into the hundreds of thousands. The Albigensian Crusade produced one of the more sinister quotes in history from the commander of the Roman Catholic army that descended upon these defenseless people. When asked by one of his soldiers how to tell a heretic from a follower of the Church of Rome, the commander, Count Simon de Montfort, replied, "Kill them all, God will know his own."

Although France was the primary objective in these "crusades" of the 13th century there was great loss of life throughout the countries of Europe. Alsace, Strasburg, and Marburg in Germany-Austria were visited by the Pope's inquisitors. The Netherlands was reached as early as 1215. The joy of 1160 was short lived; to be replaced by centuries of persecution.

As a result of the extermination of Anabaptists in France in the 13th century the focus now begins to shift to those countries of northern Europe, to the lands of our Dyck, Wall, Harder, and Claassen ancestors. There is no record of the names of any of the individuals that brought Anabaptist doctrine to Germany, Flanders, and the Netherlands in these early years. We must content ourselves with an explanation such as that given to us by Jacob Mehrning, "That the church of the Waldenses after her origin in France and violent persecution in that country, spread far and wide into Bohemia, Poland, Lombardy, Germany, the Netherlands, and elsewhere, and remained there until the year 1545."

They remained in spite of great persecution. Van Braght tells us that Albert Krantz wrote in his *History of the Vandals* that "very many so-called heretics, namely Waldenses, in Poland, in the city of Zuidenitz...ended their lives in flames." This happened in 1315 and is followed by another entry for the year of 1391 which says that 443 Waldenses became martyrs in Pomerania after confessing their belief in baptism upon confession of faith by adults. These two entries are interesting to us because it shows that Anabaptism was flourishing in the land that our ancestors chose when they left Flanders and the Netherlands in the 16th and 17th centuries.

*Martyrs Mirror* records one other instance of persecution of "Christians called Waldenses" in Flanders before the Reformation. This occurred at Donau in Flanders in the year 1421. Van Braght says only that "a great number were burnt for the faith who professed the doctrine of the Waldenses and remained steadfast."

## Early Mennonite History

As we have seen, Anabaptist beliefs were present in virtually all of Europe centuries before what is known as the Reformation. In spite of this overall presence, Anabaptism is all but ignored in the history written about the Reformation. Even among writers of Mennonite history there seems to be a reluctance to acknowledge the early Anabaptists. Atypical is A. L. E. Verheyden in his book *Anabaptism In Flanders*. In his very first paragraph he writes, “The religious emancipation of the sixteenth century in Flanders was not a sudden outburst but only the final phase of a consistent development from roots far in the past.”

Typical of Mennonite attitudes towards their origins is C. Henry Smith in his book *The Story Of The Mennonites*. He states that as there is no identifiable link between the Anabaptists of old and the Mennonites of the 16th century; the surge of Anabaptism that began in the 16th century was a spontaneous development. It is true that the evidence for the idea of a continuous lineage is circumstantial, but it would appear to be overwhelmingly so. Smith opens his *Story Of The Mennonites* by stating that the Mennonites had their beginning in Zurich, Switzerland, as followers of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), founder of the Reformed Church. It seems logical to deduce that Zwingli was the heir to a tradition of Anabaptism brought to Zurich by Arnold of Brescia from Italy in about 1140. Arnold became a martyr for his faith in 1145. The lack of an identifiable leader for the intervening 400-year period is not enough reason to suppose that Anabaptist beliefs completely disappeared from Zurich to be discovered anew in the 16th century by the followers of Ulrich Zwingli.

The Reformation, as the break with the Roman Catholic Church is known, of Martin Luther in 1517 did not go far enough in truly reforming the Church to suit Ulrich Zwingli. As a priest in his cathedral, in Zurich, he initiated many reforms that Luther never dreamed of. This radicalism of Zwingli concerning the Reformation did not, however, extend to infant baptism or a separation of church and state. A co-reformer of Zwingli named Wilhelm Reublin from the neighboring village of Wytekon began preaching against infant baptism as early as 1523. Reublin was joined by Balthasar Hubmaier, Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, and Simon Stumpf, and all of them advocated a complete break with the Catholic Church. After Felix Manz was executed by drowning on January 5, 1527, by order of the Zurich Council, the others fled Switzerland and preached their beliefs in South Germany, Austria, Tyrol, and Moravia. The Anabaptist movement spread rapidly following the Rhine and Danube River valleys. By 1530 it had reached northwestern Germany and the Netherlands.



**Map 1**  
 Anabaptists in 1550, Central Europe  
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As has been previously noted there is no record of the person or persons that brought Anabaptist beliefs to Flanders and the Netherlands before the period of the Reformation. Lack of documentation of any sort makes it impossible to determine exactly when our ancestors adopted the Anabaptist faith. That they were Mennonites after the mid-1500s does not preclude them being Anabaptists for perhaps as many as 300 years prior to the 1500s; for as we have seen, Anabaptists were in Flanders and the Netherlands by the 13th century.

But Mennonites they most assuredly became, so it is now appropriate to take a closer look at the man that lent his name to this movement.

Menno Simons was born in 1496 in the Frisian village of Witmarsum on the North Sea coast of the Netherlands. Little is known of his early life and childhood. By the age of 28 he was a priest at the village of Pingium a couple of miles from the place of his birth. Despite the best efforts of Catholic Church authorities, the writings of Martin Luther circulated in Dutch monasteries and were read by Dutch priests including Menno Simons. Menno's first doubts of the veracity of Catholic doctrine concerned transubstantiation, that the bread of the mass was transformed into the body of Christ. The validity of infant baptism was the next doctrine Menno found to be erroneous. Despite these creeping doubts Menno had no difficulty in speaking out against the violent sects of the Anabaptists and indeed gained his early reputation as an orator by so doing. This aversion to violence was at the heart of the third turning point in the conversion of Menno Simons. Some 300 Anabaptists sought refuge in a monastery not far from Witmarsum and were subsequently slaughtered by an armed force sent to subdue them by the provincial governor. The brother of Menno Simons was in this group that perished. The event had a profound effect on Menno who came to the conclusion that these people perished because of their decision to take up arms in self-defense.

In January of 1536 Menno left the priesthood and renounced the Catholic Church. He traveled to the neighboring province of Groningen where he married his wife Gertrude and was baptized by Obbe Philips, brother of Dirk Philips. Both Obbe and Dirk Philips were early leaders of the Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands. Menno's qualities as a leader were quickly recognized and he was soon ordained an elder by Obbe Philips. Menno also gained recognition from government authorities in the form of an edict issued by Emperor Charles V that put a price on his head. Menno Simons traveled throughout Holland and Germany preaching the doctrine of non-violent Anabaptism, baptizing converts, and writing voluminously. He also ordained, as elder, Leenaert Bouwens, in 1551 in Emden. By 1555 Menno had grown weary of internal strife among Anabaptists and retired to an estate

called Fresenburg in Holstein. There he died on January 13, 1561, aged 66.

That our ancestors chose to become followers of Menno Simons is an indication of their gentle nature in a time of great violence. Of the principal Anabaptist sects that arose during the time of the Reformation, the followers of Menno Simons are most distinguished from the others because of their non-violent character. This one characteristic may very well be the reason Mennonites are the only Anabaptist sect to survive into the 20th century in the numbers that they do.

The Flemish and Dutch origins of our Dyck, Wall, and Claassen ancestors have thus far eluded the genealogists of the family. The information that they are indeed Flemish and Dutch comes from a study of Mennonites names in West Prussia done in 1912 and cited in Henry Smith's book *The Story Of The Mennonites*. The author of this study divided the Prussian Mennonites into four groups and says that the second group consists of Flemish-Dutch families in the large delta of the Vistula River. Their names, some of them slightly changed since their migration from Flanders-Holland, include Dyck, Wall, and Claassen. Changes in the spelling of these names appear to be most prevalent with the name Claassen. Variations include Claeszen, Claessen, Claesken, Claisone, and the ones known to us today: Claassen and Klaassen. A Flemish variation of the spelling of the Dyck family name is Duyck. *Martyrs Mirror* lists a Willem de Duyck as being put to death at Ghent, in Flanders, in 1565, "after much tribulation and unwavering steadfastness, being not willing to apostatize in any wise, also had to bear witness with his blood to the name of Christ." *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* states that he is commemorated in the hymn "Als men schreef duyst vijfhondert jaer, ende twee en tesestich mede" found in the *Lietboecxken*, a collection of 25 hymns in the Dutch language first published in 1563. Ten subsequent editions were printed from 1566 to 1599.

Also listed in this select group of martyrs is Andrew Claessen, beheaded in 1535, Barent Claessen of Swol, executed by the sword March 6, 1535, Gerrit Claessen of Oudenyerop, executed by the sword on May 15, 1535, and his wife Grietje Maes, executed by drowning on the same date. Mennonite martyrs include the family of Jan, Joos, Laurens, and Lieven van de Walle. Jan was a ribbon maker by trade and burned at the stake at Antwerp, Belgium, on February 26, 1571, after enduring severe torture. His wife, Calleken Meevels, was also executed on the same day. Jan's brother, Martin van de Walle, suffered martyrdom at Brugge in Flanders in 1558. Joos van de Walle, a citizen of Ghent in Flanders, was executed by being burned at the stake in that city's Vrijdagsmarkt on March 2, 1560. Laurens van de Walle was a weaver by trade. He was arrested at Ypres in Flanders and burned

at the stake there in 1561 with three other Anabaptists. These four martyrs were the subject of another hymn in the Dutch hymnal *Lietboecxken*, titled “Geroert ben ick van binnen” (Inwardly I Am Moved). Lieven van de Walle was beheaded on June 5, 1536, at Ghent in front of the infamous Gravensteen Castle. He was a barber by trade. No claim can be made that these martyrs of the 16th century are directly related to our families as firm evidence is thus far lacking. Their mention here is none the less important as these are the earliest dates these family names are seen in print.

These names and dates from *Martyrs Mirror* and *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* also show that persecution of Anabaptists was fierce in Flanders during this time. It was equally fierce for the followers of Menno Simons after 1540, so much so that Menno never ventured into Flanders. However, Menno Simons had ordained as elder Leenaert Bouwens, and he traveled extensively throughout Flanders baptizing many. From 1554 to 1556 he visited Antwerp, Brussels, Tournai, and Ghent baptizing 225 people. In repeated visits in the years 1557-1561 and 1563-1565 he baptized an additional 367 people. According to Cornelius Krahn, author of the book *Dutch Anabaptism: Origin, Spread, Life, and Thought* (1450-1600), Bouwens kept meticulous records of the people he baptized from 1551 to 1582. Krahn states that Bouwens traveled from Antwerp to Danzig, visiting some places as many as five times, and baptized no less than 10,386 people in 31 years. Perhaps even more remarkable is that this record has been preserved. This is the only extant record of its kind pertaining to Anabaptists. Being able to view these records would undoubtedly benefit our knowledge of our family's history. As a result of ceaseless persecution by the inquisitors of the Catholic Church, Anabaptists fled Flanders to the north of Holland from the beginning of the 16th century. Many continued on to the Baltic seaport of Danzig. Mennonites followed this route as well, and those of Flemish origin settled primarily in the Vistula Delta area bordered roughly by Danzig, Marienburg, and Elbing. By 1640 this migration out of Flanders was nearly complete and our ancestors were settled in their new homeland of West Prussia.

## Sanctuary in West Prussia

West Prussia at the time of the migration of Anabaptists-Mennonites out of Flanders and Holland (1525-1650) was similar in many respects to Kansas in the 1870s. The cities and towns on the Baltic seacoast and along the Vistula River were established after the native inhabitants had been removed by force of arms. The land of the Vistula Delta had remained untamed despite the founding of



**Map 2**  
 European Mennonite Settlements in 1938  
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the population centers of Danzig, Elbing, Marienburg and others. Similarly the plains of Kansas had been passed over by people intent on settling in Oregon and California during the first half of the 19th century. Kansas was part of what was then called “The Great American Desert” and would not see extensive settlement until after the American Civil War ended in 1865.

The modern history of Prussia has its beginning with establishment of the city of Danzig on the Baltic seacoast along the Vistula River. Danzig was part of a trading association across northern Europe that was known as the Hanseatic League. South of Danzig and east into Russia was a vast area of relative wilderness populated by a people known as Pruzzens, or “Old Prussians.” The monarch whose empire included this area was a duke, Conrad of Mazovia. After encountering great difficulty in subjugating the indigenous population of Pruzzens, Conrad asked for the help of the Teutonic Knights. The Teutonic Knights were without purpose at that time, their intended goal of a crusade to reconquer the Holy Land having been cancelled, so with the blessing of the Pope they moved into the land south of the Baltic Sea along the Vistula River in 1225.

The commission given the Teutonic Knights was nominally called the converting to Christianity of the native population of Pruzzens. In return the Teutonic Knights were to receive large tracts of land along the Vistula River. The reality was depopulation by means of horrific slaughter. As the territory of the Teutonic Knights expanded they built massive castles from which to rule their conquered land along the Vistula and Nogat Rivers. The magnificent castle at Marienburg, in the Vistula Delta, was to become the administrative center of government during the 400-year history of Mennonite settlement in the Vistula Delta. It has withstood the ravages of wars through the centuries and still stands today.

After nearly two centuries of continuous expansion the Teutonic Knights found themselves in conflict with the Polish nobility who considered the Knights a threat to their hegemony in northeastern Europe. This conflict culminated in the Battle of Grunwald-Tannenberg in 1410 in which the Teutonic Knights were defeated. This battle was the first of many historic battles that would take place at this site in succeeding centuries, most notably during World War I. Peace finally came in the year 1466 with a treaty that ceded the western holdings of the Teutonic Knights to the Polish crown. This included the port city of Danzig and the lands south along the Vistula River.

As a reward for supporting the Polish crown in the defeat of the Teutonic Knights, the people in the cities of the Vistula Delta were given a large measure of autonomy in governing themselves. This tolerant attitude extended to religion and made the cities of



Danzig, Elbing, Thorn, and Kulm in the Vistula Delta fertile ground for the ideas of the Reformation. By 1525 the German-speaking inhabitants of these cities had largely converted to Lutheranism although the surrounding countryside remained Polish-Catholic. The atmosphere of religious toleration found in these cities also attracted Anabaptists from the surrounding countries. This undoubtedly included Waldenses who had survived deadly persecution for 200 years in neighboring Pomerania to the west and Moravia to the south, as well as in Poland itself.

At this point in history, the early 16th century, the Waldenses all but disappear from books written about the Reformation, Anabaptists, and Mennonites. Many authors presume that they were entirely absorbed by other Protestant churches by 1560. While this is true in part it is not entirely so. Those Waldenses that remained independent continued to be the object of persecution and slaughter until the time of the French Revolution, 1789. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Waldenses today are principally centered in Italy and Uruguay with approximately 45,000 members worldwide. In the United States there are Waldensian communities and churches in about six states. These small numbers and scattered communities belie the immense and important contribution the Waldenses made to the history of Anabaptism.

Marienburg Castle on the Nogat River. Built between 1274 and 1280 by the Teutonic Knights with additions built over the next 150 years. This headquarters of the Teutonic Knights was visible from much of the Vistula Delta of West Prussia. Abraham Claassen sketched portions of this castle in 1836 when he was 11 years old.

Photo:  
Olin Claassen.

As to when our ancestors arrived in the Vistula Delta area of West Prussia we can only guess. Few records exist for this time, the 16th and early 17th centuries. Anabaptists are thought to have been in the Danzig, Elbing, Marienburg triangle as early as 1530. If any of our ancestors were Anabaptist before they were known as Mennonites then they could have been there at this early date. The dates of the executions of Claessens and de Walles listed in *Martyrs Mirror* certainly suggests that this is a good possibility.

Most of the settlements that our ancestors lived in had been in existence for 200 years or more by the time of their arrival in the 16th century. Massive levees had been built along both the Vistula and Nogat Rivers during the time that the delta had been under the rule of the Teutonic Knights. Much of the levee system had fallen in disrepair during the ensuing years leaving the land between the two rivers, the Werder, subject to flooding. Werder means island in the German language, and the Vistula River flowing north on the west and the Nogat flowing north on the east side of the Werder created an area completely surrounded by water. The northern part of the Werder was below sea level in some areas, making large areas of marsh unusable for any purpose. As levees were continually raised over the centuries the whole of the Werder was below water level at the time of the great spring floods.

Holland and Flanders had many people experienced in the building of levees and dikes to protect their fragile coast from the sea. These were the people that were first invited to come to West Prussia with a promise of land in addition to religious freedom. A major project to drain and reclaim land was initiated in the area of Neuhof (New Court) in 1547-1550. Neuhof became Tiegenhof about 1760 when the town became a market for the surrounding farms. Michael Loitz was the man that controlled this area of the Werder and it was at his invitation that the first Mennonites arrived in the Werder. All Mennonites came to West Prussia through the city of Danzig and those who were not levee builders or farmers tended to remain close to Danzig. From the beginning Mennonites were looked upon with suspicion because of their religious beliefs. They kept to themselves and formed their own communities within the existing city. The first of these was the Schottland Congregation just south of Danzig. The Dutch Mennonite leader Dirk Philips was the first elder of the Danzig congregation, and Menno Simons traveled to Danzig in 1549 preaching and baptizing. The Mennonite community at Schottland grew throughout the latter part of the 16th century due to the influx of immigrants from the Low Countries who sought refuge from the intense and persistent persecution of the Roman Catholic Church and the Catholic nobility. At this same time the internal feuding among Mennonites themselves that had so distressed Menno Simons resulted in a division between Flemish and Frisian Mennonites that endured for

centuries, the results of which are still visible today in America. Until our ancestors came to America in the late 19th century they were almost exclusively members of the Flemish congregation of Mennonites. The Flemish congregations were different from their Frisian brethren in that they more rigidly enforced the use of the ban, shunning those that violated Mennonite principles, and were generally known as uncompromising in their faith. The Flemish congregations were more prone to immigrate when changes in the government, mostly compulsory military service, eroded their ability to practice their faith in the time-honored fashion.

Schottland became a center for Mennonite craftsmen that lasted until the Napoleonic Wars of the early 1800s. Many Mennonites coming from the Low Countries were master weavers and they were particularly known for producing fine lace. Furniture making too was a specialty of Mennonite craftsmen, and a few very fine examples have endured the rigors of war and transport to America and are highly prized by descendants of our ancestors.

Most of our ancestral towns and villages were established during the rule of the Teutonic Knights. Of these settlements associated with our ancestors (their places of birth, marriage, and death) the oldest is the village of Ladekopp. This village existed long before the arrival of Polish kings and Teutonic Knights. It was originally a Pruzzen settlement, "kopp" being a Pruzzen word meaning small hill. The Ladekopp Mennonite Church cemetery is one of the few Mennonite cemeteries in West Prussia that hasn't been completely destroyed. The current Polish government has plans to restore the cemetery and maintain it as a national historic site. We can only hope so. Many of the headstones in this cemetery pre-date 1800. The next oldest settlement of our ancestors is Gross Lichtenau founded in 1254, one of the earliest of the Teutonic Knight villages. Others in chronological order are Broske, founded in 1318; Mierau, 1318; Lindenau and Marienau, 1321; Simonsdorf, 1323; Schonsee, 1334; Orloff, 1349; Neumunsterberg, 1352; and Reimerswalde, 1356. The founding dates of these settlements come from Gustav Fieguth's book *Heimat Zwischen Weichel und Nogat*. A notable exception to these early settlements is the village of Poppau. Poppau was developed solely by settlers from the Low Countries on land that had been reclaimed from the sea and rivers and was a predominately Mennonite village throughout its existence. Despite their large impact on the area, Mennonites were a minority of the population in the Werder. In the whole of the Vistula Delta, the Werder, Mennonites at their zenith owned a maximum of 21% of the available farmland. After successive waves of migration to Russia beginning in 1788, the percentage of Mennonites in the Werder fell to 8-10 % by 1825. These figures are from Dr. Gerhard Driedger's book, *The Werder: The Land Between The Vistula And The Nogat*.



The largest concentration of Mennonites in the Werder was the Heubuden congregation. This included the village of Simonsdorf so prominent in the history of our Claassen ancestors. Heubuden means "haysheds" in German, and this area was named during the time of the Teutonic Knights. It is located very near the castle at Marienburg and was used as pasturage for the herds of horses required by the Teutonic Knights. While the village of Simonsdorf was founded in 1323, it wasn't until 1554 when the first Mennonites settled there and began turning this large area of pasture into farmland.

Most of West Prussia at the time of immigration of our ancestors, the 16th and 17th centuries, was under the rule of the Catholic king of Poland. However, after 1600 Danzig was primarily a Lutheran city. During the entire period of time Prussia was under Polish rule, until 1772, Mennonites endured oppression and outright hostility from the Catholic and Lutheran clergy. Although Polish kings had granted Mennonites a certain measure of protection, local government officials acted autonomously in continuing to persecute Mennonites. Catholic bishops in particular encouraged the Polish citizenry to disregard the severely restricted rights of Mennonites. Mennonites had to conduct their services quietly in private homes. Meeting houses were not allowed until the mid to late 18th century and had to be constructed on private property. Public burial was not allowed for Mennonites; they did not have their own cemeteries until 1775. Mennonites were forced to pay a high fee to be buried in special areas of Catholic cemeteries. In addition to this absence of early cemeteries, records of birth, baptism, and death were not kept before 1668. Polish law did not require it and lack of records kept secret the number of Mennonites there really were, and who they were.

In spite of the restrictions placed on them, Mennonites of the more remote rural areas were able to practice their faith and live in the closed communities they preferred. The valuable agricultural service they provided gained them some measure of immunity from persecution by local government officials. These officials were not above joining with the Catholic bishops in engaging in a subtle form of blackmail in the form of tributes that were levied against Mennonites from time to time.

In addition to persecution at the hands of government and clergy, Mennonites of the Werder suffered natural and man-made disasters throughout their 400-year stay in Prussia. Floods were a constant threat to residents of the Werder. Breaches of the levees along the Vistula and Nogat Rivers wrecked havoc on the farms of Mennonites. Great floods of the Werder were recorded in 1622, 1652, 1717, 1786, 1816, 1839, 1845, and the largest in 1855.

One instance of plague was recorded that took many lives in the Werder. This occurred in 1709-1710. In the city of Danzig 390



**Map 3**  
 Danzig, Free City of (1920-1939), showing Memmonite Settlements and Congregations in West and East Prussia  
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Mennonites died of plague in 1709. Spreading throughout the Vistula Delta in 1710 this plague took the lives of many hundreds of Mennonites.

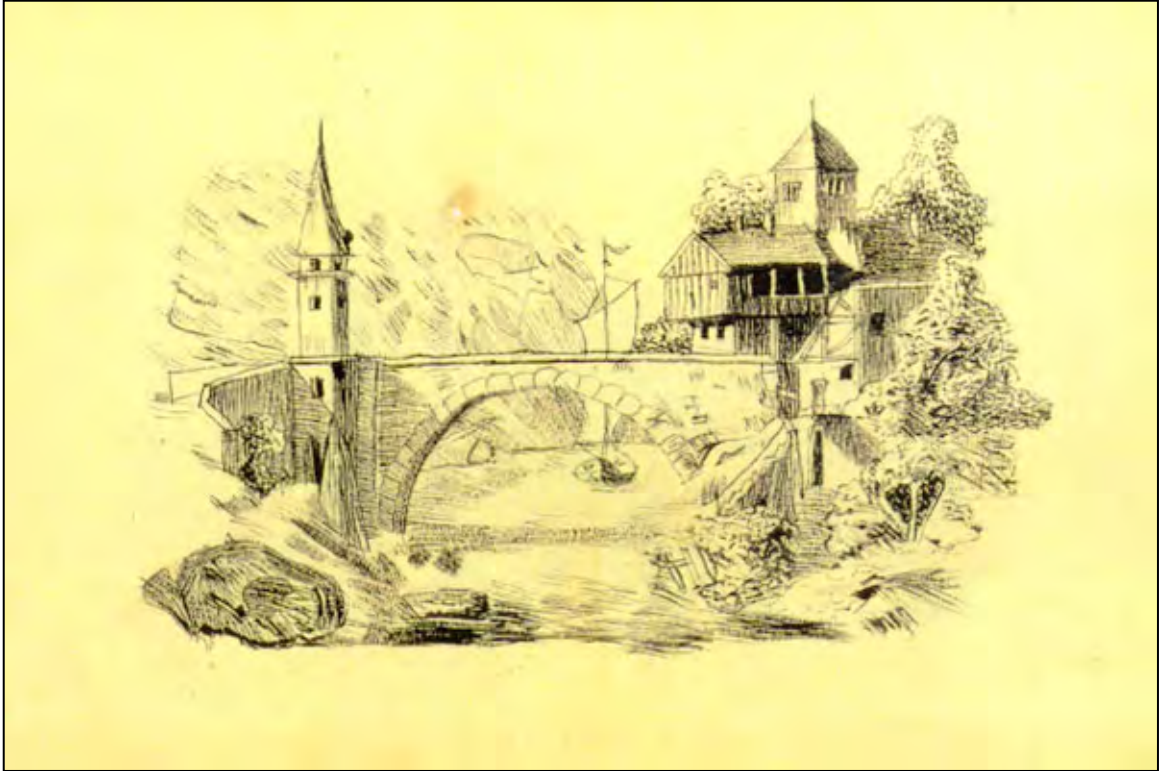
Of all the catastrophes to befall the Mennonites of Prussia none compared to the seemingly endless number of wars. The Mennonite belief in complete non-resistance forbade any participation in the military whatsoever. This put them at the mercy of every army to occupy the Vistula Delta, of which there were many. Particularly devastating were the three Swedish-Polish wars of 1626, 1656, and 1698-1715, coming as they did so close to floods in the Werder. In a war with the Russians, in 1765, the Werder was subjected to a particularly brutal occupation by the Russian army, a prelude of things to come in 1945. Napoleon Bonaparte defeated the Prussian army at the battles of Jena and Auerstadt in 1806 and his French army occupied the Werder for a period of years. This occupying French army plundered so freely that the Prussian campaign actually made money for the French government. The legacy of this occupation was a hatred of the French by most Prussians that endured for many generations.

In 1772 Poland was divided between Austria-Hungary, Russia, and German Prussia in what is known as the First Partition of Poland. The area of the Vistula Delta, the Werder, was now under the rule of the King of Prussia, Frederick II, also known as Frederick the Great. Frederick instituted many reforms that had an immediate impact on the Mennonites of the Werder. The highly efficient Prussian civil service replaced the haphazard Polish system. One of the first things Prussian officials ordered was a complete, thorough census that included family names, numbers of children, and occupations. These census records are the basis for much of the information available about our Dyck, Wall, Harder, and Claassen ancestors and are often cited throughout this book. One of the beneficial reforms Frederick instituted in the Werder was a massive building program of schools. Education was mandatory under German-Prussian law and Mennonites benefited as well as the rest of the population. Many Mennonites began to see teaching as a viable occupation in lieu of farming. This was the beginning of a tradition that continues to this day.

Against this background of events in Prussia and the Werder we can begin to follow the ancestry of the Dyck, Wall, Claassen, and Harder families. Often times dates of birth, marriage, and death coincide with the dates of floods, wars, and civil change. Knowledge of particulars about our ancestors in the 17th and 18th centuries is scarce. Most often only a date and place is available. For this reason a general knowledge of European history is helpful in enabling us, the descendants, to place our ancestors in the context of their times. Beginning in the second half of the 19th century much more information is available in the form of diaries, journals, letters,

and photographs. Photographs make the people come alive, and our Mennonite ancestors have left us many good photographs of themselves. After their arrival in Kansas, in 1877, they proudly photographed their farms as well as their families. Unfortunately, very few photographs are known to exist of the Dycks and Walls in Am Trakt, Russia. Most that might have existed were consumed in the holocaust that engulfed Russian Mennonites following the Communist takeover of Russia in 1917.

To compliment the written and photographic record left by our Mennonite ancestors are articles of furniture that are distinctively Mennonite in character. Most striking are the dowry chests brought from West Prussia. Many personal items have been handed down through the generations as well. Photographs of these and the furniture appear elsewhere in this book.



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

## 2

# The Dyck and Wall Families

## The Dyck Family Name: Origins and Early Ancestry

The Dyck family name has its origins in Flanders, present day Belgium. In Flanders, and in the early years of settlement in West Prussia, “van dem,” “van den,” and “van der” preceded “Dyck” and is indicative of the Dycks being associated with a specific location in Flanders. Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641), the great painter of the Baroque period, was Flemish.

The Dyck family name first occurs in the records of the Flemish Mennonite congregations of West Prussia in 1592. In his book *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, Horst Penner

states that Philipp van den Dyck is listed as a member of the Grossenwerder congregation in 1592. This makes the Dyck name among the oldest Mennonite family names in West Prussia. According to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, one of the first elders of the Danzig Mennonite Church was named van Dyck. The Heubuden Mennonite Congregation had as its first elder a man named Jacob Dyck, chosen in 1728, and confirmed by Isaak de Veer of the Danzig church. This Jacob Dyck died in 1748 and was succeeded as elder of the Heubuden congregation, at his own request, by Gerhard von Bergen in 1748. Gerhard von Bergen is a grandfather of our family through our Claassen ancestors.

By 1776 there were 119 families in West Prussia that had the name of Dyck, according to *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*. This figure includes the many variations in use at that time; von Dyck, van Dyck, van den, van der, and van dem Dyck, Dueck, Dieck, Duyck. Many of these families would emigrate to Russia after 1788, and in the first Russian Mennonite colony of Chortitza, Dycks were well represented by elders Gerhard Dyck, his son Isaak, and two elders named Jacob Dyck.

In the 20th century the Furstenwerder congregation of West Prussia was led by Johannes Dyck, chosen in 1919, Ernest Dyck, chosen in 1928, and Johannes Dyck chosen in 1943. This congregation ceased to exist when the Russian Army occupied West Prussia in 1945 at the close of World War II. Similarly, the Ladekopp congregation was represented by the elder Johannes Dyck II from 1919 until its destruction by the Russian Army in 1945.

Paul Dyck is our oldest known direct ancestor with the Dyck family name. He was born in 1670 at Junkeracker Bei Ostsee, West Prussia, and died there in 1740. Junkeracker Bei Ostsee (Junkeracker by the Baltic Sea) is, as its name implies, in the northern most end of the Vistula Delta area of West Prussia, near the coast of the Baltic Sea. Hegewald was the name of a large estate that was part of Junkeracker. The village of Poppau was located two miles east and two miles south of Junkeracker. Dr. Gerhard Driedger, author of *The Werder: The Land Between the Vistula and the Nogat*, is of the opinion that Junkeracker, and the estate Hegewald, originated during the time of the Teutonic Knights, that their names suggest this. Poppau was founded by Mennonite immigrants from Flanders, one of the earliest land reclamation projects in the Vistula Delta region. Our Dyck ancestors were among these early settlers, probably arriving in the second half of the 16th century, the late 1500s. In 1706 Paul Dyck married Susanne Hoffman Reimer, a widow. It is not known if Susanne had any other children from a previous marriage, nor are the dates known of her birth and death. The Reimer name is native West Prussian, according to author Horst Penner. Records of the



Teutonic Knights state that before 1400 there were Reimer-Bauern (Reimer-Farmers) living in the Grossenwerder. In 1400 a Mertin Reymer is in the village of Altmuensterberg, a farmer Reymer in Simonsdorf in 1401, a mayor Reymer in Haupt in 1403. It wasn't until the 1600s that Reimers converted to the Mennonite faith, the first recorded in the Danzig Mennonite records in 1671 is Simon Reymer. This information and these dates from Horst Penner suggest the possibility that Susanne Hoffman Reimer was not of the Mennonite faith until her marriage to Paul Dyck.

Paul and Susanne Dyck's son Jacob (I) continues our direct family lineage. It is not known if they had any other children. Jacob Dyck (I) was born December 24, 1707, probably at Junkeracker Bei Ostsee, West Prussia. No specific date is available for Jacob's marriage to Catharina Steffen, born 1717. The eldest of their two known children was born in 1743, so a marriage date *circa* 1740 is likely.

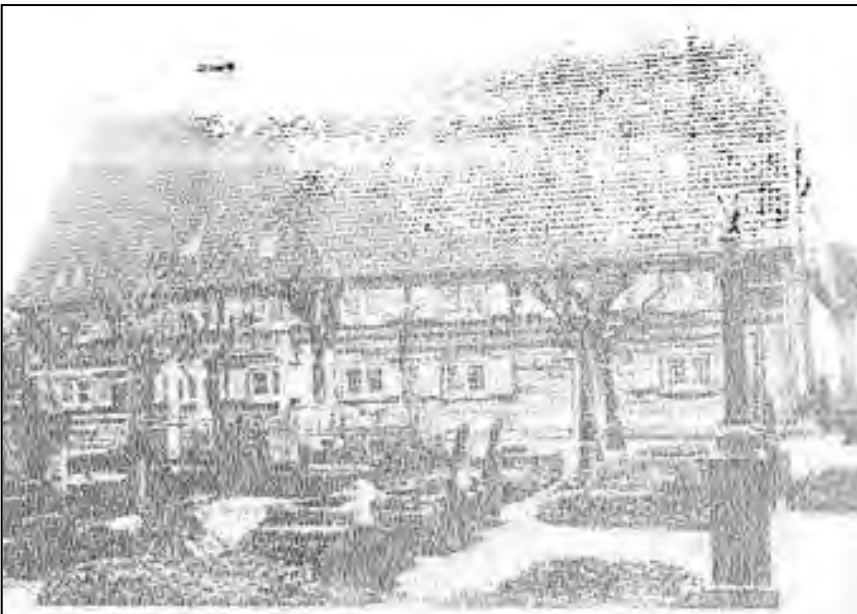
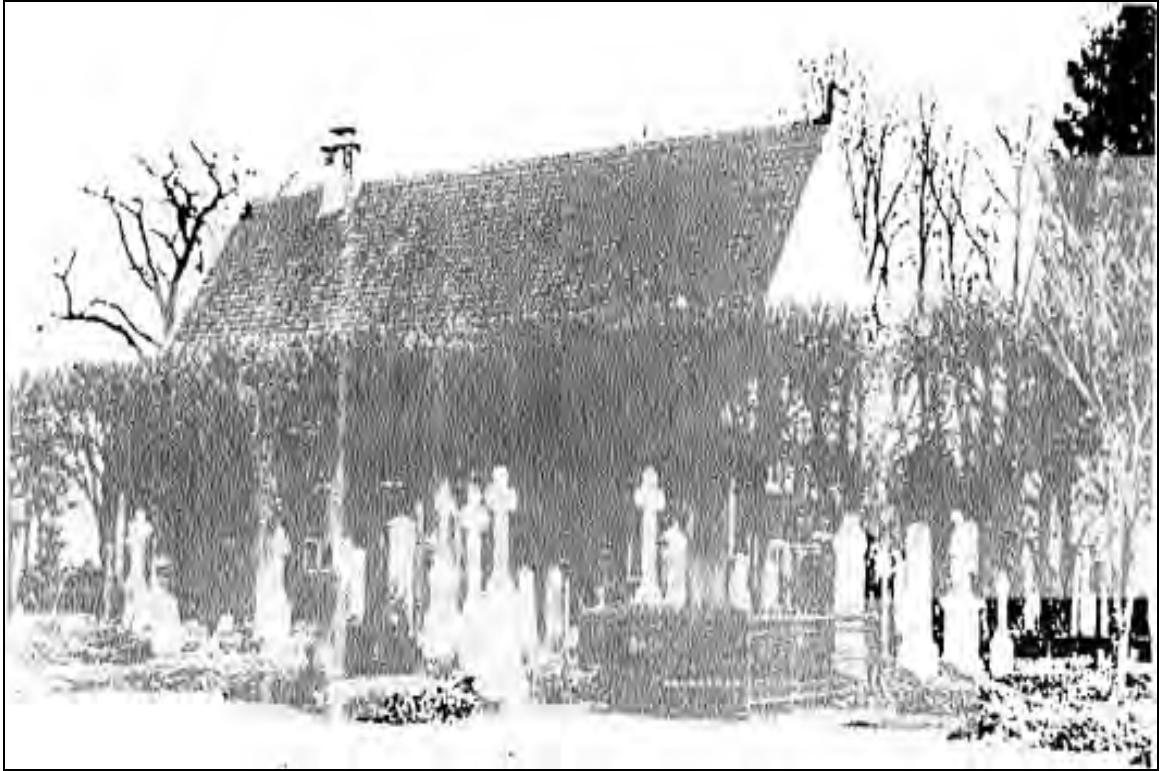
Of Catharina Steffen's immediate family, no information is available. However, Horst Penner's research into Mennonite family names of West Prussia provides some interesting background on the Steffen name. A quote from records of the Danzig city council states: "On the 7 March 1575 a Hans Steffens from Herzogenbusch, a Brabanter, received from the council of Danzig, permission to be a settler here although he is not eligible to have city privileges of a citizen because he is a handcraftsman (a stone and statue chiseler); yet he must promise that he will not ever hold a celebration (probably refers to religious services) and also that he will not use any other means to make a living." This Hans Steffens is listed as an elder of the Danzig Flemish Mennonite congregation. A letter dated 1592, from the Thorn Mennonite congregation, is signed by Cornelis Steffens. Cornelis is most likely the son of Hans. Horst Penner believes that the Steffens that were farmers throughout the Grossenwerder villages of Petershagen, Tiegenhagen, and Vogtey in the 1700s, were descended from Hans and Cornelis Steffens. This would include our grandmother Catharina Steffen.

Two sons were born to Jacob (I) and Catharina. Jacob Dyck (II), our direct descendant grandfather, was born November 18, 1743. His brother Paul was born March 10, 1746. No other children are known to have been born to Jacob Dyck (I), who died April 23, 1786 at Hegewald, West Prussia, and his wife Catharina who died March 13, 1771, also at Hegewald, West Prussia.

Jacob Dyck (II) married Maria Claassen on October 3, 1765. Ten children were born to this marriage, two of which are known to have died in infancy. Jacob Dyck (II) died April 9, 1820, at Poppau, West Prussia. No dates are available for Maria Claassen's birth or death.

Until the second half of the 18th century, Mennonite congregations did not have permanent, fixed meeting houses or





The Ladekopp Mennonite Church in the Vistula Delta. Built in 1768, this church was destroyed by the Russian Army in 1945. The present government of Poland has declared the Ladekopp Cemetery a national monument.

Top photo: The Centennial Committee, *History of the Emmaus Mennonite Church*.

Bottom photo: Horst Penner, *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*.

churches. The earliest church outside of the Danzig-Schottland congregation was one built at Rosenort in 1754. For this reason it is often impossible to pinpoint which congregation our Dyck ancestors belonged to at these early dates.

One of the earliest organized congregations in the vicinity of our Dyck ancestors was the Mennonite congregation at the old Pruzzen village of Ladekopp. This congregation had sprung from a

need to serve the outlying areas of the original Danzig-Schottland congregations that had existed in organized form since 1569. The list of elders for the Danzig congregation is complete from this early date and includes one with the name of van Dyck. In 1768 Ladekopp was granted permission by the Catholic bishop of Culm to build its own church along with the congregations of Furstenwerder, Tiegenhagen, and Heubuden. These four congregations were known collectively as the Grosse Werder Congregation.

Prior to the building of these churches all Mennonite congregations in the Werder were under the umbrella of the Danzig Mennonite Church. Danzig church records indicate that there was ongoing contact with the Mennonite churches in Holland during the 17th and 18th centuries, that these Dutch churches were looked to for guidance by the Danzig congregation. Close ties were also maintained because many members still had relatives in Flanders and Holland. The Danzig baptismal registers for the 17th and 18th centuries contain an appendix that lists those members that were baptized in Flanders and Holland suggesting that these people held some type of special status in the congregation. In this way the mother churches in Holland exerted a pervading influence that extended throughout all the congregations of the Werder. So close were these ties that Mennonites continued to use their native language of Dutch well into the 18th century. The first Bible printed for Mennonites of West Prussia was in the Dutch language. Elder Quirin Vermeulen printed this Dutch translation of the Bible in Schottland in 1598. The Schottland congregation was the first to make the change from Dutch to the German language in church services. By 1800 hymnals had been published in German, and Low German was the language used by almost all Mennonites. This was indicative of the Germanization of the Werder Mennonites that began with the establishment of their own churches in 1768. This Germanization of West Prussian Mennonites went well beyond the adoption of German as their language. Mennonites enthusiastically adopted all things associated with German high culture and would carry it with them wherever they settled later in Russia and America.

The year before Ladekopp and the other three Grosse Werder Congregations were allowed to build their churches, 1767, Jacob Dyck (III) was born on October 21. He was the second of ten children born to Jacob Dyck (II) and Maria Claassen at Poppau, West Prussia. Jacob Dyck (III) married Margarete Warkentin on October 29, 1791. No information is available about Margarete. Warkentin is a common Mennonite family name and is found in many of the church records of all of the major Mennonite congregations of the Werder. Horst Penner writes in *Die Ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten* that the Warkentins come from the German state of Mecklenburg in northeastern Germany, specifically

the market town of Perkontin. Perkontin is approximately nine miles west of the port city of Rostock in Mecklenburg. An early variation in the spelling of the name is Parchentin. Lorenz Parchentin is listed as an elder from Furstenwerder, West Prussia, in 1583. His descendant Jacob Parchentin still lived in Furstenwerder in 1727. By 1776 local German dialect had changed the spelling to Warkentin throughout the Mennonite congregations of the Vistula Delta. One member of the Warkentin family, Bernhard Warkentin, was instrumental in introducing hard winter wheat to Kansas after his immigration from Russia in the late 1800s.

Except for our next direct descendant grandfather, Dietrich Dyck, it is unknown how many children Jacob Dyck (III) and Margarete Warkentin had. Jacob Dyck (III) died February 8, 1843, at Hauskampe, West Prussia. Dietrich (Dirk) Dyck was born October 9, 1796, at Poppau, West Prussia. Dietrich was married twice and both of his wives were named Agnete Jantzen. The Jantzen family name is one the most widespread of Mennonite family names. Prior to Jantzens being located in the Vistula Delta of West Prussia, in 1568, the name was found along the entire North Sea area from Holstein to Flanders, including the Frisian Islands. A sample listing from the records of the Danzig Mennonite congregation in 1619 shows various spellings of the name and the varied origins of members: Hartwich Jansen, linenweaver, Holstein; Lenert Jansen von Mecheln, braid, trim maker for clothes; Cornelis Jan, linenweaver, Hollander; Otto Jansen, stockingmaker, Westphalia; Georg Jansen, linenweaver, Brabant.

Dietrich's first marriage occurred on June 23, 1817, at Poppau, West Prussia. Agnete (I) was born January 16, 1796, and so was some ten months older than her husband and 21 years old at the time of her marriage. Dietrich and Agnete (I) had five children beginning with Dietrich (II) born August 3, 1819. Next was a daughter, Katharina, born July 28, 1824. Three more sons followed. Johannes Dietrich, born December 5, 1826, Jacob (IV), born May 5, 1832, and Cornelius, born August 23, 1835. Jacob Dyck (IV) is our direct descendant grandfather. Agnete (I) died the day after Christmas, December 26, 1836. Dietrich married Agnete Jantzen (II) February 19, 1839. She was born May 31, 1813, and was the daughter of the Mayor of Gross Heubuden near Marienburg in the lower Vistula Delta. With this second marriage Dietrich became the father of three more children, all daughters: Agnete, born February 10, 1841, Maria, born September 11, 1846, and Justine, born October 6, 1848.

All eight of Dietrich Dyck's children were born at Poppau, West Prussia. That they all lived to reach adulthood is noteworthy. The rate of infant and child mortality in the early 19th century was extremely high. Dietrich's growing family probably strained the ability of the family farm to provide for them all. The village of

Poppau was on land reclaimed from the sea and Dietrich's farm consisted of only 38 acres. The Dyck family had owned an additional 63 acres near the village of Glabitz, but lost it during the occupation of Prussia by the French Army under Napoleon. Napoleon had ordered a reorganization of all Prussian land holdings in 1806. Had the family been able to retain all of their land holdings, all of Dietrich's sons probably would have been farmers. As it was, Johannes Dietrich, the second son, was sent south to Robach to apprentice as a merchant-storekeeper at the age of 12 in 1839.

## **The Adventures of Johannes Dietrich Dyck**

Johannes Dietrich, the older brother of our direct descendant grandfather, Jacob Dyck (IV), would become a man of major legend in the Dyck family. Johannes was a prodigious writer, keeping diaries throughout his life span of 72 years. Not only did these diaries chronicle Johannes' life, but they provide information that gives insight on many family members. Drawing on these diaries and the oral history of the family, Johannes Dietrich's great grandson, Cornelius J. Dyck, wrote a biography of his great grandfather. This unpublished manuscript is the source of the information contained in this book about Johannes Dietrich Dyck.

After serving his four-year apprenticeship Johannes was offered the post of manager in Frau Hamm's grocery and dry goods store. This was a job of much importance for a young man of 16 years of age, but Johannes made a good accounting of himself and his period of employment with Frau Hamm was mutually satisfactory. In 1844 Johannes was baptized in the Ellerwald Mennonite Church by Elder Jacob Kroeker.

Probably as a result of leaving home at such a young age, wanderlust was in Johannes' blood. He left the employment of Frau Hamm and worked at similar jobs in Marienburg and Caldove (Caldowe) in the Vistula Delta. However, discontent with the storekeeper's life had set in. In the winter of 1847-1848 he returned to the home of his father and stepmother. He spent his time hunting, no doubt to supplement the family income and meat supply. This seems to be a rather radical departure from the norm for Mennonites, to own a gun and use it for hunting in the Vistula Delta area. A prelude of things to come.

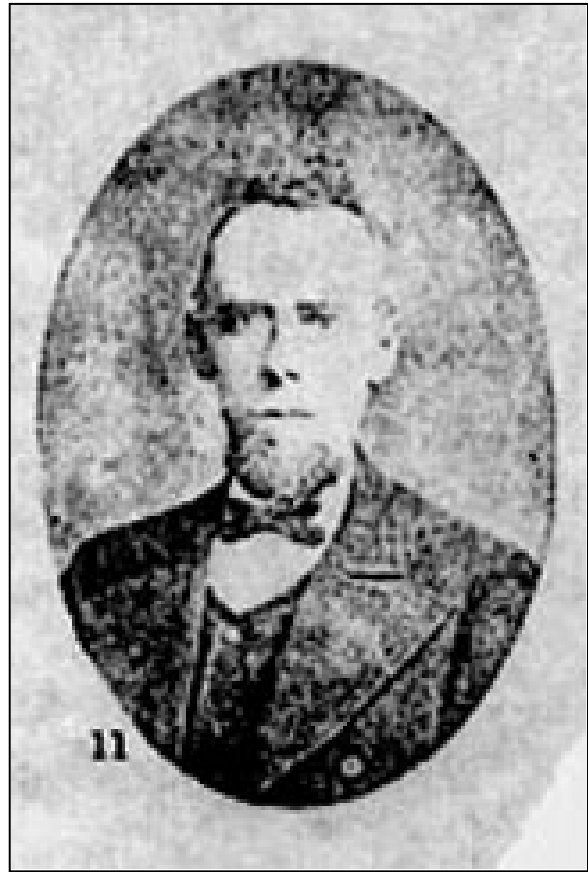
While staying with his parents Johannes received word that a visitor from the Mennonite colonies in Russia, Johann Cornies, was looking for someone to accompany him back to Russia from West Prussia. Johannes Dyck eagerly sought out Cornies and the two made arrangements for the trip to Russia, planning to leave in eight

days. Before their departure, however, Cornies married and went back to Russia with his new wife. It must have been a whirlwind romance that caused Cornies to forget his prior agreement with Johannes. Apparently Cornies never even bothered to tell Johannes what took place.

With the trip to Russia scuttled Johannes made the decision to go to America to seek his fortune. He appears to have had in mind working, perhaps in the merchant's trade, saving his money, and returning with the means to purchase his own farm. Most likely he had his appetite whetted by Cornies and meant to buy a farm in Russia, in the colony of Chortitza or Molotschna. Before leaving for America Johannes had a piece of serious business to attend to. While working in Caldove he had fallen in love with Helene Jantzen and they announced their engagement prior to Johannes' departure.

Johannes left West Prussia on August 18, 1848, traveling by train to the port city of Hamburg. Once there he booked passage on the American ship *Joseph Fish* and set sail on September 1, 1848. Upon reaching open sea violent storms were encountered that forced the captain of the ship to sail north around England and Scotland before entering the Atlantic. Even then the weather was miserable and the voyage perilous. It would be a full two months before the ship reached New York, finally docking on November 2, 1848. Johannes was traveling with a friend named Berisch, and it was Berisch who had plans of going to the city of Chicago. Johannes tagged along. Taking a route that would be repeated by Abraham Claassen and his family in 1876, Johannes and Berisch went up the Hudson River to Albany, New York, and from there to Buffalo and Niagara Falls. A lake steam ship took them the rest of the way to Chicago. Johannes secured work as a bartender in the place where he lived and began learning English. One can imagine the language learned in a saloon in Chicago in 1848-1849. While working at this job Johannes heard the first stories of gold being discovered in California. He didn't have the money required for the long trip to California, yet.

In the Spring of 1849 Johannes traveled by boat on Lake Michigan to the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There he met several people he had known in West Prussia, including the sister of



Johannes Dietrich Dyck (1826-1898), Uncle of Jacob J. Dyck. Johannes went to California during the Gold Rush of 1849 and was Mayor of the Am Trakt settlement in Russia from 1866 to 1884.

Photo:  
*A Pilgrim People.*

Frau Hamm of Robach, his former employer. Through this sister he gained employment with the importing firm of Fullton and after a couple of months was earning the respectable salary of \$45 per month.

Much of his work for the Fullton company required Johannes to spend considerable time aboard the company ships docked at Milwaukee. One day, while supervising the unloading of one of these ships, Johannes saw a young girl suddenly fall 30 feet from a bridge over the bay. Quickly calculating how far the current would carry her while he removed shoes and clothes, he dove into the water at the spot he thought she would resurface. Johannes had guessed correctly and was close enough to grab the girl when he caught a glimpse of her in the murky water. A boat picked them up and the young girl was revived by a doctor on shore. The next day the newspapers hailed the young German hero with headlines such as "Young German Risks Life To Save Drowning American Girl." Johannes received an invitation to dine with his employers, the Fullton brothers, who were no doubt pleased with the recognition Johannes' heroics brought to their company.

A good salary and the afterglow of heroism were not enough for Johannes. He had promised his betrothed Helene that he would return to West Prussia within 2-3 years and he had no intention of returning in the same financial condition he had left in . The lure of the gold rush to California finally overcame Johannes and he set off on the overland route, lacking the money it would take for the faster route by ship via Panama to San Francisco. His first destination was St. Joseph, Missouri, the jumping-off point for the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails. He arrived outside of St. Joseph, on March 14, 1850, at the Mormon settlement of Canesville, Missouri. There he sold his wagon and bought a pair of oxen for \$80. With a group of 22 other people and five wagons, Johannes ferried across the Missouri River on March 19 and headed west. Reports of massacres of previous travelers by the Pawnee tribe and a fear of getting lost on the vast Plains made Johannes' group stick to following the Platte River. No hostile Indians were encountered and the group reached Ft. Laramie, Wyoming, on July 22, 1850. At Ft. Laramie Johannes met a man who made a lifelong impression on him. His name was Louis Mellon and he had been a mountain man for over 25 years. Originally from Canada, Mellon had not seen civilization for the better part of the two and a half decades he spent ranging the Rocky Mountains trapping. Mellon could speak many Indian languages and knew the route to California well. He agreed to let Johannes accompany him. They made a relatively easy crossing of the Rocky Mountains and reached Ft. Bridger, Wyoming, in mid-August. In Ft. Bridger Mellon met up with an old friend, the famous scout, Kit Carson. Carson warned the men not to take the southern route into California at that time of year

because of the snowstorms in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. On this advice the men traveled the northern route over the Cascade Mountains into Oregon.

This route from Ft. Laramie, Wyoming, to Oregon, follows the famed Oregon Trail. Johannes' entire path once he had crossed the Missouri River near St. Joseph, Missouri, follows this famous Trail first discovered by Robert Stuart in 1812-1813. Stuart and a group of companions left the trading post of Astoria in Oregon and traveled east taking a route much further south of previous explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. The South Pass through the Rocky Mountains in Wyoming is what made this such a viable route for the waves of settlers that would come to Oregon in the years 1820-1860.

Along this route into Oregon Territory, Johannes remembered seeing as many as 30 graves a day. Hostile Indians and cholera took their toll on travelers heading for Oregon. On September 12, 1850, Johannes was involved in his first encounter with hostile Indians after finding three scalped bodies along the trail. Though indeed attacked, the small party of men all escaped and continued on to Oregon. From Oregon Johannes wrote to his Helene in West Prussia that he hoped to return to her in one year. It took that long for the letter to reach Helene, and Johannes was still in California. Helene's letter of response, closed with the words, "Yours, even unto death," was saved by Johannes and no doubt it comforted him on many lonely nights yet to come.

Johannes reached the gold fields of California sometime in 1850 and joined thousands of other miners from around the world that had come seeking their fortunes in the gleaming yellow metal. Stories of failure far exceed those of success in finding gold in amounts worth the backbreaking labor and danger inherent in these primitive mining operations. Johannes was one of the lucky ones. After three years he felt he had enough gold to return to West Prussia. Together with two companions and packhorses loaded with their treasure, Johannes began the return journey across America. The return route was through the desert Southwest, possibly headed for Santa Fe, New Mexico. From Santa Fe they could use the well-traveled Santa Fe Trail that would take them in a northeasterly direction toward St. Joseph, Missouri. They never made it. Not far into the trip they were attacked by hostile Indians who quickly overcame one of Johannes' companions and then the second. Only Johannes' fast and durable white horse saved him from being captured and surely killed by the pursuing Indians. Although Johannes escaped with his life, the fruit of three years work in the gold fields was gone. With heavy heart he turned around and headed back to California.

Johannes would spend an additional four years in California attempting to recover his losses. He would have at least one more

close call with death. Camped with a partner, Johannes awoke the following morning to find the man murdered in his sleep and all their possessions gone. Eventually Johannes had what he considered enough gold and made the return trip to West Prussia, no doubt taking the safest route available to him. When he arrived in the fall of 1858, after having been gone for ten years, Helene Jantzen was still waiting for him. What a reunion this must have been for these two remarkable people. Johannes and Helene were quickly married and spent the winter of 1858-1859 in West Prussia before joining their relatives in the Am Trakt Colony, Samara Province, Russia.

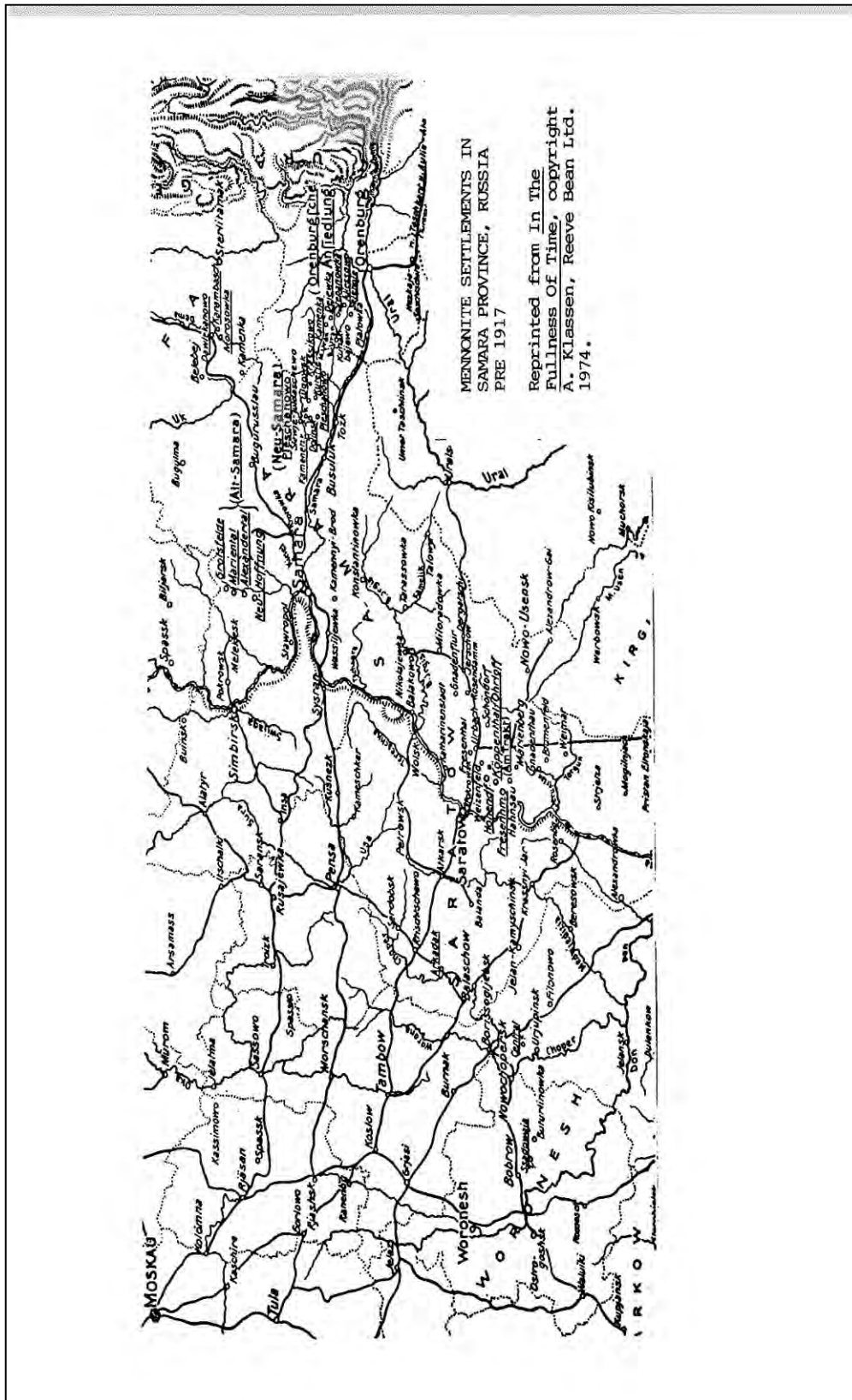
Much had happened in West Prussia during the ten years of Johannes D. Dyck's absence. His father, Dietrich "Dirk" Dyck, had died June 25, 1849, at Steegenwerder (near Poppau), West Prussia, of an apparent heart attack. His son Cornelius found him dead in the fields of his farm. His older sister Catharine had married on November 20, 1849. Johannes' older brother Dietrich and two younger brothers, Jacob (IV), our direct descendant grandfather, and Cornelius had sold the family farm at Poppau, West Prussia, and emigrated to Am Trakt, Russia.

## **The Promise of Mother Russia**

In 1848 universal military conscription was introduced in Prussia. Until then Mennonites had been granted exemption from military service based on their religious belief of complete non-resistance. Even non-combatant military service was unacceptable to Mennonites, such as being part of a medical unit. As a result of the conscription law many Mennonite families in West Prussia made the decision to emigrate to Russia. The precedent for such a move had been established 65 years earlier in 1788.

Under a Manifesto issued in 1763 by the Russian Czarina, Catharine II (the Great), large numbers of West Prussian Mennonite families immigrated to the Ukraine region of Russia in the years 1788 to 1835. This Manifesto of 1763 contained nine articles that made immigration to Russia attractive to Mennonites. Prospective settlers were to be granted the following rights and privileges: (1) Free board and transportation from the Russian boundary to the place of settlement; (2) The right to settle in any part of the country and to pursue any occupation; (3) A loan for building of houses etc.; (4) Perpetual exemption from military and





**Map 5**  
 Mennonite Settlements in Samara Province, Russia, before 1917  
 Reprinted from *In The Fullness Of Time*, copyright A. Klassen, Reeve Bean Ltd., 1974

civil service; (5) Exemption from payment of taxes for a period of years; (6) Free exercise of religious practices, and to those who founded agricultural settlements, the right to build and control their own schools and churches; (7) The right to do mission work among non-Christians; (8) The right of local self government for agricultural communities; (9) The right of every family to import its possessions free of duty. The first Mennonite settlement established under the articles of the Manifesto was that of Chortitza in the Ukraine. A total of 462 West Prussian Mennonite families made up the core of this first Russian Mennonite settlement. During the years 1803-1806, the time of French occupation of West Prussia, an additional 365 Mennonite families made the overland trek to the Ukraine and established a second settlement called Molotschna. By the end of migration in 1835 some 1200 families, or about 6,000 people, had made the move to these two settlements of Chortitza and Molotschna. In the 1870s and 1880s many Mennonites from these two settlements would again move, this time to the United States. Most settled in the states of Nebraska and Kansas.

The Russian government granted permission to 100 West Prussian Mennonite families to establish a colony in the Russian province of Samara in 1853. The conditions under which they came differed somewhat from those of the earlier settlements of Chortitza and Molotschna. Exemption from military service was only for 20 years and each family had to make a payment to the Russian embassy in Berlin of 35 talers, a considerable sum in those days. In addition these Mennonites were expected to be model farmers, an example to the surrounding population, and to bring with them to Russia the necessary implements, draft animals, and seeds. Another requirement of the Russian government was that there would be one family of craftsmen for every three of farm families; carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, etc. These stipulations meant that only the more affluent Mennonite farmers from West Prussia were allowed to immigrate to Russia at this time, insuring that no financial burden would be imposed on the Russian government. These 100 families came primarily from the Ladekopp and Furstenwerder congregations and were led by Johann Wall and Claus Epp Sr., the Mayor of Furstenwerder. Johann Wall would later become Elder of the Koepental-Orloff Mennonite Church at Am Trakt. Jacob Dyck (IV) and his two brothers, Dietrich and Cornelius, immigrated to Am Trakt in 1854. The name Am Trakt is derived from the road near the settlement known as Salztrakt, or salt road. This road had been used to haul salt from the Elton Sea for many years. After wintering over in the nearby village of Privolynaya the Mennonites began building in the spring of 1854. The first village in the settlement was Hahnsau, followed by Koepental in 1855. When completed in 1880 the Am Trakt settlement consisted of ten villages on 37,800 acres of land. After

Hahnsau and Koepental came Lindenau, 1856-1859, Fresenheim, 1856-1859, Hohendorf, 1862, Lysanderhoeh, 1864, Orloff, 1871, Ostenfeld, 1872, Medental, 1872, and Valuyevka, 1875. Except for the last two villages all of these names were transplanted from West Prussian Mennonite villages.

The Am Trakt settlement prospered quickly, unlike the sister colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna that endured several periods of hardship before becoming economically stable. The selection process of the Russian government paid early dividends in this respect. The soil of Am Trakt was not as good as that of the Ukraine, but these industrious Mennonite farmers were able to produce good crops of wheat, rye, barley, and oats in the first decades of the settlement. They introduced the practice of crop rotation used by Mennonite farmers in West Prussia. An integral part of this rotation system allowed for fields to be set aside in green fallow for a period of 4-5 years after several years of use. This practice helped to replenish the natural nutrients of the fragile soil of Am Trakt. The use of commercial fertilizers was not known at this time and animal manure was more valuable as a source of fuel than fertilizer. Even with this careful use of the land many acres of farm ground were virtually used up by the early 1890s and crop production decreased.

There was no natural pasture in the vicinity of the Am Trakt settlement and it was only after several years of trial and error that suitable native grasses were found that would sustain herds of livestock. Cropland that would no longer produce was planted in grass and enough hay and forage was available by the early years of the 20th century to allow considerable dairy operations in Am Trakt. A cheese factory was built in 1908.

This area of Samara province was almost totally without trees when the first Mennonite settlers arrived. The first attempts by the settlers to plant trees ended in failure. The harsh climate of hot summers and bitterly cold, long winters killed all but the hardiest varieties of shade and orchard trees. From their nearby neighbors, the Volga Germans, the Am Trakt settlers learned which trees could survive the harsh climate. By 1879 the ten villages of the Am Trakt settlement boasted tens of thousands of shade trees and hundreds of orchards with thousands of fruit trees. On a road that ran between the farms of the villages of Hohendorf, Lysanderhoeh, Ostenfeld, and Medental trees were planted on both sides. This long, straight road lined with shade trees was a magnificent boulevard known throughout the region for its beauty.

Lysanderhoeh village in the Am Trakt settlement is where Jacob Dyck (IV) started his new life sometime after its founding in 1864. In 1873, at the age of 41, he married Justine Wall. Justine was born February 1, 1855, at Mierauerwald, West Prussia. Jacob had been married twice before and widowed both times. His first



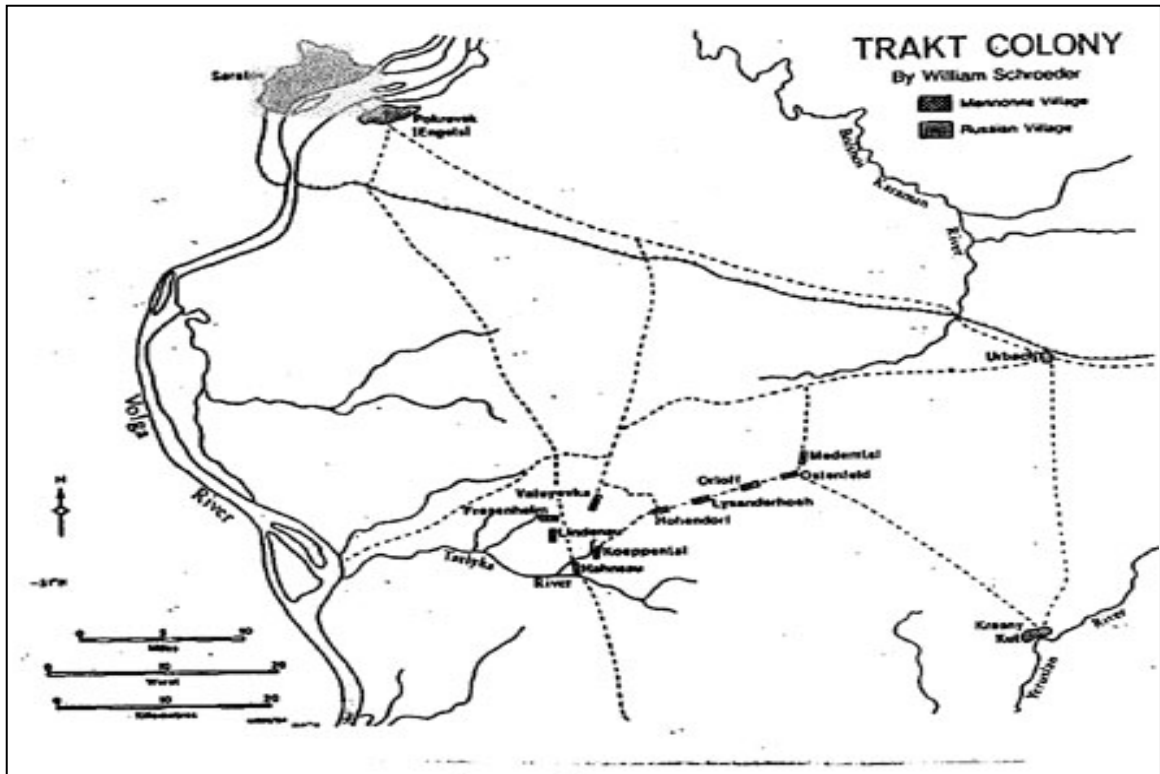
wife was Maria Siebert whom he married in 1860. She died in 1862 leaving no issue. Jacob's second wife was a widow named Anna Penner. Anna was pregnant at the time her first husband died and the house she lived in unfinished. Here she gave birth to her second child, Peter Penner. Anna's first child was a daughter named Catharine. The marriage of Jacob Dyck (IV) and Anna Penner produced one child, a daughter Anna. Sadly, Anna Penner Dyck died giving birth to her daughter. So it was that when Justine Wall married Jacob Dyck (IV) at the young age of 18 she was immediately the stepmother to three children, only one of which was fathered by her husband. Despite this, and their age difference of 23 years, the marriage of Jacob and Justine was considered a great love match.

Jacob Dyck (1832-1882), father of Jacob J. Dyck. Photo *circa* 1875, Am Trakt, Russia.

Photo: Authors' collection.

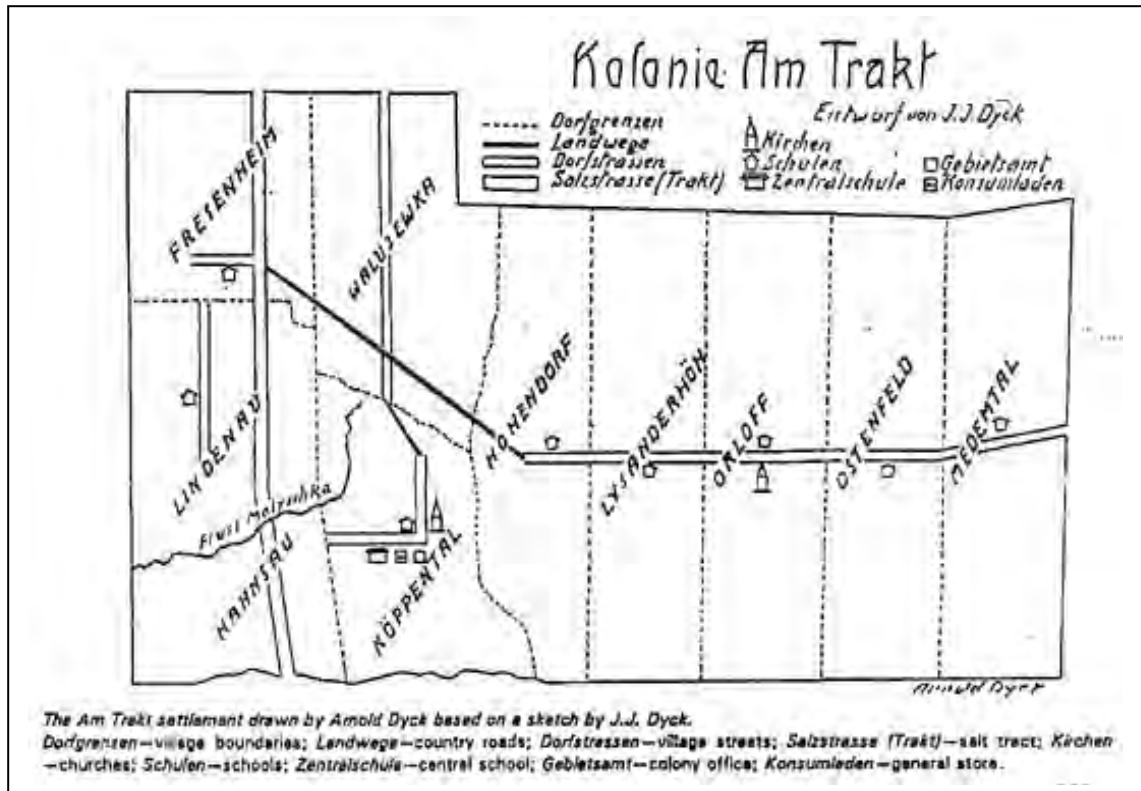
The Village Settlement						
<i>Farms &amp; Inhabitants in 1897</i>						
<i>Village</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Farms</i>	<i>Farms</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Founded</i>	<i>65 dess.</i>				
1. Hahnsau	1854	[land sold to non-Mennonites ca. 1880]				
2. Köppental	1855	25	36	103	98	211
3. Lindenau	1856-59	-	26	93	81	174
4. Fresenheim	1856-59	-	21	46	57	103
5. Hohendorf	1862	-	18	47	49	96
6. Lysanderhöh	1864	-	22	62	57	119
7. Orloff	1871	26	17	44	36	80
8. Valuievka	1875	26	8	23	34	57
9. Ostenfeld	1872	26	19	66	61	127
10. Medemtal	1872	30	30	118	101	219
Total			197	602	574	1176

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**Map 6**, above:  
Am Trakt Mennonite Colony in Samara, Russia

**Map 7**, below:  
*Kolonie Am Trakt* as drawn by Arnold Dyck



## The Wall Family Name: Origins and Early Ancestry

Of the four family names that are the focus of this book; Dyck, Harder, Claassen, and Wall, the least is known about our Wall ancestors. According to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Wall is a Mennonite family name of probable Dutch origin. The author Horst Penner, in *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, says unequivocally that the Walls come from Holland. Originally the name was spelled “de Waal” as noted in records of the Mennonite congregation at Danzig, West Prussia. Among the West Frisian Islands off the west coast of Holland is the island of Texel, the largest of this group of islands. A prominent city on the island of Texel is De Waal. The city of De Waal was home to many Anabaptists and had a Mennonite congregation before 1550. Thus it seems highly probable that the city of De Waal on the island of Texel is the origin of our family name Wall. The confines of the 71 square miles of the island of Texel undoubtedly made the existence of Mennonites precarious, and for this reason they were among the first to immigrate to Danzig. Anabaptist trial records from Amsterdam, Holland, noted by Horst Penner, list a Jacob de Waal that died in Danzig in 1549. The signature of Jacob's son or grandson, Pieter De Waele, appears in Danzig Mennonite records in 1586. The fourth generation of this family was represented by Elias de Wale operating a brandy distillery in Danzig in 1660. Gradual changes in the spelling of the name can be seen through these four generations. By the 18th century “Wall” had become the most common spelling, but with many families retaining the “de.”

As with most Mennonites, agriculture was the primary pursuit of the Wall family. In 1726 additional farmland near Marienburg was made available to Mennonite farmers. Isaac and Jacob Wall of Danzig settled in the village of Stadtfelde, near Marienburg, in 1727 and probably became members of the Heubuden Mennonite congregation formed in 1728. As the years passed the Wall name appeared in the records of the Mennonite congregations of Tiegenhagen, Rosenort, and Ladekopp.

Our oldest known ancestor in the Wall family is Johann Wall (I) born in Broske, West Prussia, exact date unknown, *circa* 1760. Broske is in close proximity to Ladekopp so it is logical to assume that our Wall ancestors were members of this Mennonite congregation. Johann married Helene Claassen, date unknown, and died at a date unknown. Helene's date of birth is unknown, but the year of her death was 1846 at Broske, West Prussia. Johann and Helene's son Johann Wall (II) was born at Broske, West Prussia, date unknown. It is not known if he had any brothers or sisters.

On February 24, 1815, Johann Wall (II) married his first wife, Justine Toews. Justine was the daughter of Johann Toews, date of death April 28, 1813, and Justine Claassen, born July 10, 1771, died January 10, 1806. Johann Toews was a teacher and minister at the Schonsee Mennonite Church. In addition to daughter Justine, there were two Toews sons, Franz and Johann.

Again, using *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* as reference, Toews is listed as a name of probable Dutch origin. Horst Penner says the Toews come from East Frisia and the lower Rhine regions. At Gladbach three Thewis are listed in the baptismal records for 1622. A Peter Tewes is listed as plenipotentiary of the East Frisian Mennonites in 1658. It isn't until the early years of the 18th century (1727-1734) that Tewes are found in the Mennonite villages of the Vistula Delta

region of West Prussia; Cornelis Tewes at Einlage, Cornelius Tewes at Frejenhuben, and Cornels Tewes at Schonsee. In the records of the Ladekopp Old Flemish Mennonite congregation, Isaac and Johann Toews are listed as ministers from 1762 and 1767 respectively.

Johann Wall (II) and Justine Toews had two children during their nine-year marriage. Johann Wall (III) was born January 8, 1816 and his sister Catherine was born *circa* June 1824. Justine Toews Wall died June 2, 1824, most likely from complications of childbirth. In December of 1824 Johann (II) married Margaret Regier. There were six children born to this union; Helene, Cornelius, Gerhardt, Jakob, Maria, and Elisabeth. Of these six children only information is available about Gerhardt. He was born May 6, 1835, in West Prussia. Gerhardt married Margaret Hamm and died on June 20, 1878. No date or place of death is available for Johann Wall (II). His second wife, Margaret Regier, died in 1852.

Johann Wall (III), our direct descendant grandfather, married Catharina Wiens on November 8, 1816, at Schonsee An Der Weichel (Schonsee On The Vistula). Catharina was born April 1, 1827, at Neumunsterbergerfeld, West Prussia. Her parents were Peter and Helene Wiens.



Cornelius Seibert, half brother of Justine Wall Dyck, uncle of Jacob J. Dyck. Date of birth *circa* 1865. Cornelius is wearing the uniform of the Russian Forest Service (Forsteiwesen). Photo *circa* 1885. Mennonite men served in the Forest Service in lieu of serving in the Czarist Russian Army.

Photo: Authors' collection.

Catharina's maiden name of Wiens is another old Prussian Mennonite name. Horst Penner's research into the origins of family names of Prussian Mennonites tells us that the Wiens' come from the German city of Cologne on the Rhine River in Westphalia. Old names for what was known as the "wine quarter" near Cologne were Vingst, Vinze, and Winze. From these names evolve that of Hermann Wynes, a teacher in Danzig *circa* 1568. Menno Simons spent a good deal of time in Cologne, baptizing many into the Mennonite faith. Menno's travels to Danzig undoubtedly pointed the way for immigration for his followers in Westphalia far to the west of Prussia. By the close of the 17th century Wynes had become Wiens and no members of this family were living in Danzig proper, but had moved into the surrounding countryside. The first Wiens recorded to be living in the Vistula Delta, the Werder, was Harem (Hermann) Wiens in the village of Altababke. Horst Penner believes this Hermann to be a grandson of Hermann Wynes, the Danzig teacher.

Four children were born to Johann Wall (III) and Catharina Wiens, all in Mierauerwald, West Prussia. Julius, the eldest son, was born February 15, 1852. Next were two daughters, Anna, born July 25, 1853, and Justine, our grandmother, born February 1, 1855. A second son, Cornelius, was born May 2, 1858.

These four children being born in West Prussia shows that Johann (III) and Catharina were not among the initial group of 100 families that went to Samara, Russia, to start the new Am Trakt colony in 1853. They were, however, among the earlier settlers, having made the overland trek to Am Trakt from West Prussia in a covered wagon in 1862. Within a couple of years of the family's arrival at Am Trakt, Johann Wall (III) died leaving his wife Catharina a widow with four children. The date of Johann's death is unknown. Catharina remarried within a short time. Her second husband had been the manager of the Wall farm and his name was Johann Siebert. He was quickly accepted by the young Wall children as a much-loved stepfather. Johann Siebert and Catharina Wall Siebert had three additional children, two daughters and a son. Years later, after he had been widowed, Johann Siebert continued to be the object of great affection for his Wall stepchildren, and later, Dyck step-grandchildren.

It was at the home of her mother, Catharina, and stepfather, Johann Siebert, that young Justine Wall married Jacob Dyck (IV). Johannes Dietrich Dyck, Jacob's older brother, had moved to the Am Trakt settlement soon after his marriage to Helene Jantzen and recorded the wedding in his diary.

26 Sept. 1873-Afternoon at Sieberts' in Orloff with Brother Jakob Dyck on the occasion of wedding. Jakob Toews performed the ceremony and Bernhard Harder from



Molotchna Colony gave a speech. There were 69 families invited.

## Later Dyck History

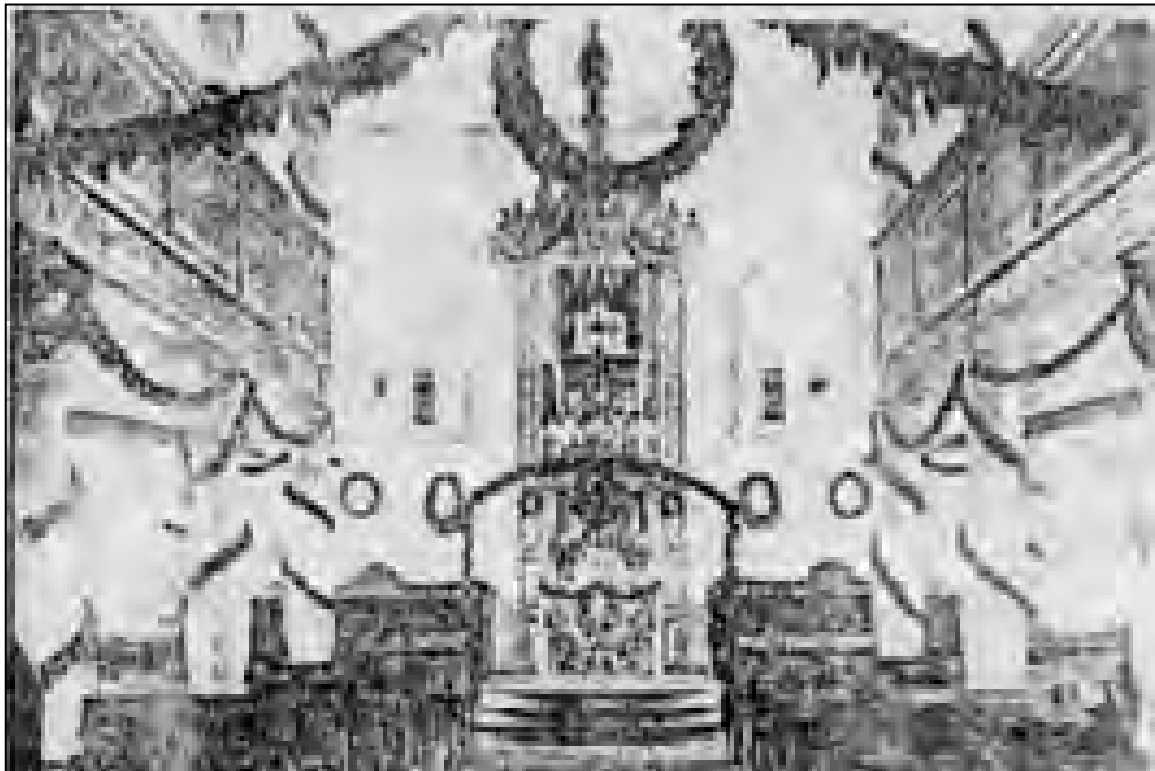
After Jacob (IV) and Justine were married they moved to the Ostenfeld community in Am Trakt. Ostenfeld was a little east of Lysanderhoeh with Orloff in between them. It may be that the Penner family of Jacob's second wife Anna reclaimed the home he lived in after his marriage to Justine Wall. The three children of Anna Penner Dyck, Catharine, Peter, and Jacob's daughter Anna, were the heirs to this property and they continued to live with Jacob and Justine. But it appears that the Penner family was not entirely pleased with Jacob's marriage to Justine and the reclaiming of the Penner home was but the first action they took to show their displeasure.

In Ostenfeld Jacob and Justine's first son, Jacob, was born in 1874. He was stillborn but no date of birth or death is known. Their second child, a daughter Maria, was born October 1, 1876. Maria was followed by Johannes, born February 27, 1878, and Justine born September 26, 1879. On August 17, (August 4 by the Russian calendar) 1881, the first set of twins recorded in our family history was born to Jacob (IV) and Justine. Their names were Jacob (V) and Johanna. Jacob (V) would have the middle name (patronymic) of Jacobovich as required by Russian law to distinguish him as the son of a man named Jacob. Jacob Jacobovich is our direct descendant father and grandfather and will hereafter be referred to as Jacob J. Dyck in this book.

Jacob Dyck (IV) and his brothers Dietrich, Johannes Dietrich, and Cornelius appear to have been moderately prosperous farmers in the Am Trakt colony, and well-respected men. Certainly this was the case of Johannes Dietrich. Johannes settled in Fresenheim with his wife Helene in 1860. Fresenheim was in the northwestern end of the Am Trakt colony and Johannes' farm there eventually totaled 129 acres. In the winter of 1865 Johannes was elected Oberschultz of the Am Trakt colony. Oberschultz would be the equivalent of the office of mayor, or chief administrator. Such a position in the colony was honorary in the sense that it was not a paying job, nor a full-time one. But it was very important to the German Mennonites of Am Trakt. Johannes' responsibilities included maintaining the order of the colony, the administration of justice, and acting as a go between with the Russian government. In this latter capacity Johannes proved exceptionally capable, benefiting both his colony and the government of the Russian Czar. In recognition of this exceptional service the Russian government



Above: The Koeppental-Orloff Mennonite Church at Am Trakt. Jacob J. Dyck was baptized here in 1898. The church was destroyed after the Russian Revolution. Below: Interior of the Koeppental-Orloff Mennonite Church. Photos: Aaron Klassen, *In The Fullness Of Time*.



decorated Johannes on three separate occasions. The medals awarded to him were inscribed, "For Faithful Service," and "For Service to the Czar and the Fatherland." Johannes held the post of Oberschultz for 18 years, from 1866 to 1884.

Entries from Johannes Dietrich's diary show that there was much interaction between him and his brothers and their families. On December 22, 1879, Johannes recorded that Jacob (IV) had stopped by on his way home from making a purchase of building supplies to start a business in Ostenfeld. What this business was is not recorded, but most likely it was farm related. Johannes had started his own flourmill in Fresenheim and it may be that Jacob was doing the same in Ostenfeld.

In March of 1882 typhoid fever came to the Am Trakt settlements and struck the family of Jacob Dyck (IV). Jacob's stepchildren, Catherine and Peter Penner, and his own daughter, Maria, five years old, contracted the disease. Jacob moved the infected children from the main house to one of the farm's outbuildings to try to prevent the spread of the fever to the rest of the family. There Jacob remained and cared for the sick children while Justine tended the rest of the family in the house. Almost inevitably, Jacob contracted the disease himself. On March 23, 1882, Jacob's brothers Johannes Dietrich and Dietrich visited him as recorded in Johannes', diary:

23 Mar 1882 - Drove to Jakob Dyck's. Dietrich Dyck drove along. Almost impossible to drive, such a bad road. We found Bro. Jakob still very sick, although it was said he is somewhat better it seemed to me he was deathly sick. Peter was already up but Kaete and Maria lay ill with the same sickness, typhoid fever.

2 Apr 1882 - I and Dietrich Dyck drove again to Jakob Dyck and found him very ill.

4 Apr 1882 - P. Janzen brought the news that Brother Jakob Dyck had died at 6 a.m. today, I immediately sent a letter off to health officials.

9 Apr 1882 - Mama, Johannes and I attended Brother Jakob Dyck's funeral.

Jacob's stepchildren, Catherine and Peter Penner, and his daughter Maria survived. They owed their lives to their devoted and loving father Jacob.

Jacob's death left his wife, Justine, a young widow of 27 years of age with eight children to care for. At this time, when she needed help the most, it seems as though her family, and that of her

husband, were neglectful of their duty. The two Penner children, Catherine and Peter, along with Jacob's daughter Anna, were taken by their Penner relatives soon after Jacob's death. This may have lessened the immediate worry of Justine on how to care for so many children, but was not done in a spirit of caring by the Penner family. Once they had the children the Penners were perfectly willing to let Justine and her Dyck children fend for themselves.

Justine's decision to marry Cornelius Froese a few years after the death of Jacob Dyck (IV) was met with almost unanimous disapproval by the families of Justine's children and stepchildren. But they may have been partly to blame. Surely Justine's plight was known to all of them and they knew that without their help she would have to do whatever she saw as necessary to provide for the children. Still, Cornelius Froese seems a poor choice as Justine's rescuer. He was known to be crude and rough in manner, a poor farmer and provider for his own children. Unlike the beloved Johann Siebert, Justine's own stepfather, Cornelius Froese was intensely disliked by his Dyck stepchildren; Maria, Johannes, Justine, Jacob Jacobovich, and Johanna. The fact that he was responsible for the Dyck home burning to the ground didn't endear him to anyone. One version of this story says that Froese knocked over a kerosene lamp while drinking after the rest of the family had gone to bed. Another that he started the fire by careless smoking, again while drinking.

Cornelius Froese was also a bully who physically abused his stepchildren. On one occasion Froese went too far. Jacob J. Dyck was about ten years old at the time, his brother Johannes 14 or 15. They were in the barn tending to the horses late one evening; Jacob was holding a lantern so that Johannes could remove harnesses. Cornelius Froese came into the barn reeking of alcohol. He became impatient with the progress of the two boys and took over Johannes' job. When he didn't think that Jacob was holding the lantern right, Cornelius struck Jacob in the head, sending him sprawling to the barn floor. Johannes helped Jacob to his feet and then turned his attention on his stepfather. Johannes grabbed the older man by his jacket and shoved him hard up against the barn wall. In no uncertain terms Johannes told Cornelius Froese that if he ever struck Jacob, or any other of the children again, he would kill Froese. This whole sordid story of the widow Justine and her children shows that even Mennonites and their families were not immune to their own failings and shortcomings. All the faith in the world is worth nothing unless it is put to everyday, practical use.

After the burning of their home in Lindenau, the result of Cornelius Froese's carelessness, the family moved into a home purchased in Koepental. Here, Jacob Jacobovich and his siblings attended Kreisschul, the local district school. Their teacher was a Russian woman, but they received their religious instruction from



Anna Dyck Tjahrt (1872-1945) and her husband Peter Tjahrt ( -1924). Anna was Jacob J. Dyck's half sister, her mother was Anna Penner. Jacob lived with Anna and Peter Tjahrt during his early teen years in Am Trakt. Peter Tjahrt died in Canada while traveling in North America visiting relatives. Anna Dyck Tjahrt died in Berlin, Germany during an Allied bombing raid at the close of World War II. Photo *circa* 1910, Saratov, Russia. Photo: Authors' collection.

Elder Johann Quiring of the Koeppental-Orloff Mennonite Church. Probably because Cornelius Froese owned land in Lindenau, the house in Koeppental was taken down and rebuilt in Lindenau. Jacob Jacobovich finished his formal education at about this time, 1895-1896, and went to live with his older half sister, Anna Dyck Tjarht, in Ostenfeld. Anna had married Peter Tjarht a couple of years before and the couple lived on the farm they bought from Cornelius Dyck in the Am Trakt settlement. Cornelius Dyck was Anna and Jacob J. Dyck's uncle. He had immigrated to Woodland in the state of Washington, U.S.A., in 1890.

Cornelius Dyck's brother, Johannes Dietrich, had always longed to return to America. Indeed, it was his first choice as a place to settle after he returned to West Prussia in 1858 from the gold fields of California. But his wife Helene would have no part of America after having heard Johannes' tales of Indians and the Wild West. Johannes' stories of his ten years in America probably influenced his brother Cornelius' decision to go to the American Northwest. Improvements in mail systems allowed Cornelius in Washington to keep in close contact with his brother Johannes Dietrich in Am Trakt, Russia. Johannes Dietrich was amazed at the changes that had taken place in America in the 40 years from 1850 to 1890.

In route to Washington, the Cornelius Dyck family spent some time in the Mennonite communities of Kansas. They may have considered settling in Kansas because Cornelius' son Dietrich filed a Declaration of Intention to become a citizen of the United States in Marion County, Kansas, on July 18, 1890. Eventually the family settled in Cowlitz County, Washington, near the community of Woodland. At this time, 1890, the family consisted of father Cornelius, born August 23, 1835, mother Cornelia nee Pauls, born May 4, 1842, and sons Dietrich and Cornelius Jr., born August 24, 1867, and February 13, 1873, respectively. Two daughters were born and died in Am Trakt, Russia. They are Cornelia, born December 24, 1865, died July 9, 1866, and Helene, born July 29, 1869, died August 17, 1874. The son Cornelius Jr. was mentally handicapped and was placed in a Washington State Hospital after the death of his mother Cornelia on March 21, 1913. Cornelius Sr. had died on July 8, 1893, only three years after the family arrived in Washington. Johannes Dietrich in Am Trakt, Russia, recorded receiving word of his brother's death in his diary:

29 July 1893-Received a letter from Dietrich Dyck (this is the diarist's nephew, not his brother of the same name) from the state of Washington USA with the news of his father, my brother Cornelius had died of a heart attack on 8 July. Dietrich found him in the field just exactly like my brother Cornelius had found our father in 1849 in the field. Besides

our two half sisters who are still alive, I am the last of five right siblings who are still living. Also my evening inclines toward the sunset. (Johannes Dietrich had three half sisters: Agnete, Maria, and Justine. It is not known which two of these three were still living in 1893.)

Back in Woodland, Washington, Cornelius Dyck Jr. died April 3, 1926. The sole surviving member of the family, Dietrich, never married. He had sold the family's farm and equipment to pay for his mother's medical care before she died of cancer. After that, Dietrich worked as a farm laborer in the Woodland, Washington area. He died April 2, 1943. Dietrich left behind only two watch fobs, a stamp box, and the Dyck family Bible. This Bible is now in the possession of the Cowlitz County Historical Society Museum. The entire family is buried together in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Cemetery near Woodland, Washington. There are no markers on the graves.

While living with his half-sister Anna and brother-in-law Peter Tjarht, Jacob J. Dyck maintained close contact with his mother, Justine, his brother Johannes, and his sisters Maria, Justine, and Johanna. Johannes Dietrich Dyck's home seems to have been the place where the family could gather without the despised stepfather, Cornelius Froese. Johannes Dietrich made note of one such occasion in his diary:

25 December 1895-In the afternoon all the children except Mariechen with their children here. The tree was lit and the children received their little gifts and yet general Christmas joy prevails. Jakob Dyck's Jacob and Tinchén were also here. (Jakob Dyck's Jacob would be Jacob Jacobovich and Tinchén his mother Justine, who was always referred to as "Wall's Tinchén.")

On May 25, 1898, at the age of 17, Jacob Jacobovich was baptized upon confession of faith by Johann Quiring at the Koepental-Orloff Mennonite Church in Am Trakt. Soon after his baptism Jacob journeyed to Kazakhstan near the Terguv-Tergive River with his stepfather Cornelius Froese. Cornelius had entered into a rental agreement with the owner of a large tract of land. This agreement also included management of many farm workers and herders. The exact size of this parcel of land is unknown, but it must have been vast. Jacob said it covered "13 gueter" (estates), that to cover the 60 miles across the farm required changing horses several times. Plowing the soil required five yoke of oxen and three people per plow. They used 12 of these plowing teams at a time. Herders tended 7,000 head of sheep. The Russian landowner furnished the plows and threshing machines for harvesting the

wheat. Half of the income of the farm went to the landowner. Jacob and Cornelius remained in Kazakhstan for three years, until 1901. One of Jacob's most vivid recollections from this time was of the gleaners that came from across the border in Turkestan. It was customary to leave a small amount of grain for these gleaners and Jacob remembered them as the most beautiful women he would ever see.

During Jacob's absence from Am Trakt his beloved uncle Johannes Dietrich Dyck died. Final entries from Johannes' diary chronicle his last days:

October 30, 1898: Saturday and Sunday I did not feel well. I drove a distance on the Trakt, but I was so cold even though I had my fur coat on.

November 3, 1898: Tuesday Elder Quiring and B. Epp were here to witness my last will and testament. Mariachen stayed here.

November 7, 1898: This morning I felt bad. None of the children have come yet today.

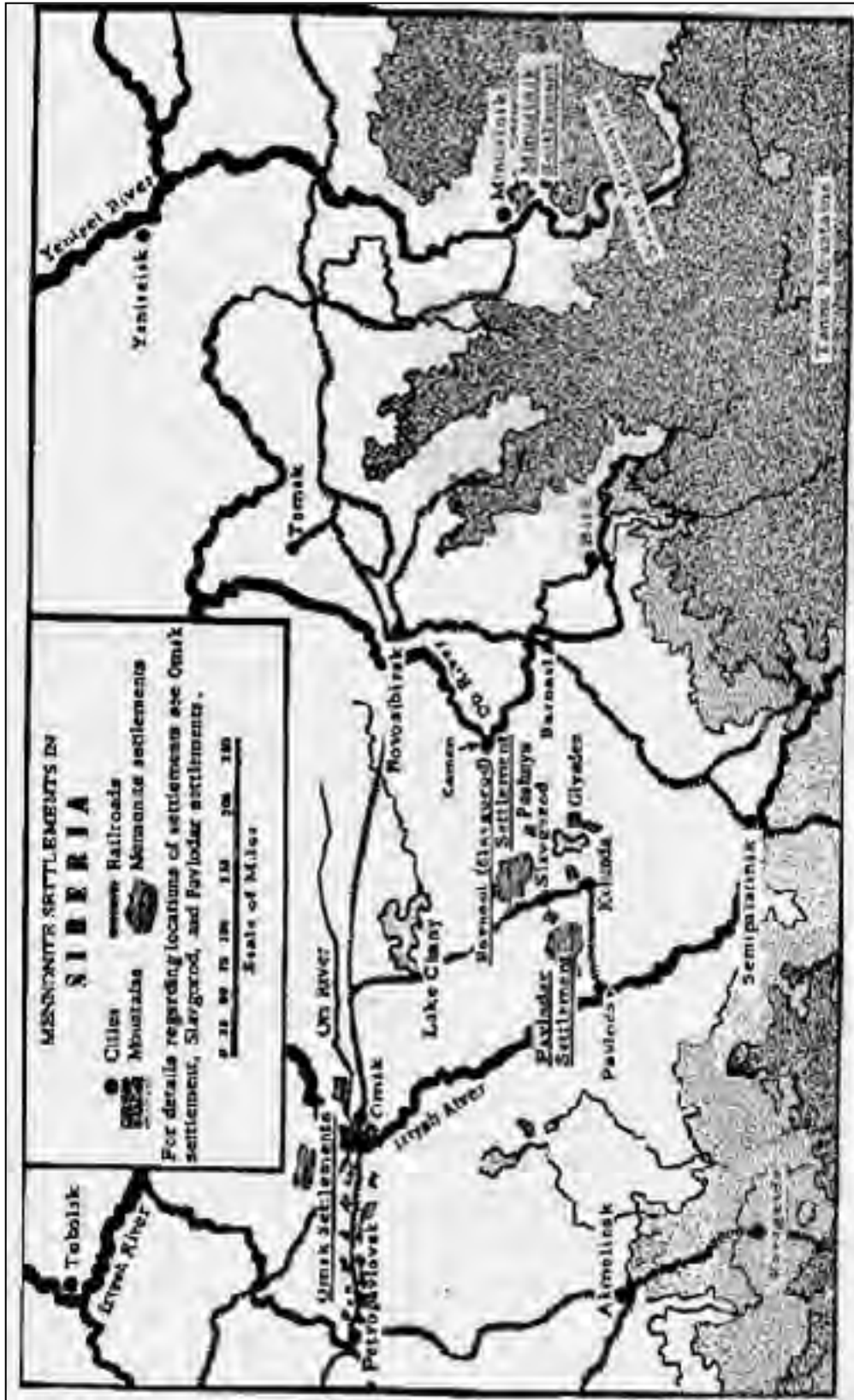
On November 11, 1898, Johannes Dietrich Dyck's remarkable life ended. In the span of his 72 years he had been a storekeeper and merchant in West Prussia; adventurer, frontiersman and gold miner in the California Gold Rush of 1849, farmer and Oberschultz of Am Trakt, Russia.

Johannes' death undoubtedly meant more to Jacob Jacobovich than that of his own father when Jacob was less than a year old. Upon returning to Am Trakt from Kazakhstan, Jacob found work on the farm of Johann Bergmann at Hohendorf in the Am Trakt settlement and remained there for the next two years, until 1903.

Jacob's older brother Johannes, nicknamed "Krolljer" (Curly) because of his blond, curly hair, married Maria Wall in 1904. Maria was born March 1, 1886, at Am Trakt, and would die April 13, 1974, in Siberia, Russia. Jacob spent a lot of time with his older brother and their sibling love would endure as a legacy through subsequent generations of their children. Having employment with Johann Bergmann, and being able to enjoy the company of his brother Johannes and wife Maria, it is surprising that Jacob left Am Trakt and traveled to the Siberian Mennonite settlement of Barnaul in 1904.

Jacob's mother, Justine Wall Dyck Froese, had gone to Barnaul with her husband, Cornelius Froese, and their two children; Gustav born in 1889, and Wilhelm, born in 1891. Other of their children probably accompanied them, but just which ones are not

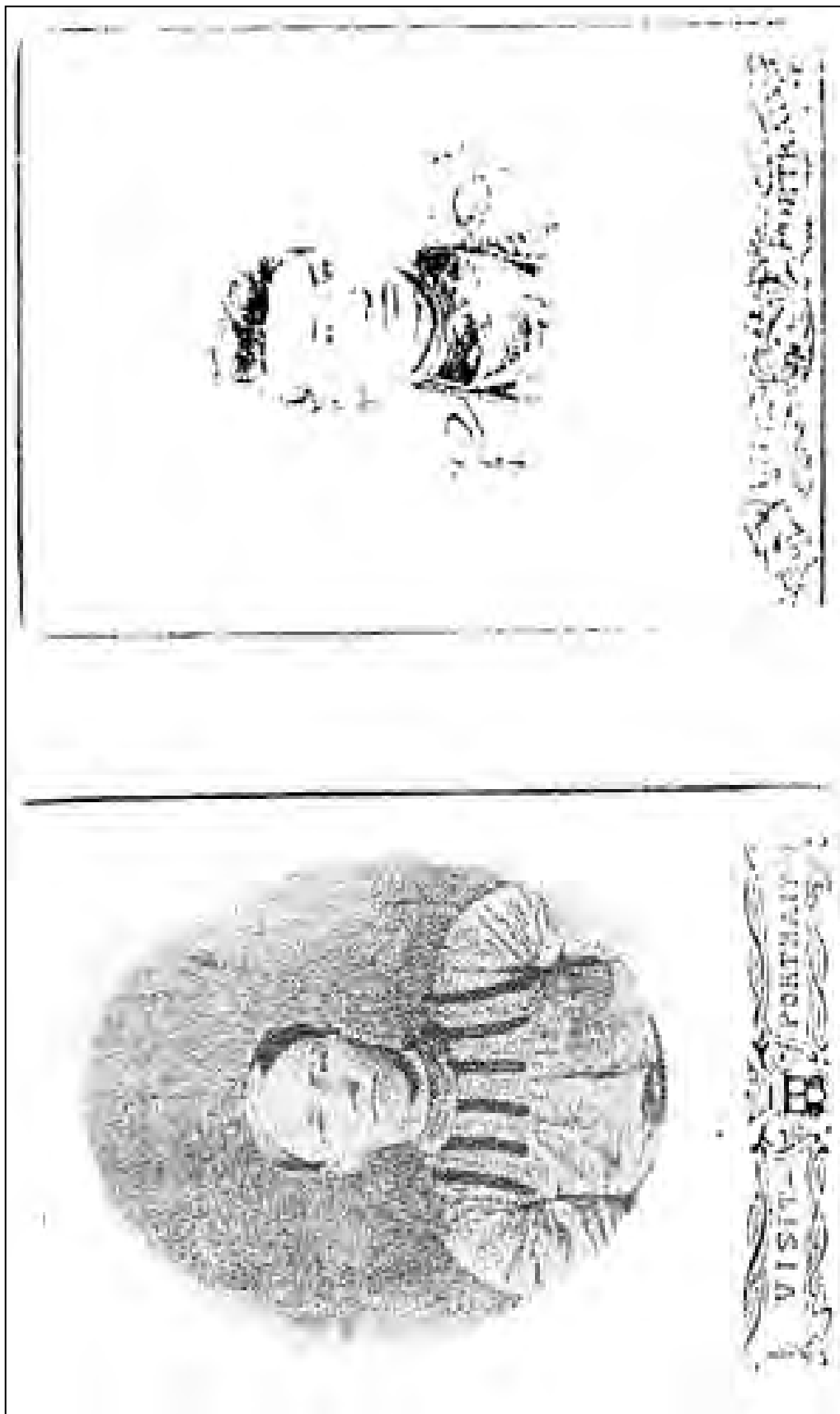




**Map 8**  
 Mennonite Settlements in Siberia  
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Johannes Dyck (1878-1921) and his wife Maria nee Wall (1886-1974). Johannes was Jacob J. Dyck's older brother and the father of "Mimi", Jacob's beloved niece. Photo *circa* 1904-05, Saratov, Russia. Photo: Authors' collection.



Sisters of Jacob J. Dyck. Left: Jacob's twin sister, Johanna Dyck Froese (1881-1970). Johanna immigrated to Brazil in 1930 with her husband Jacob Froese and adopted son Cornelius. Right: Justine Dyck Penner (1879-19--). Justine remained in Russia. Her fate is unknown. Photos: *circa* 1900, Authors' collection.

known for certain. Barnaul-Slavgorod would be the largest Mennonite settlement in Siberia established in the pre-1917 Revolution period. By 1925 this settlement numbered 58 Mennonite villages with a combined population of 13,173. Cornelius Froese was probably enticed by the offer of farmland available to homesteaders in the Barnaul settlement. An uneasy truce must have continued between Cornelius Froese and Jacob Jacobovich because Jacob stayed with his mother and stepfather for two years. Froese probably grudgingly valued Jacob's labor while creating a farm and home on the Siberian Steppe. Jacob's motivation was to aid his mother and the two young children, Gustav and Wilhelm, Jacob's half brothers. The rigors of farming in Siberia were difficult under the best of circumstances. The intense cold and vastness of Siberia is the subject of much great Russian literature. Siberia is a psychological experience as much as it is a physical one. For Jacob Jacobovich this was epitomized by a trip he made in the winter of 1905-1906. After loading a sled with wheat from the previous spring's harvest he set off for the market in Semipalatinsk (Semey) some 90 miles to the south of Barnaul. Leading the horse-drawn sled along frozen riverbeds whenever possible to avoid the bitter wind, Jacob endured temperatures of -50 F. Great care had to be exercised in order to protect himself and the horses. Even if they were able to travel 15 miles a day, which is doubtful, the round trip would have required two weeks' exposure to brutally cold weather.

Jacob J. Dyck returned to Am Trakt from Barnaul the same way he went, on the then-new Trans-Siberian Railroad, in May of 1906. His half-brother Gustav would have been 17 years old, and Jacob probably felt Gustav was old enough to help his father and mother on the Siberian farm. The younger half-brother, Wilhelm, died in 1906 at the age of 15 after being thrown from a horse. Whether he died before Jacob's departure isn't known. Also not known is whether Justine was aware of Jacob's plans to go to America. If she were, the goodbyes would have been especially tearful for Justine knowing that she probably would never again see her loving, protective son Jacob.

Arriving back in Am Trakt Jacob found that his brother Johannes was the proud father of a baby girl, Maria, nicknamed "Mimi," born in 1905. Jacob adored his niece and would make a special request in 1951 that a newborn granddaughter be named Maria Louisa as a namesake for Mimi. Jacob stayed with his brother Johannes for the remainder of 1906 and tried to convince Johannes to accompany him to America. Jacob and Johannes' older stepbrother, Peter Penner, and a friend, Edward Esau, had already emigrated to the Emmaus Mennonite community near rural Whitewater, Kansas. Letters from Peter and Edward in America encouraged the Dyck brothers to come and join them. Jacob

Jacobovich was footloose and fancy free, so to speak, and eager to go. Not so with Johannes. He had a wife and daughter, and was already engaged in farming at Am Trakt. His wife's family was also at Am Trakt. Then too, there was their mother in Barnaul, Siberia. Who would look out for her if they both went to America? In the end Jacob decided to go alone. The day before he left he carried little Maria in his arms all day, loathe to leave his precious niece.

Early in 1907 Jacob J. Dyck traveled overland from Am Trakt to Riga, Latvia. There he stayed with Mennonite families for a time hoping that his brother Johannes would change his mind and come with his wife and daughter. They must have had a predetermined cutoff date that passed before Jacob sailed from the port city of Libau (Liepaja), Latvia, on February 27, 1907. From Latvia, Jacob sailed to Hull, England. Disembarking at Hull the immigrants bound for America were literally herded into cattle cars for a train trip to the port of Liverpool, England. This inhumane experience left Jacob with an intense dislike for the English that lasted to his dying day. From Liverpool, Jacob crossed the Atlantic Ocean aboard the ship *Nordland* and arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 19, 1907. In his pocket he had a train ticket to Newton, Kansas, and less than \$5.00 in U.S. currency.



Jacob Jacobovich Dyck (1881-1954). This photograph was taken in Newton, Kansas soon after Jacob's arrival in the United States in 1907. Photo: Authors' collection.

## Dyck Family Lineage and Data

Sources of this information are Don Martin, Meta Toews, Marie G. Dyck, and Kaete J. Dyck. Our direct descendant Dyck grandfathers are underlined and in bold type.

### I. Paul Dyck

b. 1670, Junkeracker Bei Ostsee, West Prussia  
d. 1740, Junkeracker Bei Ostsee, West Prussia  
m. 1706

Susanne Hoffman Reimer (widow)

Issue: Number of children unknown

### II. Jacob Dyck (I)

b. 24 December 1707, Junkeracker Bei Ostsee, West Prussia  
d. 22 April 1786, Hegewald, West Prussia  
m. date unknown

Catharina Steffen

b. 1717

d. 13 March 1771

Issue: Number of children unknown

A.

### III. Jacob Dyck (II)

b. 18 November 1743, Hegewald, West Prussia  
d. 9 April 1820, Poppau, West Prussia  
m. 3 October 1765

Maria Claassen

Issue: 10

1. Catharina

b. Poppau, West Prussia

d. unknown

m. unknown

2. Jacob (III)

b. 21 October 1767, Poppau, West Prussia

d. 8 February 1843, Hauskampe, West

Prussia

3. Maria

b. Poppau, West Prussia

d. unknown

m. unknown

4. Abraham

b. Poppau, West Prussia

d. Poppau, West Prussia, died in infancy

m. N/A

5. Abraham

b. Poppau, West Prussia

- d. unknown
- m. unknown Cornelia
- b. Poppau, West Prussia
- d. Poppau, West Prussia, died in infancy
- m. N/A
- 6. Paul
  - b. Poppau, West Prussia
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
- 7. Cornelia
  - b. Poppau, West Prussia
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
- 8. Anna
  - b. Poppau, West Prussia
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
- 9. Cornelius
  - b. Poppau, West Prussia
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
- B. Paul Dyck
  - b. 10 March 1746, Hegewald, West Prussia
  - d. 2 January 1809, Lindenau, West Prussia
  - m. 20 February 1776
  - Maria Dyck Claassen (widow)
- IV. **Jacob Dyck (III)**
  - b. 21 October 1767, Poppau, West Prussia
  - d. 8 February 1843, Hauskampe, West Prussia
  - m. 29 October 1791
  - Margarete Warkentin
  - Issue: Number of children unknown
- V. **Dietrich ("Dirk") Dyck**
  - b. 9 October 1796, Poppau, West Prussia
  - d. 25 June 1849, Steegenwerder, West Prussia
  - m. (1) 23 June 1817, Poppau, West Prussia
  - Agnete Jantzen
    - b. 16 January 1796, Einlage an der Nogat, West Prussia
    - d. 26 December 1836, Poppau, West Prussia
  - Issue: 5
    - 1. Dietrich
      - b. 3 August 1819, Poppau, West Prussia
      - d. Am Trakt, Russia
      - m. Jantzen-sister of Johannes Dietrich's Helene Jantzen
    - 2. Catharine



- b. 28 July 1824, Poppau, West Prussia
      - d. 7 August 1892, Hauskampe, West Prussia
      - m. 20 November 1849, Jacob Dyck-no relation
    - 3. Johannes D.
      - b. 5 December 1826, Poppau, West Prussia
      - d. 11 November 1898, Am Trakt, Russia
      - m. 5 May 1859, Helene Jantzen
        - b. 31 August 1825, Heubuden, West Prussia
        - d. 28 January 1888, Am Trakt, Russia
    - 4. **Jacob (IV)**
      - b. 5 May 1832, Poppau, West Prussia
      - d. 4 April 1882, Am Trakt, Russia
    - 5. Cornelius
      - b. 23 August 1835, Poppau, West Prussia
      - d. 8 July 1893, Woodland, Washington, USA
      - m. Cornelia Pauls
        - b. 4 May 1842
        - d. 21 March 1913, Woodland, WA, USA
  - m. (2) 19 February 1839
    - Agnete Jantzen
      - b. 31 May 1813
      - d. 15 November 1868
    - Issue: 3
      - 1. Agnete
        - b. 10 February 1841, Poppau, West Prussia
        - d. unknown
        - m. unknown
      - 2. Maria
        - b. 11 September 1846, Poppau, West Prussia
        - d. 15 January 1932, Tiegenghagen, Poland
        - m. 21 February 1871
          - Cornelius Jantzen
      - 3. Justine
        - b. 6 October 1848, Poppau, West Prussia
        - d. unknown
        - m. date unknown, Dueck
- VI. **Jacob Dyck (IV)**
  - b. 5 May 1832, Poppau, West Prussia
  - d. 4 April 1882, Am Trakt, Russia
  - m. (1) Siebert-no issue
  - (2) 23 February 1871, Am Trakt, Russia
    - Anna Wiebe Penner (widow with two children)
    - d. 1872, Am Trakt, Russia

Issue: 1

1. Anna
  - b. 1872, Am Trakt, Russia
  - d. 1945, Berlin, Germany
  - m. *circa* 1895, Am Trakt, Russia  
Peter Tjahrt,  
d. 1924, Canada
- m. (3) 26 September 1873, Am Trakt, Russia  
Justine Wall
  - b. 1 February 1855, Mierauerwald, West Prussia
  - d. 1927, Siberia, Russia

Issue: 6

1. Jacob
  - b. 1874, Am Trakt, Russia
  - d. 1874, Am Trakt, Russia
  - m. N/A
2. Maria
  - b. 1 October 1876, Am Trakt, Russia. To  
Canada 1927
  - d. date unknown, Canada
  - m. date unknown, Am Trakt, Russia.  
Henry Dyck, b. 1871
3. Johannes
  - b. 27 February 1878, Am Trakt, Russia
  - d. 1 December 1921, Am Trakt, Russia
  - m. 1904, Am Trakt, Russia,  
Maria Wall,  
b. I March, 1886  
d. 13 April 1974, Siberia, Russia
4. Justine
  - b. 26 September 1879, Am Trakt, Russia
  - d. date unknown, Siberia, Russia
  - m. Penner
5. **Jacob J. (V)**
  - b. 17 August 1881, Am Trakt, Russia
  - d. 30 November 1954, Newton, Kansas,  
USA
6. Johanna (Jacob's twin)
  - b. 17 August 1881, Am Trakt, Russia. To  
Brazil, 1930
  - d. 7 January 1970, Curitiba, Brazil, South  
America
  - m. date unknown, Jacob Cornelius Froese  
b. 14 November 1877, Madantal,  
Russia  
d. date unknown, Curitiba, Brazil

VII. Jacob J. Dyck (V)

b. 17 August 1881, Ostenfeld, Am Trakt, Russia

d. 30 November 1954, Newton, Kansas, USA

m. 22 February 1911, Rural Whitewater, Kansas

Marie G. Harder

b. 2 October 1884, Rural Whitewater, Kansas

d. 29 October 1973, Whitewater, Kansas

Issue: 15, All children born rural Whitewater, Kansas.

1. Kaete Justine

b. 6 December 1911

d. 30 August 1987

m. unmarried

2. Edward Jacob

b. 17 February 1913

d. 20 September 1960

m. unmarried

3. Will Gustav

b. 17 March 1914

d. 26 June 1974

m. 10 August 1950

Muriel C. Binford

b. 6 May 1928

d.

4. Irene Anna

b. 16 July 1915

d. 5 October 1920

m. N/A

5. Robert Hans

b. 20 September 1916

d. 31 August 1966

m. unmarried

6. Bruno George

b. 4 September 1917

d. 25 January 1984

m. (1) 15 August 1943

Ellen L. Claassen

b. 31 December 1924

d.

(2) 24 November 1948

Pearl S. Curtis

b. 6 August 1914

d. 5 March 1987

7. Otto

b. 4 April 1919

d. 4 April 1919

m. N/A

8. Gertrude Marie  
b. 16 February 1920  
d.  
m. 26 September 1941  
Ernest H. Schmidt  
b. 5 December 1915  
d. 7 October, 1989
9. Louise Irene  
b. 15 February 1921  
d.  
m. unmarried
10. Walter Dietrich  
b. 10 March 1922  
d.  
m. (1) 25 December 1948  
Barbara Kroll  
b. 21 May 1926  
d.  
(2) 16 January 1976  
Marion Lammell  
b. 8 July 1950  
d. 23 December 1999
10. Esther Helena  
b. 4 June 1923  
d.  
m. 24 August 1949  
Walter J. Schmidt  
b. 9 October 1923  
d. 12 March 2000
11. Arthur Paul  
b. 26 August 1924  
d. 8 June 1991  
m. 17 November 1951  
Wanda J. Swarts  
b. 17 May 1932  
d.
12. Irene E  
b. 5 March 1926  
d.  
m. 20 January 1951  
Ernest G. Claassen  
b. 2 March 1922  
d.

- 13. Herbert Cornelius  
 b. 20 October 1927  
 d.  
 m. 28 November 1948  
     Alice N. Sitler  
     b. 11 September 1929  
     d.
- 14. Linda Sarah  
 b. 6 April 1929  
 d.  
 m. unmarried

## Wall Family Lineage and Data

Sources of this information are Meta Toews and Walter J. Schmidt. Our direct descendant Wall grandfathers and grandmother are underlined and in bold type.

### I. **Johann Wall (I)**

- b. *circa* 1760, Broske, West Prussia
- d. unknown
- m. date unknown  
     Helene Claassen  
     b. unknown  
     d. 1846, Broske, West Prussia

Issue: Number of children unknown

### II. **Johann Wall (II)**

- b. *circa* 1790, Broske, West Prussia
- d. unknown
- m. (1) Justine Toews  
     b. 31 May 1793, Schoensee, West Prussia  
     d. 2 June 1824, Schoensee, West Prussia  
     Issue: 2
  - 1. **Johann (III)**  
     b. 8 January 1816, Schoensee, West Prussia  
     d. *circa* 1860, Am Trakt, Russia
  - 2. Catherine  
     b. *circa* June 1824  
     d. unknown  
     m. unknown

- m. (2) Margaret Regier  
     b. unknown  
     d. 1852  
     Issue: 6

1. Helene  
b. unknown  
d. unknown  
m. unknown
2. Cornelius  
b. unknown  
d. unknown  
m. unknown
3. Gerhardt  
b. 6 May 1835  
d. 20 June 1878  
m. date unknown,  
Margaret Hamm
4. Jakob  
b. unknown  
d. unknown  
m. unknown
5. Maria  
b. unknown  
d. unknown  
m. unknown
6. Elisabeth  
b. unknown  
d. unknown  
m. unknown

**III. Johann Wall (III)**

b. 8 January 1816, Schoensee, West Prussia

d. *circa* 1860, Am Trakt, Russia

m. 8 November 1849

Catharina Wiens

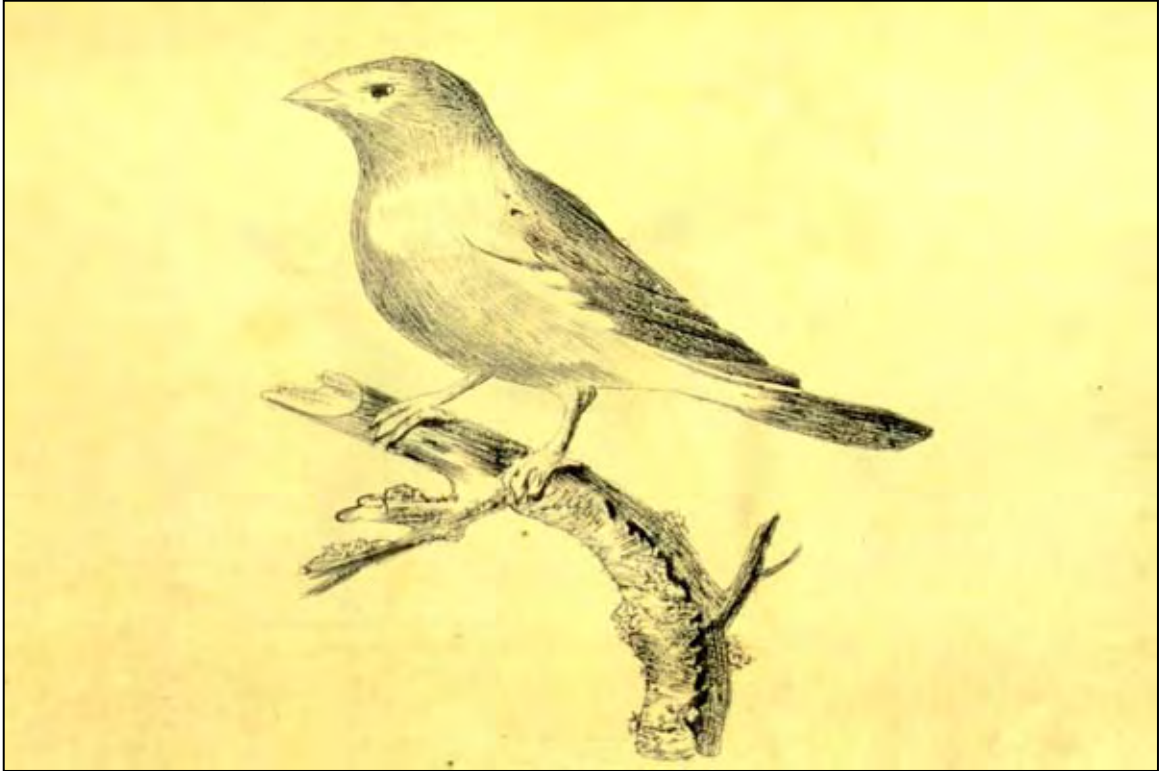
b. 1 April 1827, Neumunsterbergerfeld, West Prussia

d. date unknown, Am Trakt, Russia

Issue: 4

1. Julius  
b. 15 February 1852, Mierauerwald, West Prussia  
d. unknown  
m. unknown
2. Anna  
b. 25 July 1853, Mierauerwald, West Prussia  
d. unknown  
m. unknown
3. **Justine** (“Wall's Titchen”)  
b. 1 February 1855, Mierauerwald, West Prussia  
d. 1927, Siberia, Russia

- 4. Cornelius
  - b. 2 May 1858, Mierauerwald, West Prussia
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
- m. (2) Catharina Wiens-Wall, widow, to Johann Siebert,
  - circa* 1861
  - Issue: 3
  - 1. girl-Siebert
    - b. unknown
    - d. unknown
    - m. date unknown, Jakob Janzen
  - 2. Johanna Siebert
    - b. unknown
    - d. unknown
    - m. date unknown, Hermann Penner
  - 3. Johannes Siebert
    - b. unknown
    - d. unknown
    - m. unknown
- IV. **Justine Wall** (“Wall’s Titchen”)
  - b. 1 February 1855, Mierauerwald, West Prussia
  - d. 1927, Siberia, Russia
  - m. (1) **Jacob Dyck (IV)**
    - b. 5 May 1832, Poppau, West Prussia
    - d. 4 April 1882, Am Trakt, Russia
    - Issue: 6 See Dyck family lineage and data
    - VI. Jacob Dyck (IV)**
  - m. (2) Cornelius Froese, widower. It is not known how many children Froese had in his previous marriage, but Meta Toews said that he “abounded in children.”
    - Issue: 2
    - 1. Gustav Froese
      - b. 1889, Am Trakt, Russia
      - d. date unknown, went to Harbin, Manchuria, China, to escape the Russian Communists.
      - m. unknown
    - 2. Wilhelm Froese
      - b. 1891, Am Trakt, Russia
      - d. 1906, Barnaul Mennonite settlement, Siberia, Russia



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

### 3

## The Claassen Family

### The Claassen Family Name: Origins and Early Ancestry

When Jacob J. Dyck made his decision to come to America in 1907 his future wife was the third generation of her family to live in Kansas, although she was the first generation to be born in America. Marie Gertrude Harder was born in 1884 in rural Whitewater, Kansas, the second daughter of Jacob Harder and Anna Claassen. Anna Claassen had arrived in Kansas with her parents and siblings from Simonsdorf, West Prussia, in 1876. Jacob Harder came to Halstead, Kansas, in 1878, also from West Prussia.



The Claassen family history is well covered in a book previously printed by Ernest Claassen (1895-1996) in 1975. His book, *Abraham Claassen, Vistula To Plum Grove*, is owned by many family members. It has yet to be reprinted since 1975, so while much of the Claassen history here will seem repetitive to those that have that book, it will be new to those that haven't had the pleasure of reading it.

The Claassen family name has many spelling variations. In addition to those mentioned in *Martyrs Mirror*, in the 1530s, the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* lists Claasen, Classen, Claesz, Claussen, Klaassen, Klassen, and Klaeszen. The use of the letter "K" is considered a Germanization of the Dutch spelling. Claassens came to West Prussia at an early date because of the intense persecution of Anabaptists and Mennonites in the Netherlands. Mennonite family name researcher Horst Penner states that Claassens settled in the upper land of Prussia between 1527 and 1557. In 1552 Gert Claussen is named on a land deed at Schmerblock, West Prussia, the earliest mention of this family name in Prussian records. In 1606 Gert Claussen became a deacon, in 1611 a teacher, and in 1621 an elder in the Danzig Flemish congregation. Also named in early Prussian records is Merten (Martin) Claus in Greuelsdorf in 1557. After intense questioning by Lutheran officials about his Anabaptist faith he "moved away again in 1558." Later Merten Clausen is listed as a farmer in Scharfenberg, the Vistula Delta, in 1567. Other early settlers in West Prussia were Henrich Claus from Midwoude, Holland, and Antonins Claussen from Alkmaar, Holland. The names of Martin and Gert Claassen continue to appear in records for the next 150 years, suggesting a continuous family lineage. In 1734 there is a Martin Claassen in Pasewark, one in Glabitsch, and another in Fisherbabke. In the area of Marienburg, where the Heubuden congregation was located, a Johannes Classen was listed as living in Campenau in 1612. In 1622 Adrian Classen is living in this same village.

By 1776 there were 107 families with the Claassen name in West Prussia, excluding the city of Danzig. The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* lists Peter Claassen, second elder of the Grosse Werder congregation, 1645-1679, and minister Peter Claassen (1828-1901) of the Heubuden congregation as outstanding representatives of this family.

The Claassen name occurs repeatedly in our family history, not just as ancestors of Anna Claassen. Jacob Dyck (II), (1746-1820), married Maria Claassen. Johann Wall (I) of Broske, West Prussia, married Helene Claassen. Our oldest known Claassen ancestor is Isaak Claassen born in 1670 in West Prussia. His wife was Margaretha Bergmann, born in 1667, in West Prussia. She died in 1736.

Bergmann too is a name that recurs throughout our family history. This Mennonite family name has variations that include Bergmann, Barkman, and Bargmann, that appear in the rural Flemish congregations of West Prussia, the Werder. Horst Penner says that the Bergmanns come from the south of Holland, the mining district, and the cities of Maastricht and Antwerp. Penner writes that in 1525 a Jan Berchmans (a shoemaker) was banished from Antwerp for six years for distributing heretical books and songs (Anabaptist material). Another Jan Berchmans is in the Dutch city of Groningen in the early 17th century. This may be the first Jan's descendant. By 1632 he was a teacher in the Altonaer Mennonite congregation in Hamburg, Germany. From there Jan went to Glueckstadt. His descendants went to Danzig beginning in 1657. In 1675 a Dirk Berkmann is listed as owning two hufen (83 acres) of land in Plehnendorf, just outside the city of Danzig. The name Bergmann first appears in the Danzig Mennonite Church records in 1685. According to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* there were only ten families in West Prussia with the Bergmann family name in 1776. This low number makes Bergmann one of the less common of Mennonite family names.

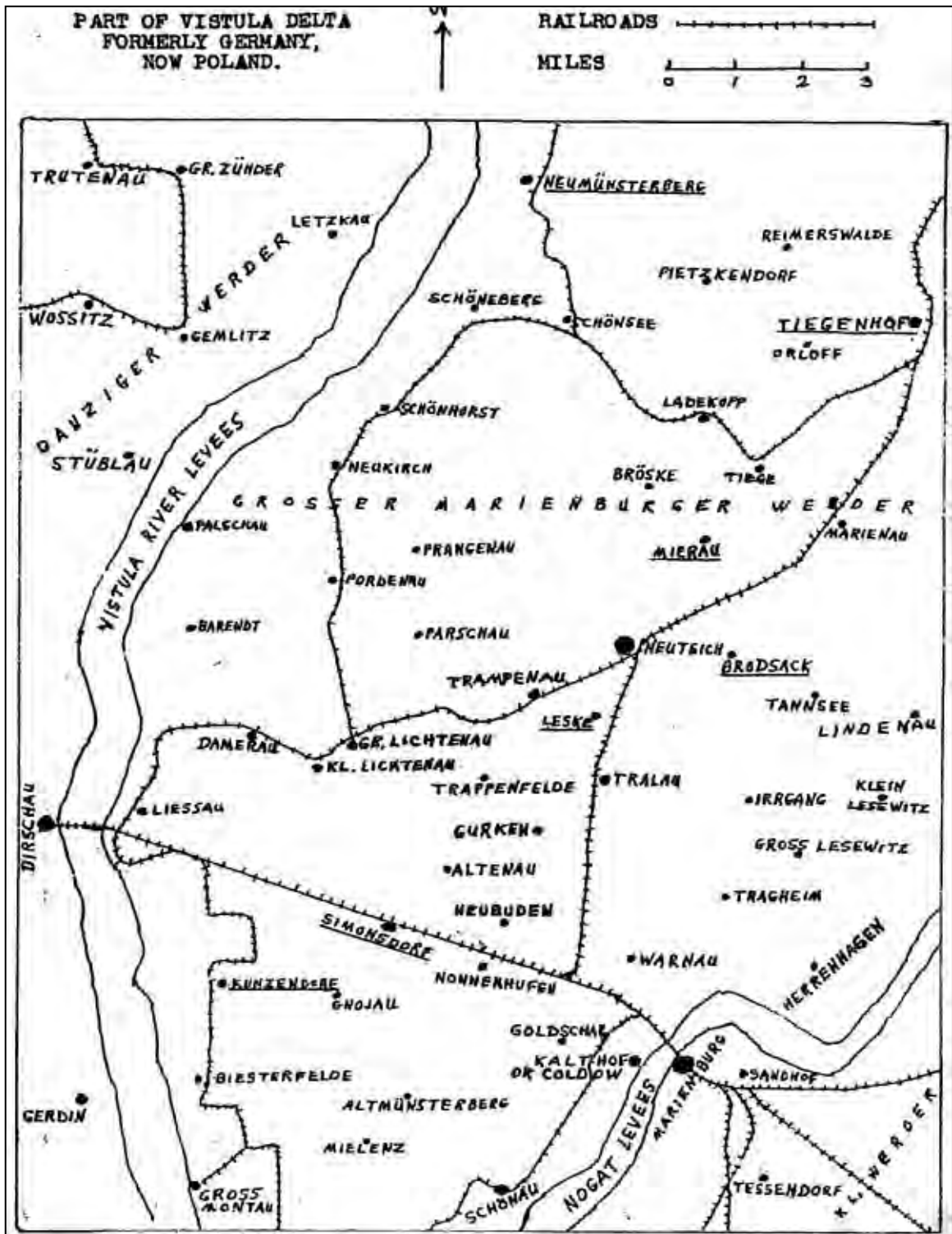
A daughter of Isaak Claassen and Margaretha Bergmann, Maria, was born April 11, 1704. Her first husband was Michael Regehr whose early death left Maria a widow at the age of 26. Her second husband was Gerdt von Bergen (I). The date of their marriage is unknown. Gerdt was born in 1704 and died January 29, 1771. In 1741 Gerdt von Bergen (I) became elder of the Heubuden Mennonite Congregation, at the request of the first elder, Jacob Dyck. Gerdt held this position until his death in 1771. He was succeeded as elder by his son-in-law Cornelius Regier (1743-1794).

Again referring to *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, Horst Penner states that the van Bergens came from Antwerp, Belgium (Flanders). Adriaen Reyers van Bergen owned a large printing business in Antwerp and was banned from the city in 1536 for printing and distributing Bibles and for spreading heretical thinking (Anabaptist faith). On October 2, 1545, he was beheaded in The Hague, Holland, for the crime of being a heretic. In 1585 Antwerp was conquered by Alessandro Farnese (1545-1592), an Italian general and the Duke of Parma in the service of the Spanish crown. All citizens of Antwerp who did not want to become Catholic fled the city, some 35,000 people. Among these refugees was Martin van Bergen who settled in Konigsberg in East Prussia. Other members of the van Bergen family settled in Elbing, east of the Nogat River. In 1615 a Hans van Bergen is farming in the vicinity of Danzig. By 1727 five van Bergens were farming in the Grosswerder, the Vistula Delta; two in Pietzgendorf, one in Freienhuhnen, and two in Heubuden. One of the farmers of

Heubuden was Gerdt von Bergen (I). The adoption of the German “von” in place of “van” seems to have occurred at the beginning of the 18th century. Various spellings are also encountered; Baergen and Bargaen, as well as use of “van” and “von.” According to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, there were 15 families in West Prussia with the von Bergen name in 1776. This is a small number comparable to the few Bergmann families mentioned earlier.

Two children born to Gerdt von Bergen (I) and his wife Maria nee Claassen (I) continue our Claassen family lineage. They are Gerdt von Bergen (II) and Maria (II). Gerdt von Bergen (II) was born in 1741. Known by the Germanized version of his name, Gerhardt, he kept a diary of the major events in his life that Ernest Claassen translated from the original German to English and included in the book *Vistula To Plum Grove*. From this diary we learn that Gerhardt was married three times. His first wife was Lena Mattisen. She died November 1, 1772, at the age of 24 years after six years of marriage. Gerhardt was meticulous in recording her age in years, months, weeks, and days. From this information it is possible to calculate her probable birthdate, December 8, 1747, and the date of their marriage, October 10, 1766. Gerhardt and Lena had five children, two of which died in infancy. On March 7, 1773, Gerhardt married Gertrud Lewens. Again, from Gerhardt's record we can deduce her date of birth as May 1, 1754. Gertrud died only nine months, two weeks, and three days after their marriage, most likely from complications of childbirth, on December 22, 1773. She had given birth to a daughter Gertrud on December 17, 1773. Gerhardt's first wife Lena also died only three days after giving birth to their fifth child. The infant Gertrud died after living 12 weeks. On May 3, 1774, Gerhardt married his third wife, Helena Warkentin. Helena was born in 1754 and died February 27, 1813. This marriage produced ten children, seven died in infancy. The high mortality rate of newborn children and young mothers is heartbreaking to read. Gerhardt wrote after the death of his second wife Gertrud, “The Lord be merciful to me and comfort me in my grieved condition.” The pain of Gerhardt is obvious in this plea to God. Many more generations of our ancestors would endure this similar pain until the 20th century brought improvements in the field of medicine.

The diary of another man, elder Gerhard Wiebe of Ellerswald, gives a glimpse of the public side of Gerhardt von Bergen (II). On July 23, 1780, Gerhard Wiebe writes that a deacon election was held and that Gerhardt von Bergen was elected to this office of the church. However, he did not want to accept the office and was only reluctantly persuaded to assume the position after a drawing of lots in which he drew the short straw. Three years later he was elected minister of this congregation on November 9, 1783, and gave his first sermon at Elbing on January 10, 1784. In March



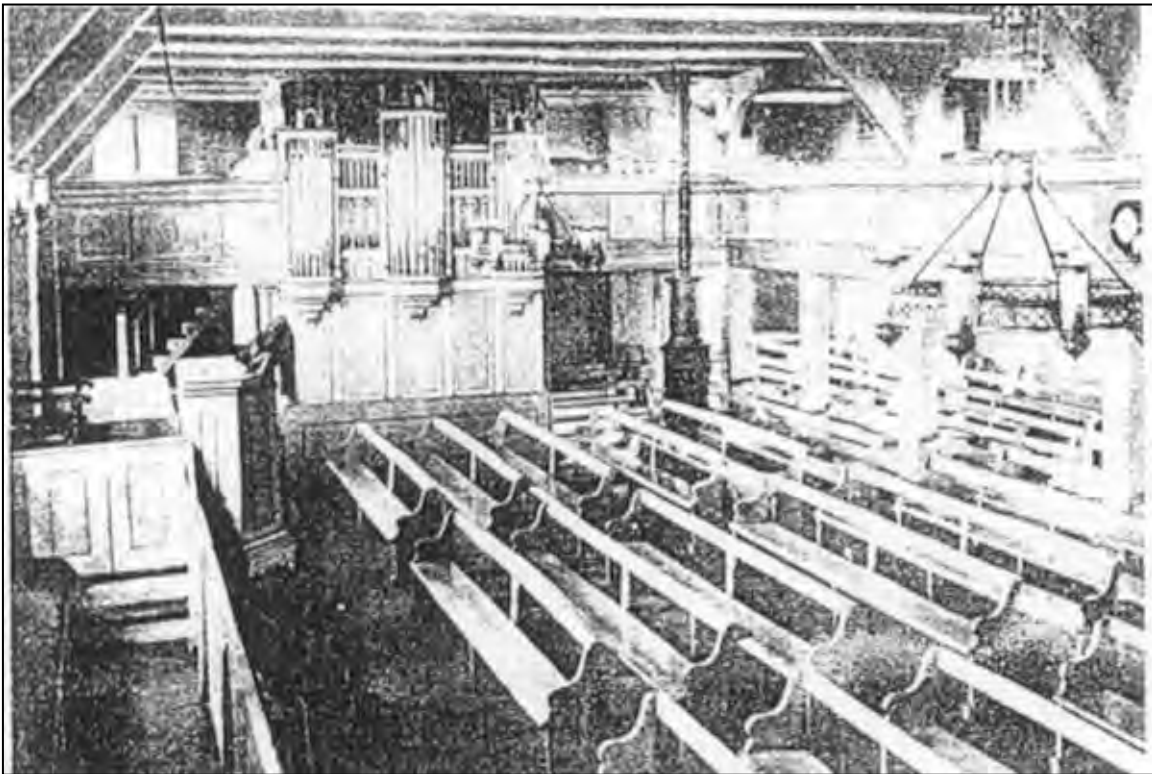
Map 9

Part of Vistula Delta. Formerly Germany, Now Poland. Drawn by Ernest Claassen.

Reprinted by permission from *Abraham Claassen: Vistula To Plum Grove*. Private printing by Ernest Claassen, 1975.



The Heubuden Mennonite Church in the Vistula Delta, West Prussia. Built *circa* 1768, the church was destroyed by the Russian Army after 1945. Above: Exterior of the Heubuden Church. Photo: The Centennial Committee, *History of the Emmaus Mennonite Church*. Below: Interior of the Heubuden Church. Photo: Horst Penner, *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*.



of 1786 Gerhardt von Bergen (II) gave notice to his congregation that he was going to move to Lichtenau in the Heubuden community and asked that he be excused from his duties as minister. This announcement caused a good deal of concern in the Ellerwald-Elbing congregation and attempts were made to dissuade him, unsuccessfully. Writes Gerhard Wiebe, "This is an incident without precedent among us." What prompted this extraordinary event is not known. Perhaps it was a desire to be closer to his boyhood home and his siblings. Gerhardt apparently left the Heubuden community at some point, possibly to marry. Ellerwald-Elbing is some distance north of Heubuden and is located in the Kleines Werder (Little Island) on the east side of the Nogat River. Lichtenau is in the Grosse Werder almost midway between the Vistula and Nogat Rivers. The initial move to Ellerwald-Elbing would not have been nearly as momentous as the return to the Heubuden community, to Lichtenau in 1786, but none the less a noteworthy event.

Gerhardt's last entry in his diary is followed by one written by his wife Helena. "Anno 1790, April 23 my dear husband fell asleep in the Lord. God grant him quiet and peaceful rest, and on the last day a blessed resurrection. His age was 48 years, 5 months." Gerhardt's last child was born a little over eight months after he died. This daughter, Margaretha, died after living only 13 weeks.

The sister of Gerhardt von Bergen (II), Maria von Bergen (II), date of birth unknown, married Abraham Claassen (I). The marriage date is also unknown. Whether or not this Abraham Claassen was in any way related to Maria von Bergen's grandfather, Isaak Claassen, is not known. Marriage between cousins was quite common in the closed Mennonite communities of West Prussia. Abraham Claassen (I) was born in 1717. He had a nickname of "Koenig", or King, because of his great strength and reputation as the best wrestler in the community. As recorded in a diary kept by his son, Abraham (II), "Koenig" Claassen died November 11, 1775. Maria von Bergen followed her husband in death on August 12, 1810.

Abraham Claassen (II) was born September 2, 1771, making him only four years old when his father died. His father was 54 years old when Abraham (II) was born. It is very possible that Abraham (I) was married at least once before he married Maria von Bergen and that Abraham (II) had half brothers and sisters much older than him. Undoubtedly Maria von Bergen was considerably younger than her husband at the time of birth of Abraham (II). In addition to the diary previously mentioned, a poem written by the 14-year-old Abraham (II) has survived and been handed down through the generations. A photograph of this poem in *Vistula To Plum Grove* shows that Abraham (II) possessed a fine handwriting, the script is beautiful. Surrounding the poem is colorful artwork

done in a style known to us today as “Fraktur.” It depicts fanciful renditions of lions, rabbits, deer, unicorns, and bears in a background of flowers and vines. Abraham (II) signed his poem, a New Year's gift to his parents, and datelined it, “Grosslichtenauerfeld, January, 1786.” This would indicate that Abraham's mother, Maria von Bergen, was living in Lichtenau before her brother, Gerhardt von Bergen (II), made the decision to move there from Ellerwald-Elbing.

Abraham Claassen (II) married for the first time on April 12, 1796. His wife was Sophia Berckman (Bergmann), born February 23, 1777. Together they had 11 children, beginning with Elisabeth, born in 1797, and ending with Gerhard, born in 1819, just six months before his mother's death on October 14, 1819. Remarkably, of these 11 children only two did not live to reach adulthood. On December 7, 1821, Abraham (II) married his second wife, his first cousin Justina von Bergen. Justina was the daughter of Gerhardt von Bergen (II) and his third wife Helena Warkentin and was born October 9, 1780. Although Justina was 41 years old when she married Abraham (II) there is nothing to indicate that she had been married previously, that she was a widow. Divorce was forbidden to Mennonites except in cases of adultery. In those very rare cases when this occurred only the innocent party was allowed to remarry and remain in the church. The prohibition on divorce only somewhat relaxed after the middle of the 20th century, and only in the more liberal congregations. Probably due to Justina's advanced age at the time her marriage to Abraham (II), only two children were born to this union. Helena on April 30, 1823, and Abraham (III) on July 18, 1825. Helena married Aron Klaassen on August 27, 1850. It is not known if Aron was related to the family of Abraham (II). Abraham (II) lived a full life, and a long one for his time. He died July 7, 1857, at 86 years of age. His second wife, Justina, preceded him in death on September 6, 1853.

## The Quests of Gerhard Claassen

Gerhard Claassen, born April 3, 1819, from the marriage of Abraham Claassen (II) and Sophia Berckman (Bergmann) kept a journal throughout most of his adult life. As a half brother to Abraham Claassen (III), our direct descendant grandfather, Gerhard's journal is a valuable source of information about our Claassen ancestors during much of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Much of Gerhard's journal is reprinted in Ernest Claassen's book, *Vistula To Plum Grove*, translated from the original German to English by Ernest.



Gerhard Claassen (1819-1913). Photograph *circa* 1875, West Prussia. Gerhard came to America in 1876 with his brother Abraham Claassen (III).  
Photo: Edith Claassen Graber.



The first entry in this journal gives Gerhard's birthdate and place of birth, Simonsdorf, West Prussia. This is the first mention of this village in the Heubuden community in any family record of births, marriages, and deaths. Gerhard's birth in Simonsdorf in 1819 indicates that his father, Abraham Claassen (II), had moved there from Gross Lichtenau since he wrote his poem in 1786 at age 14. What prompted this move can only be guessed at, but it could have been the availability of farmland as a result of emigration of Mennonites to Russia beginning in 1788. Gerhard writes that his five older sisters had emigrated to Russia, the Molotschna colony, sometime before 1847. Gerhard was the only child of the first marriage of Abraham Claassen (II) to remain living with his father and stepmother after his sisters went to Russia. He writes that he remained on his father's farm until he was 28 years old when he took a job as a farm manager for a widow surnamed Fieguth. Gerhard held this position for 12 years and enjoyed his work very much.

In 1859 the opportunity arose for Gerhard to travel to Russia to visit his sisters. The overland trip took 39 days from West Prussia to the Molotschna colony in Russia, the Ukraine. Evidently there was little or no correspondence between the Claassen family in Simonsdorf, West Prussia, and the sisters that lived in Russia, for Gerhard says that he found that three of his sisters had died in the intervening years. He stayed with the families of the other two sisters for a year before returning to West Prussia in August of 1860. Gerhard says simply that he did not like it in Russia. Gerhard's father, Abraham Claassen (II), had died in 1857 while he was employed as a farm manager and it would appear that the youngest son, Abraham (III), lived on the family farm in Simonsdorf, West Prussia. It was here that Gerhard returned to in 1860, living with his half brother's family. Part of Gerhard's restlessness may have been due to loneliness. At 41 years of age he remained unmarried. Although he made several proposals of marriage, none of them were accepted. He attributed this to God's will and remained optimistic that he would one day have a household of his own.

Despite his dislike of Russia, Gerhard was persuaded to return there in the spring of 1863 by Abraham Bergmann with the chance to buy his own farm as the enticement. Bergmann had purchased a large tract of land in the vicinity of the Molotschna colony that he wanted to sell off at a profit to new settlers. The deal fell through, Bergmann not being the most honest of men. Gerhard languished in Russia particularly bemoaning the lack of church services available. In July of 1865 he made the decision to return to West Prussia. Before leaving Russia he visited the nearby settlement of Chortitza, the first Russian Mennonite colony, and the newer colonies established in Samara including Am Trakt. His

return trip took him through Moscow, he was impressed by the Kremlin. From Moscow he continued on to St. Petersburg where the cathedral of St. Isaac had recently been completed after a century of construction. Gerhard probably worked as a farm laborer/manager during his time in Russia in order not to deplete his money reserves brought from West Prussia to buy land with. In any event money does not seem to be a concern during his travels. Finally, on August 27, 1865, Gerhard was back in Simonsdorf, West Prussia. He had been gone more than two years.

After his return to West Prussia Gerhard again began managing farms for other people, spending his winters with the family of Abraham Claassen (III), his half brother. In the spring of 1873 he made his third trip to Russia to visit his sister, returning to Simonsdorf in October of the same year. After spending the winter with Abraham (III) he again returned to managing farms. This cycle ended on June 15, 1876, when Gerhard emigrated to the United States with Abraham Claassen (III) and his family.

While Gerhard was moving from job to job, traveling from place to place, his younger half brother Abraham Claassen (III) was living the life Gerhard seemed to yearn for. On July 21, 1857, he married Anna Bergmann and started his family while living and working on the family farm of 74 acres in the rich Vistula Delta.

Anna Bergmann was born May 2, 1838, and was 19 years old at the time of her marriage to the 32 year old Abraham (III). Anna's ancestry can be traced back a considerable number of years through her mother, Helena Reimer, and her grandmother, Anna Driedger.

Helena Reimer, Anna Bergmann's mother, was born in 1814, and died in 1839. This scant piece of information is all that is available on Helena. No information is available about her father, Gerhard Reimer. Helena Reimer's mother, Anna Bergmann's grandmother, Anna Driedger, was born March 22, 1785, in West Prussia. A letter to the author from Dr. Gerhard Driedger, dated October 8, 1997, provides interesting information about Anna Driedger's family. Dr. Driedger writes that Johann Driedger, Anna's great-grandfather, came to West Prussia from Holland where he was born in 1668. Dr. Driedger's belief that Johann Driedger came from Holland is at odds with Horst Penner, author of *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*. Penner believes that the Driedgers probably came from Switzerland and that the name evolved from Riediger or "Der Riediger", which means "swamp dweller." It is possible that both men are right; that Johann Driedger's family came to West Prussia from Holland, that their ancestors came from Switzerland. Johann's son, Jacob Driedger, was born June 18, 1722. A translation of Dr. Driedger's letter from the original German provides the following information about Jacob Driedger and his son Johann.

Jacob Driedger b. 18 June 1722 d. 25 March 1816

He died at the time of the flood when the water had penetrated into his sick room. In 1752 he is supposed to have come to the manor of the royalty/crown werder. An old document reports:

“This Jacob Driedger had one hufe land (41.5 acres) in Vogtei in common with another person. The land was mostly under water and did not support the family. He took his scythe and hired himself out for the harvest while the other person earned something working for tailors. When things went better for him, he bargained for what is now a mayoralty plot of six hufen (249 acres). When he reached a price with the owner a neighbor came and offered the same amount and according to the right of contiguity, Jacob Driedger had to forgo the purchase so then purchased a piece of ground in the crown werder opposite the church. When his son Cornelius took over the piece of ground, he built a rental property which cost 500 Gulden. In 1790 he built a stable attached to the house which cost 100 Gulden. In later years he wanted to marry his landlady, which his children prevented with much argument.”

Jacob Driedger, in 1768, relinquished a parcel of land to the Memmonite congregation for construction of the church and for an adjacent cemetery (Furstenwerder). In 1791 he gave his farm to his son, Cornelius, who in turn, passed it on to his son, Peter. After his death his widow married a Jacob Wiens whose descendants were in possession of the farm as late as 1940.

Regarding Johann Driedger born 5 January 1761, reported in an old document is the following:

“Johann moved to Moesland; he was a skilled carpenter and built himself a wooden horse capstan and a chaff chopping machine. When he had it in operation many neighbors came to view it because it was completely new (to them) and they bought him out. He built new ones several times and sold them. Later he made for himself and his wife oak coffins but they were consumed in a fire.”

Dr. Gerhard Driedger ends his letter by writing that Johann Driedger (1761-1852) had five children by his first wife Margarete nee Epp, and that only Anna survived and married Gerhard Reimer. Together they emigrated to Jerescho, Russia. This town is also spelled Jerschow and was located northwest of the Am Trakt settlement on the main road from Saratov to Orenburg, Russia. This last piece of information is puzzling because it raises the question how Helena Reimer came to marry Johann Bergmann in West Prussia?

Helena Reimer married Johann Bergmann *circa* 1835. Johann was born August 23, 1805, and died February 2, 1884. His father was Peter Bergmann, born 1749. Peter died in 1808, in West Prussia, at the height of the occupation of West Prussia by Napoleon's French army. He left his wife Helena Bergmann, nee Fast, a widow with 11 children. Among these 11 children was the 3-year-old Johann, future father of Anna Bergmann

After Anna Bergmann's marriage to Abraham Claassen (III) in 1857 the first of their 11 children was born in 1859. All of these children were born in Simonsdorf, West Prussia, with the exception of the last two who were born in Kansas. Caring for nine children born from 1859 to 1872 was undoubtedly a full time job for Anna, though she had the benefit of a hired cook and housekeeper. While Anna tended to household affairs, her husband Abraham looked after his farming operation. In his book, *Abraham Claassen, Vistula To Plum Grove*, Ernest Claassen gives excerpts from Abraham's records of his farming operations at Simonsdorf, West Prussia, that give a clear indication that Abraham was more of a manager of his farm than a laborer. In this age of farms that run into thousands of acres it is hard to imagine that Abraham hired four permanent workers and additional labor during harvest for his 74-acre farm.

Besides his keen business sense reflected in the detailed farm records he kept, Abraham (III) also left a record of his talent for drawing in the form of three sketchbooks that have come to light since Ernest Claassen published *Vistula To Plum Grove* in 1975. One of the sketchbooks, noted as No. 4 by Abraham (III), was started April 1, 1836, and completed December 23, 1836, when he was 11 years old. The artwork from this sketchbook is reproduced throughout this book with the kind permission of its present owner, Arthur N. Claassen, a great-grandson of Abraham (III). These drawings, some of them rendered in vivid color, show remarkable talent and attention to detail for an 11-year-old boy. Abraham drew what was most likely close to him, what he saw every day. He obviously had an eye for beauty and a sense of proportion rare in one so young. This sense of proportion is most evident in the ink drawings of the Teutonic Knight's castle at Marienburg. This castle



Wall Mural painted on wood from the interior of the Claassen ancestral home at Simonsdorf, West Prussia. Size: 60 inches by 72 inches.

Photo: Olin Claassen.





The ancestral home of Abraham Claassen (1825-1910) at Simonsdorf, West Prussia. The architecture is typical of Mennonite homes built in the Vistula Delta in the late 18<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Above: Front of the house. Below: Rear of the house. Photos: 1989, courtesy of Olin Claassen.





Above: End view of the Claassen home at Simonsdorf, West Prussia. Below: The train station at Simonsdorf, West Prussia. It was from this station that the Abraham Claassen family left for the United States in 1876. Photos: 1989, courtesy of Olin Claassen







was 600 years old at the time Abraham sketched portions of it. It dominated the skyline of the lower Vistula Delta and was clearly visible from Abraham's home at the village of Simonsdorf. Comparing Abraham's sketches with contemporary photographs of the castle confirm the accuracy of his drawings.

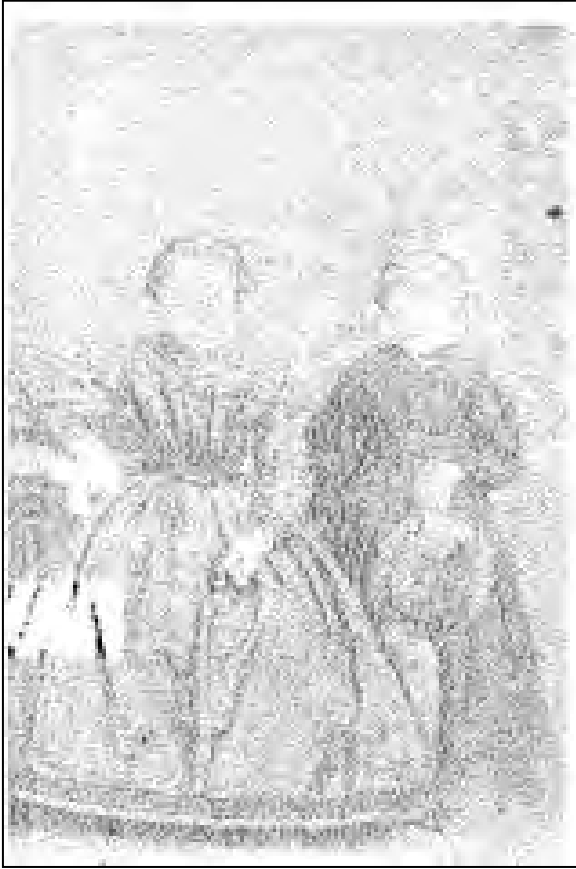
Two more sketchbooks and a penmanship book by Abraham Claassen (III) are owned by Olin K. Claassen, another great-grandson of Abraham. The drawings in these two sketchbooks are similar in theme to the one owned by Arthur Claassen, some are color duplicates of ink drawings and these too are reproduced in this book courtesy of Olin Claassen.

Into the idyllic life on the farm at Simonsdorf, West Prussia, our grandmother Anna Claassen was born on June 24, 1862. Anna was the third child of Abraham Claassen (III) and Anna nee Bergmann. An older brother, Johann, had been born October 18, 1860, but died May 12, 1861. Anna's older sister, Helene, was born June 21, 1859. Helene too died at a young age on November 25, 1872. This death of an older sister at the age of 13 probably had profound impact on the ten-year-old Anna. Undoubtedly they were very close to one another and valued help to their mother in raising the other, younger children. Although there is no mention of any epidemic in any of the written records left from this time, it would seem that the possibility exists as a way to explain the deaths of three of Abraham and Anna's children from August, 1872, to January,

Cemetery of the Heubuden Mennonite Church in the Vistula Delta. The Heubuden Mennonite Church was destroyed in the closing months of World War II, in 1945. The cemetery was vandalized and neglected by the Polish people for decades after the war. At the time of this photo, 1998, the Polish government had aided in restoration of the cemetery.

Photo: Klaus Dueck.





Helene Claassen (1859-1872), the “Mennonite Mona Lisa”, first child of Abraham (III) and Anna Bergmann Claassen. With Helene is Anna Claassen Harder (1862-1949). Photo: circa 1871, Authors’ collection.

well tended orchards in Simonsdorf. Along with the practicality she learned the pleasure that beautiful flowers and ornamental trees and shrubs provide.

Exactly when and how Anna met her future husband, Jacob Harder, is not known. It seems it was at a rather young age and that Jacob made a good, permanent first impression on the young Anna. It may have been at church, or perhaps Jacob worked for Anna’s father Abraham (III) in some capacity on the farm. Jacob was 13 years older than Anna and at some point had served an apprenticeship as a carpenter-cabinetmaker. So it may have been that Jacob was employed by the Claassen family for this skill, or his additional talent as a stonemason. Reportedly Anna told Jacob, sometime prior to leaving with her family for America in 1876, that she would marry him when she grew up. This would seem to be very rash, bold behavior for a young Mennonite girl of 13. However, the story was so widely repeated in family circles that it appears to have some basis in fact. Anna herself may have left us with confirmation of this story in one of her letters written to a friend. Ernest Claassen printed several of Anna’s letters at the end of his book *Vistula To Plum Grove* that were written while the Claassen family was in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, during the winter of 1876-1877. Writing to a friend Gretchen, Anna says,

1873. Gerhard, born May 24, 1872, died August 18, 1872. The 13-year-old Helene died in the following November. On January 4, 1873, six-year-old Maria died five months shy of her birthday, June 2, 1866. Truly this was a time of great sorrow for the Claassen family.

Anna Claassen, like most Mennonite girls of her time, received a good basic education in addition to learning those things that were expected of a daughter. Penmanship books show that Anna developed a fine script style of handwriting in her native German. She also had a fondness for poetry as indicated by several poems that are included in these writing exercise booklets. Anna learned the patient art of embroidery as well as quilting and knitting lace. Several fine examples of her workmanship as a young woman are treasured by her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Anna learned too the importance of a good garden and

“One evening we went out of town and found large orchards. On the trees were branch on branch, and many a graft twig, and because, as I know very precisely, Jakob had forgotten to cut them in our former orchard, he could always get some from here, but they might be too expensive for him. I give you good advice, but write too how he feels about himself now, so I can improve him in the future.”

Ernest Claassen inserted a comment here in the letter that “This seems to refer to some private joke, the point of which escapes us now.” If Gretchen was privy to Anna’s plan to marry Jacob Harder, this passage from Anna’s letter makes very good sense.

Migration to America by the Abraham Claassen family and his brother Gerhard was the result of the increasingly militant and nationalist policies of the Prussian government. Under the forceful personality of Otto von Bismarck, the “Iron Chancellor”, Prussia fought numerous wars of expansion that culminated in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. The defeat of Prussia’s arch enemy France gave birth to the German Empire under Kaiser Wilhelm I on January 18, 1871. The gradual loss of exemption from military service for Mennonites that began in 1848 was complete with the formation of the new German Empire.

The Heubuden Mennonite congregation that Abraham and Gerhard Claassen belonged to was sharply divided on the question of military conscription. Some were willing to accept the compromises offered by the German government, service in a non-combatant branch of the military. Others would accept no compromise in their beliefs. Abraham and Gerhard belonged to this last group. In the spring of 1876 many members of the Heubuden congregation began selling their farms in preparation for immigration to the United States. Under the guidance of Elder Gerhard Penner 55 families and 29 single persons booked the complete second class section of the steamship *Rhein* and chartered a special train to carry them from West Prussia to the seaport of Bremen. They left the train station at Simonsdorf, West Prussia, on a Thursday, June 15, 1876, at 8:15 in the morning.

Abraham Claassen kept a diary of this journey to America that was translated from the original German to English by Ernest Claassen and printed almost in its entirety in his book *Vistula To Plum Grove*. It is a fascinating account filled with detailed information of the trip by train across Germany from Simonsdorf to Berlin and on to Bremen. After boarding the steamship *Rhein* at Bremen they crossed the Atlantic Ocean following a brief stopover in Southampton, England. On July 1, 1876, the *Rhein* dropped anchor in the harbor at New York. Here the immigrants were met

by Mennonite friends that had previously settled in Kansas and Nebraska.

The unloading of their belongings from the ship in New York merits a long description by Abraham Claassen in his diary. One passage is of particular interest and a quote of that passage follows:

“Our chests arrived in pretty good shape. On my wife's chest the bottom was jarred loose somewhat. On mine the strip on top got a mighty jar, and the ornamental plates on top are dented, although it was bound in a horse blanket and the blue robe and a double canvas cover. The two freight chests show the least damage. On the blue chest a strip was torn loose, and it is no wonder. I was an eyewitness when one fellow set it against the coach that was to go to Kansas. Another moved the cart away, then the first one noticed that the chest did not belong there, and moved it the length of four coaches, stepping it along on the corner in rapid tempo. This really tests a heavily loaded chest.”

Two of the chests described in this passage survived the rigors of transport to Kansas. Both are dowry chests. The chest described as “mine” by Abraham Claassen is a fancy chest of ash inlaid with dark wood veneer. The brass bosses that cover the bolts for the lock and hinges are indeed heavily dented. The “blue chest” that was heavily damaged was repaired at a later date with two braces across the split lid. Photographs of both chests appear in this book. They were apparently given to Anna, Abraham's daughter, at some point as both chests were rediscovered by the author on the farm of Jacob Harder and Anna Claassen Harder nearly 100 years after they were brought to the United States. The fancy chest remained in the house and was still in excellent condition stored in an unused bedroom. The “blue chest” had been relegated to practical duty as a storage bin for alfalfa and grain sorghum seed in a barn on the Jacob Harder farm.

Departure from New York City was prompt, the evening of their arrival at that port of entry. Abraham Claassen and his family traveled by train to Buffalo and Niagara Falls, New York, by noon of July 2, 1876. From here they crossed over to Canada, traveling west with Lake Erie on their left. They crossed back into America by ferry at Detroit, Michigan, and continued by train to Chicago, Illinois. Although the modes of transportation were different, this is the same route taken by Johannes Dietrich Dyck when he traveled from New York City to Chicago in 1848. Trains had replaced sail and steamboats by 1876. Continuing west by train, the Abraham Claassen family arrived at their temporary destination of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, at 10 o'clock on the night of July 3 amid a violent

thunderstorm. Abraham was not yet decided about where he wanted to settle with his family, Kansas or Nebraska. While he ventured forth into the frontier to find farm land to his liking his family waited in Iowa.

## **Abraham's Choice: Butler County, Kansas**

Although Kansas had been admitted to the Union in 1861 as the 34th state, it was sparsely settled when Abraham Claassen came looking for farm ground in 1876, and still very much a frontier state. The population centers of Kansas before the American Civil War of 1861-1865 were clustered in the northeast portion of the state. Kansas City, Lawrence, and Topeka, the capital, were well settled by 1861. There was a large army post at Ft. Leavenworth, home of the famed 7th Cavalry under George A. Custer. No railroad ran southwest from Topeka until ground was broken for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad in November of 1868. By July of 1870 the railroad had only been completed for 75 miles to Emporia, Kansas. In 1871 the railroad was completed to Newton, Kansas, in Harvey County. Newton is about 18 miles from where Abraham Claassen would eventually settle near the town of Plum Grove, Kansas, in neighboring Butler County. With the arrival of the railroad Newton would become a cowtown with a brief and violent history rivaling that of Abilene, Kansas, to the north about 75 miles. Until 1871 Abilene was the nearest rail shipping yard for the huge herds of longhorn cattle that were being driven north out of Texas for sale to eastern buyers waiting at Abilene. Driving these herds of cattle up the famed Chisholm Trail, beginning in 1867, were hardened Texas cowboys, many of them Confederate veterans of the Civil War. While their cattle were welcome, these cowboys were not generally appreciated except by the merchants of the cowtowns.

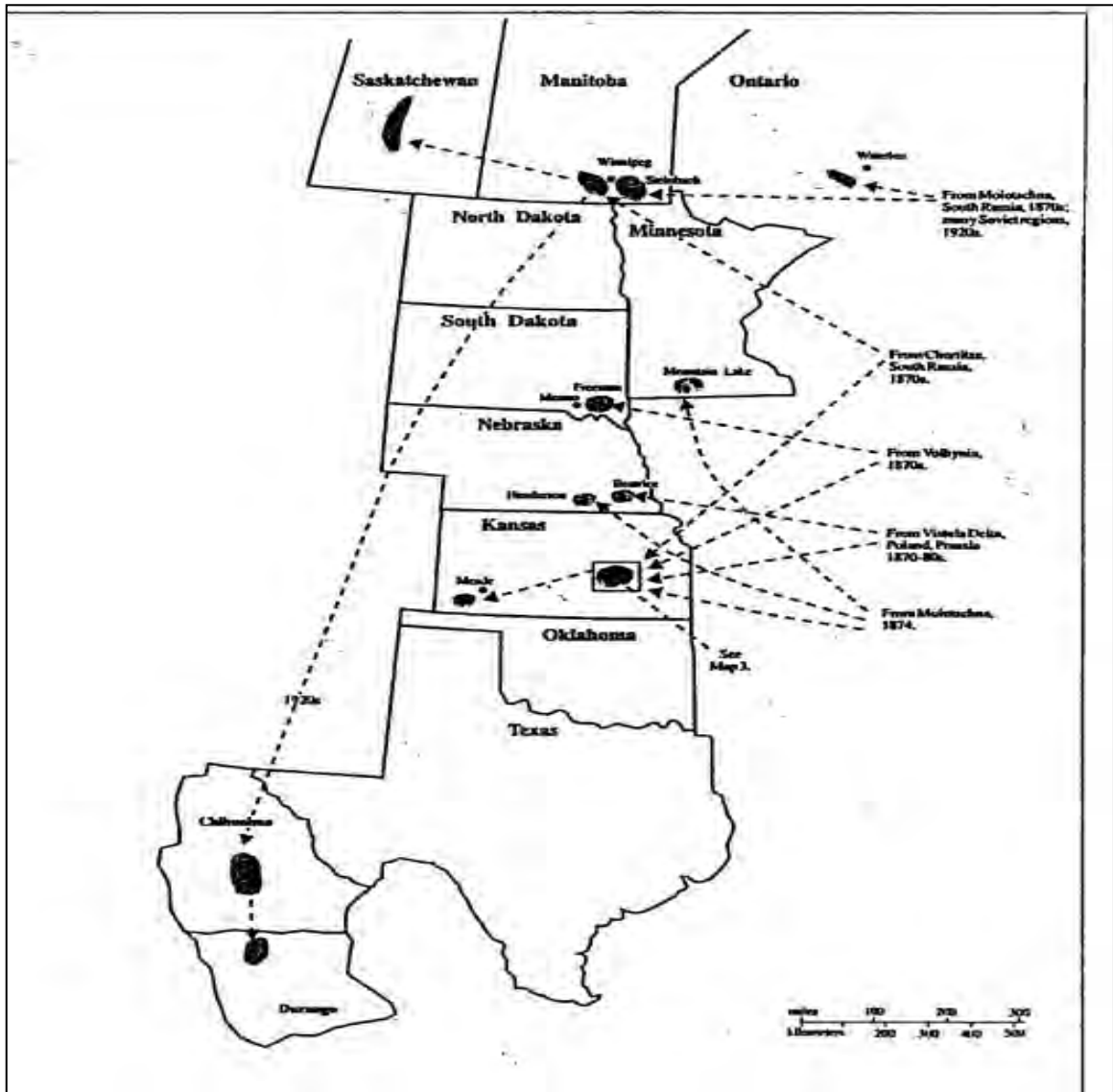
The cattle drives into Kansas were not possible until the Native American Indian tribes had been driven from their homeland. It wasn't until an extensive campaign against these tribes by Major General Philip Sheridan in 1868 that Kansas was considered "safe" for settlement by farmers and ranchers. This campaign against the Native Americans was no less savage than the Teutonic Knights' slaughter of Pruzzens in West Prussia 600 years earlier. Part of the calculated extermination of the Indians included the wholesale slaughter of the vast herds of buffalo that roamed the Plains states including Kansas. The buffalo were the primary source of food for the Plains Indians and were called a "living commissary" because the Indians utilized the buffalo so completely. Nothing on the animal was wasted. From 1867 to 1874 tens of millions of these magnificent animals were killed by professional hunters who

stripped off the hides and left the carcasses to rot. As the railroad moved further west, so did the hunters. By 1872 Dodge City, Kansas, had become the main shipping point for buffalo hunters who shipped nearly one million hides and a million and a half pounds of meat east in the three years of 1872, 1873, and 1874. Using powerful, single shot Sharps rifles in .45 and .50 caliber, hunters such as Orlando Bond were able to kill astounding numbers of buffalo in short periods of time. In one hunting expedition in November and December of 1874, Bond killed over 6,000 buffalo. Thus were the prairies of Kansas made "safe" for the settlers of Kansas. In admiring the farms and homes that our Mennonite ancestors established in Kansas, it is well to remember that this land was only available to them after the highest price was paid by the Native Americans and the wildlife of the plains.

Abraham Claassen and his family could not have been oblivious to the struggle for the land they were about to settle on. Little more than a week before their arrival in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, George Custer and all of the men under his command in the 7th U.S. Cavalry were killed at the Battle of the Little Bighorn in Montana Territory. This was a momentous news story that everybody in America was aware of. The Claassen family had to hear of the massacre and they were probably filled with no small amount of apprehension about venturing west into Kansas.

Most of the group that arrived in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, quickly left for Nebraska to join Mennonite settlements around the town of Beatrice. Abraham Claassen was drawn to Kansas because he had friends who had settled there. The Santa Fe Railroad had a vested interest in seeing that farmers settled along their line and used the railroad for shipping the grain and livestock that they would produce. For this reason representatives of the railroad were only too eager to provide prospective settlers with free rail transport to Kansas and facilitate the purchase of farmland. Abraham Claassen was a patient man in viewing the land shown to him, he didn't jump at the first parcels he saw. Arriving first in Halstead, Kansas, he proceeded to Peabody by train and viewed land south of that town. He wanted land that had timber on it. That was a scarce commodity on the prairies of Kansas and would only be found near a creek or river. Although he was to ponder his eventual purchase for some months, Abraham found what he was looking for in a quarter section (160 acres) of land that was situated in between the Henry Creek and the Whitewater River. It almost seems as if fate drew Abraham to this particular spot in Kansas. Viewed on a map the land between the Henry Creek and the Whitewater River resembles a small version of the Vistula Delta between the Vistula and Nogat Rivers in West Prussia. Just as Simonsdorf was in the lower part of the Vistula Delta, so is the location of the 160 acres purchased by Abraham Claassen in the lower basin created by the confluence of

the Henry Creek and Whitewater River. In addition to this 160 acres Abraham would also buy 160 acres northwest of his original purchase. This “L” shaped piece of land consisted of two 80 acre parcels that lay on both sides of the Henry Creek. There was a log cabin on this land that was less than 100 yards west of the Henry Creek. The builder of this cabin is unknown. It would be the first home of Abraham Claassen and his family.



**Map 10**

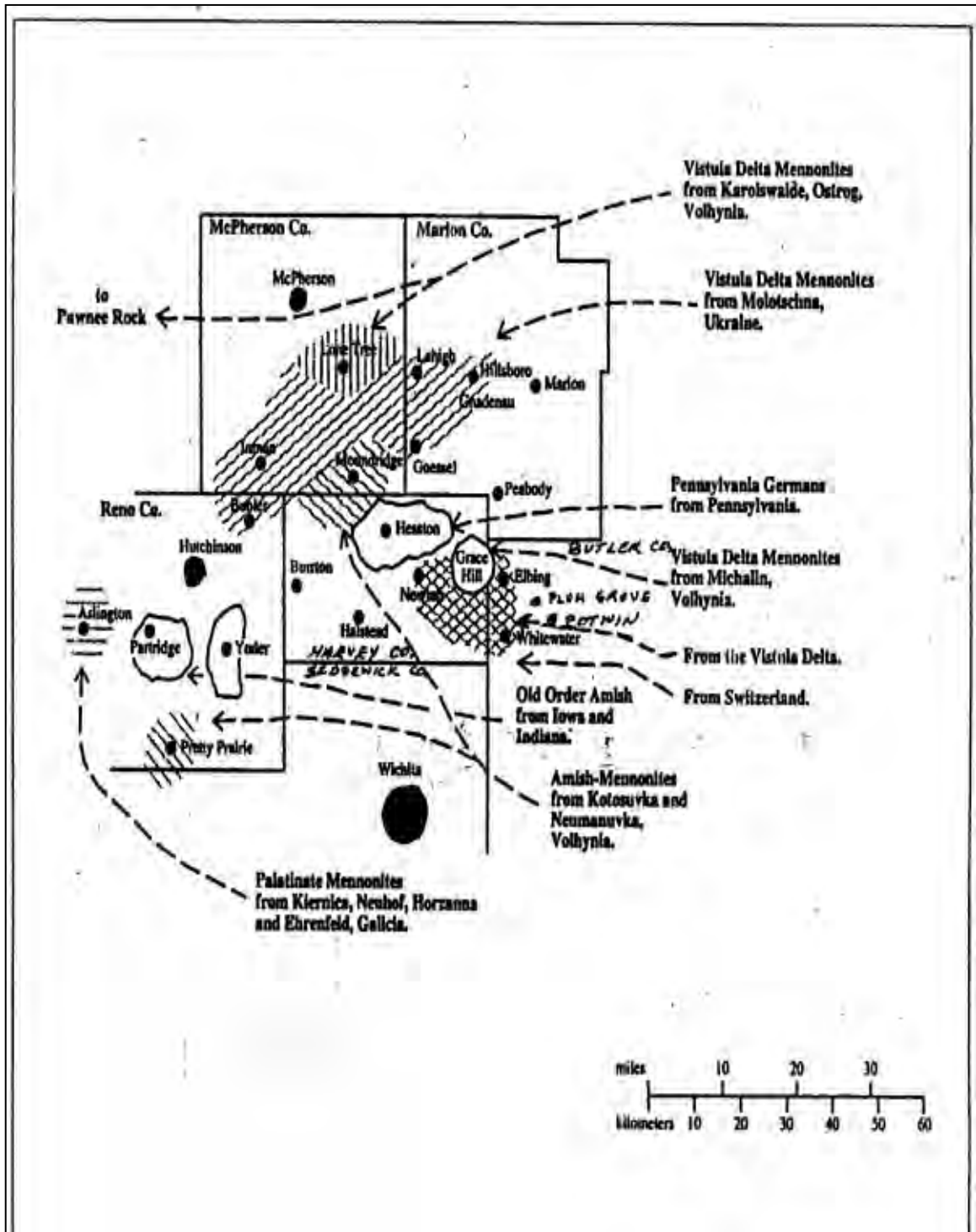
Mennonite settlements and Migrations from Russia and Poland-Prussia to the North American Plains, 1870s-1920s

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It appears that Abraham's half brother, Gerhard Claassen, did not accompany Abraham on his land-buying trip to Kansas, but remained in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, with Abraham's family. A letter written by Abraham's daughter Anna to a friend begins:

“Dear Margaret: Since Uncle (this would be Gerhard Claassen) is writing I will send you a few lines. We have waited anxiously for letters from home, for many here have already received letters. We are all fairly well, only Justine has been rather sickly for several days. She was still unwell this morning, and might not have arisen, but we thought Papa would arrive early today, which was not the case. Papa and six others of our travel companions left for Kansas and Nebraska 3 weeks ago and we hope they will return this evening or early tomorrow.”

This letter by Anna indicates that Abraham did look at land in Nebraska before going to Kansas. One of the companions traveling with Abraham Claassen was Peter Dyck. Peter kept a detailed record of the land buying trip and states that they left Mt. Pleasant on August 14, 1876. This date plus the three weeks Anna says they have been gone would put the date of Anna's letter at the second week of September, 1876. Peter Dyck bought his farm on this trip, but Abraham Claassen did not. He still had not made his purchase by November, 1876. The family was living in a rented house in Mt. Pleasant that seems to have been very comfortable and affordable. But most of the people that came with the Claassen family from West Prussia were gone by the end of 1876, most to Nebraska, some to Kansas. Why Abraham waited is not known, but he must have completed his land purchases sometime in December of 1876 for the family set out in January of 1877 for their new home in Kansas. As might be expected of a January in Kansas their train became snowbound near Topeka. If anyone in the family doubted the wisdom of Abraham in embarking for a log cabin on the prairie in a January blizzard it is not recorded. Silently there must have been doubts. An account of the Mennonite families on this snowbound train was written by Doris Janzen Longacre. Titled “A chest, a train, a blizzard, and some zwieback,” in *On The Line*, February, 1977, this story relates the experiences of Catherine Dyck Regier, great grandmother of Doris Janzen Longacre, sharing her store of bread from her dowry chest with other passengers on the train. Ernest Claassen writes in *Vistula To Plum Grove* that a farmer on horseback brought milk and bread for the children stranded on the train. The name of this unsung hero is not known.



**Map 11**

Mennonite Settlements and Towns in Central Kansas, showing origins of emigration

Reprinted by permission from *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition (1766-1910)*. Copyright 1991, Good Books, Intercourse, PA 17534.



The train finally made it to the town of Peabody where the Abraham Claassen family stayed with a friend, the newlywed John Harder Sr. This delay in proceeding on to the log cabin some 15 miles south of Peabody was probably due to the advanced pregnancy of Abraham's wife Anna. She gave birth on January 26, 1877. The infant was stillborn and Anna required a long convalescence.

Finally, after more than eight months in America, Abraham Claassen and his family had arrived at the place that would remain home for most of them for the rest of their lives. In addition to Abraham, age 51, there was his wife Anna, age 38, daughters Anna and Justine, ages 14 and 6, and sons Johann and Abraham, ages 12 and 8. Abraham's half brother, Gerhard Claassen, age 57, was with the family as well.

Gerhard wrote in his own journal that he did not intend to buy a farm, that he thought he could invest his money more profitably in some other way. This would explain in part why he did not accompany his brother Abraham to Nebraska and Kansas looking for land. Gerhard changed his mind rather quickly, however, and bought a quarter section (160 acres) of his own on March 1, 1877. It may be that living in the cramped quarters of the log cabin near the Henry Creek with Abraham's family helped Gerhard to make up his mind.

The log cabin was situated on a natural rise above the flood plain of the Henry Creek just a few dozen yards away. There was a spring on the Henry Creek that provided a source of fresh water even in the freezing winter weather. The abundant timber along the creek was a ready source of fuel for cooking and heating. A photograph of the Jacob Harder farm taken circa 1899 shows the location of the log cabin. In this photograph, shown on page 48 of *Vistula To Plum Grove*, and in this book, the low one story building between the stone house on the left and the two story barn in the center of the photograph is the original log cabin. By the time this photograph was taken the cabin had undergone extensive remodeling. The rough-hewn logs were covered with sawn lumber and the roof re-shingled. Jacob Harder used this building as his workshop for over 40 years until his death in 1937. It was torn down in 1946.

For the entire family, living under primitive conditions in this log cabin was a far cry from what they had been used to in West Prussia. An affluent farmer like Abraham Claassen had many hired hands to work his 74-acre farm at Simonsdorf and his wife Anna had a number of servants that performed most of the housekeeping chores in addition to the laundry and cooking. Cheap, abundant labor was not to be found on the Kansas prairie. Everyone had to pitch in and contribute if the family were to survive and prosper.

The first order of business for Abraham Claassen was to get a house built for his family. He chose to build on the 160 acres he bought first, that between the Henry Creek and Whitewater River, rather than where the log cabin was situated. Abraham hired a local stone mason, Andy Patterson, to build a house. There was an abundance of limestone in the area, as close as the site of the log cabin. Suitable building stone was found south of the log cabin about 3/8 mile. This quarry site is located on the ridge just a few yards west and south of the current drive entrance to the Jacob Harder house. Andy Patterson built Abraham a fine looking house of native limestone that still stands today. The cost of the house was \$2,479.33, as noted in Abraham's detailed records. An additional \$3,201.22 was spent to pay for construction of various barns and sheds on the farm. All of this



building was completed by 1878. A photograph taken in that year shows the complete farmstead of newly constructed buildings. Being able to purchase 320 acres of land and have all of these buildings put up in such a short period of time indicates that Abraham Claassen had come to America with considerable cash reserves. This undoubtedly made the transition to life on the plains much easier for the whole family. At most, they had to endure the primitive conditions of the log cabin for one year.

Anna Bergmann Claassen (1838-1917) and Abraham Claassen (1825-1910). Photo: *circa* 1890, Authors' collection.



Left: Justine Claassen Entz (1870-1951) and Helene Claassen Kopper (1878-1968). Photo: *circa* 1894, Authors' collection.



## Plum Grove, Kansas

Prior to the arrival of Mennonite settlers in northwest Butler County, Kansas, attempts to settle and farm in the area are best described as sporadic. The abandoned log cabin that Abraham Claassen and his family lived in for their first year is indicative of previous, failed attempts.

The first known settlement near the area of the Plum Grove community was Whitewater City. This town was established on the banks of the Whitewater River, south of the present town of Potwin, Kansas, by a group of pioneers from Douglas County, Kansas, in 1857. Douglas County, with Lawrence as its main city, is approximately 120 miles northeast of this first settlement. A severe drought in 1860 forced the inhabitants of Whitewater City to abandon the settlement because of a lack of food.

During the winter of 1860 Joseph Adams arrived at the ghost town of Whitewater City and stayed until spring in one of the deserted log cabins. He then moved north on the Whitewater River and filed a homestead claim in Plum Grove Township. There he remained, becoming the area's first permanent settler.

The Homestead Act of 1861 brought more settlers into this rather remote corner of Butler County. Notable men that arrived before 1870 are T. L. Ferrier, Jake Green, H. H. Wilcox, Walter Gilman, and Henry Comstock. The Henry Creek received its name from Henry Comstock. Another lasting legacy was the stone fort-housebarn built by Wilcox in 1867. This building on the Whitewater River was taken apart and rebuilt in the city of El Dorado, Kansas, in the late 1980s. In the spring of 1871 the last available quarter section (160 acres) in Plum Grove Township was homesteaded by Charles Coppins. On July 1, 1870, a United States Post Office was established for Plum Grove at the home of John R. Wentworth who acted as Postmaster. The name Plum Grove was chosen because of the abundance of plum thickets in the area. In 1871, partners Drake and Lobdell built a store for general merchandise near the Post Office-home of Wentworth. This was soon followed by another retail store built by a man named Stewart. This small cluster of three buildings would be the extent of the first town of Plum Grove. On October 7, 1872, a bond issue was passed for the building of a railroad that would roughly follow the Whitewater River running south to the towns of Augusta and Douglas, Kansas. The proposed route was one and half miles west of the existing Post Office and two stores of Plum Grove. The town was promptly moved due west to the intersection of Milton and Plum Grove Townships. The nationwide financial Panic of 1873 doomed the proposed Chicago, Kansas, and Nebraska Railroad to a stillborn birth. There would be many more proposals for railroads in and around Plum Grove, but they never materialized. Lack of a

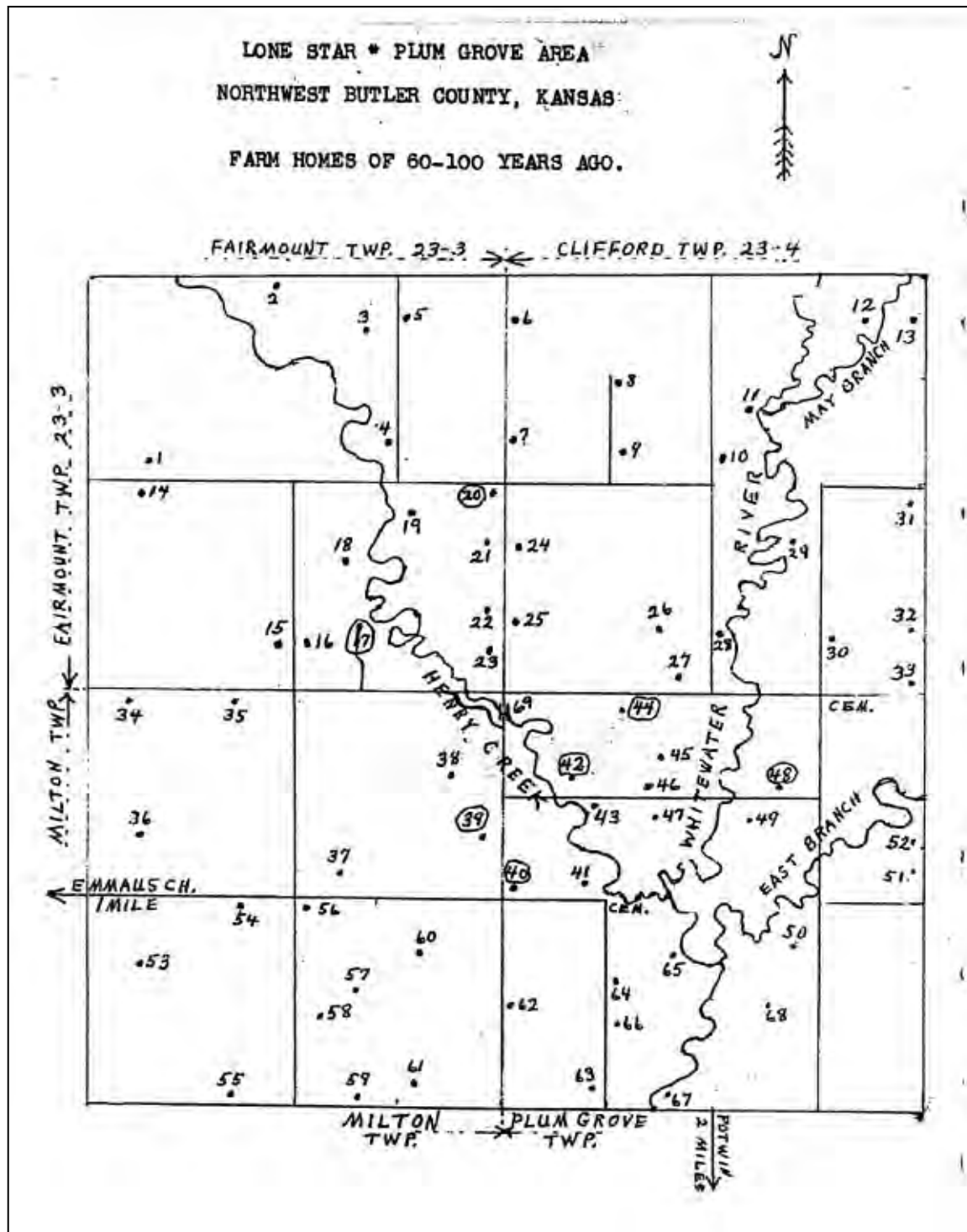


Above: Abraham Claassen home 1998. In May, 1882, lightning struck the north end of the house destroying one of the chimneys and walls. Extensive remodeling in the subsequent 100 years has radically altered the original appearance of the house.

Photo: Arthur N. Claassen.

Right: Anna Bergmann Claassen (1838-1917). This photograph was taken May 2, 1916, in front of the Claassen home built in 1878. Photo: Courtesy of Edith Claassen Graber.





Map 12

“Lone Star - Plum Grove Area, Northwest Butler County, Kansas” as drawn by Ernest Claassen, showing farm homes of 85-125 years ago. See legend facing page.

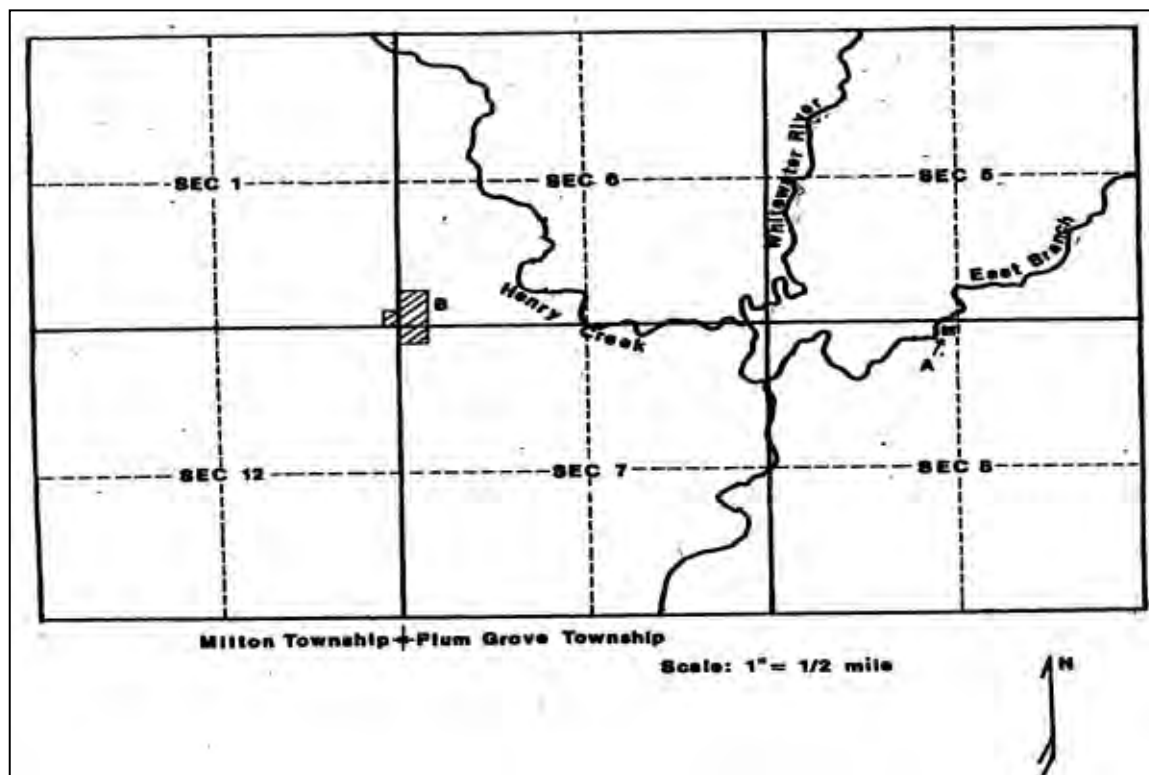
Reprinted by permission from *Abraham Claassen: Vistula To Plum Grove*. Private printing by Ernest Claassen, 1975.

## Lonestar - Plum Grove Area

Farm Homes of 60-100 Years Ago With Names of Some of the Occupants. 1974 Occupants Underlined.

- 1 Stone-Cullop-Dorsey
  - 2 E.Paulson-Chambers-Bumm
  - 3 Robert Camp-Jim Paulson
  - 4 Janzen- \*Remington-H.Wiebe
  - 5 Turner-W.Scrivher-E.Esau
  - 6 Dey-Puckett-Arnold Koehn
  - 7 John Bricker-Jim Snavelly
  - 8 Logan Ullum
  - 9 James Long
  - 10 Ed Snavelly-Roy Ullum
  - 11 John Thomas-E. Lewis-J.Kraft
  - 12 A log cabin
  - 13 Thos. Ferrier-ElvinLong
  - 14 Fritz Stucky-Fred Tschumi-  
Marvin Wiebe
  - 15 Charles Stephens
  - 16 Dirks
  - 17 Log cabin-Jacob Harder-  
Arthur Dyck
  - 18 A dugout-Brubaker
  - 19 Dan Elder-Peder Paulson,  
Robert Lemon
  - 20 Lone Star school- R. Brady
  - 21 John Smith
  - 22 Name not known
  - 23 Alden Watson-Wm. Ferrier
  - 24 J.J.Dyck
  - 25 Richard Lierle-Paul Claassen
  - 26 Wm.Edwards
  - 27 Wm.Beard-Jim Day-M,Hopkins
  - 28 Thos.Beard-J.Yoder-J.Tuttle
  - 29 James Van Tuyl-Arnold Claassen
  - 30 Thos.Edwards-Guthrie
  - 31 B.G.Guhr-Leslie Smith
  - 32 Frank Smith
  - 33 Albert Gates-D.Carter
  - 34 Ingold-Wuthrich-Ben Krahn
  - 35 Log cabin-Geo.Cornelius-  
H.Thiessen
  - 36 Thompson-Roy Ullum
  - 37 Henry Dirks-C.Merrifield
  - 38 Hugo Wiebe-Chas.Lierle
  - 39 John Entz-Dillon-Jagnow
  - 40 Plum Grove town and school
  - 41 Philip Corfman-O. Claassen
  - 42 Abraham Claassen-Albert Claassen
  - 43 Henry Comstock-Jos.Farni
  - 44 John Claassen-Donovan Claassen
  - 45 Dugout-Thos.McCluakey
  - 46 McCluskey-Jacob Corfman
  - 47 John Harrison-C.Wateon
  - 48 J.B.Morton-Arthur Claassen
  - 49 Jacob Farni Jr.-Henry Long
  - 50 Wentworth-Snyder-Herbert Claassen
  - 51 Will Ball-John Tuttle
  - 52 Milo Ball-Mertz-C.Hopkins
  - 53 John F. Harder-Brown
  - 54 Samuel Thomas Jr.
  - 55 Will Stephens-H.Unruh
  - 56 Kennard-Ade-Wesley Thomas
  - 57 Chet Brenner-Myers
  - 58 George Strasser
  - 59 Will Baum-Lawrence Hinnen
  - 60 Geo.Ogden- Kenneth Toeys
  - 61 Thos.Powell-Lew Powell
  - 62 John Scrivner-Woods
  - 63 Rolla Joseph-Carl Claassen
  - 64 Joseph Adams Jr.-Glen Claassen
  - 65 Joseph Adams Sr.-C.Pitzer
  - 66 M,Joseph-W.Kemper T.Guhr
  - 67 Sam Oder,a truck gardener
  - 68 Chas. Cain-Otto Kemper
  - 69 Stone Arch Bridge
- \*Frederic Remington - Artist  
Sheep Ranch 1883





**Map 13**

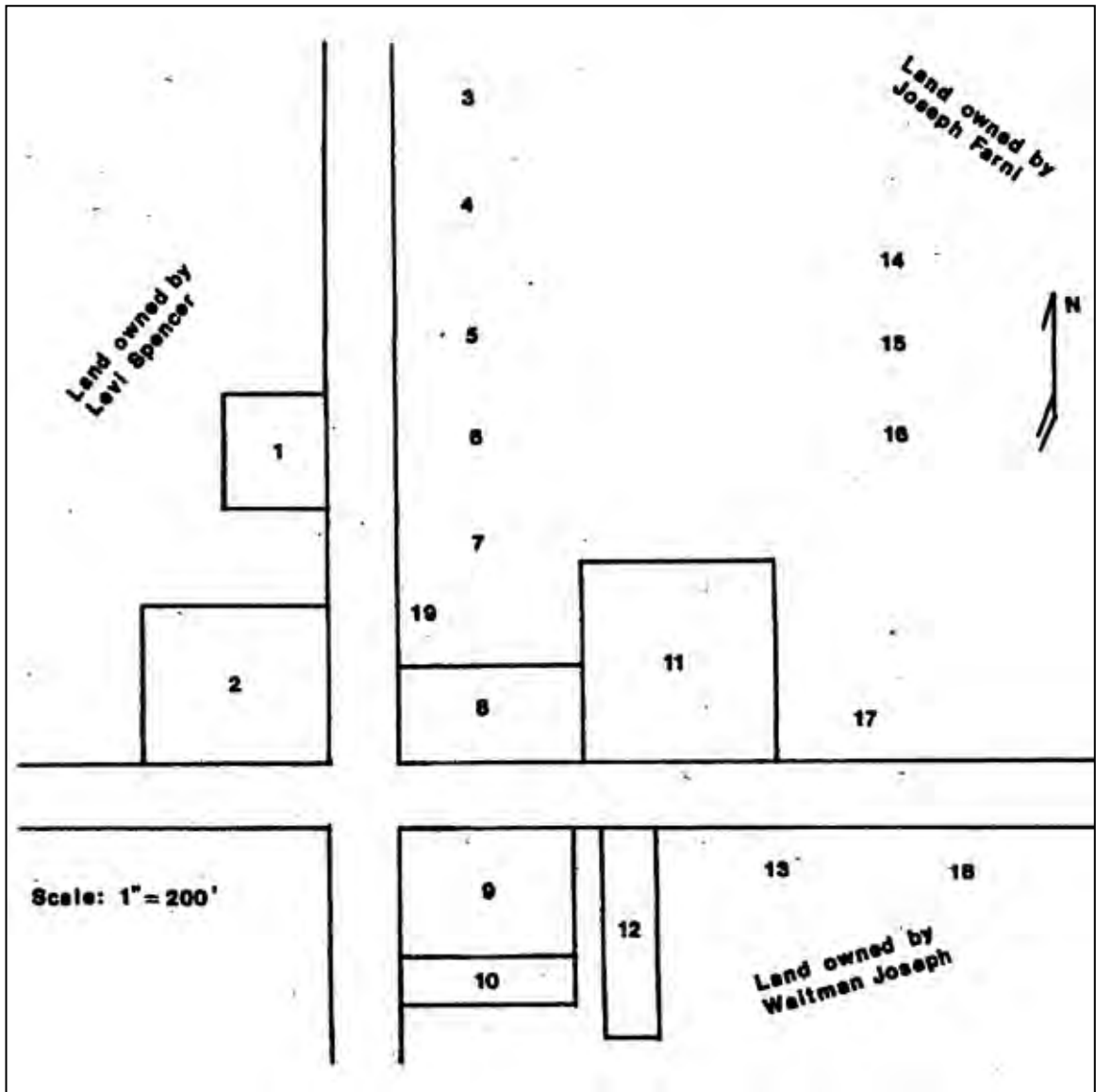
Locations of the town of Plum Grove in Butler County, Kansas

A  
Location of Drake & Lobdell's store and Mr. Stewart's store on the Wentworth homestead

B  
Location of Plum Grove, Kansas after it was moved in the early 1870s

railroad would eventually mean the demise of Plum Grove itself. Before that time, however, Plum Grove experienced a spurt of growth fueled by an abundance of optimism.

Stark Spencer was probably Plum Grove's most enthusiastic booster after the town moved to its second, and final location. Spencer operated a store for general merchandise, had a saloon in the basement of his store, and a jail in the back of the saloon! One of the many hats that Stark Spencer wore was that of Honorable Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Plum Grove. He also became Postmaster of the Plum Grove Post Office. Mail was brought twice weekly from the town of Peabody, some 15 miles north of Plum Grove. Peabody did have a railroad and also a newspaper, "The Peabody Gazette." Stark Spencer was a contributing reporter to "The Peabody Gazette" under various pseudonyms, including "Star Cus." Newsworthy events in Plum Grove during the 1870s and 1880s were the meetings of the Plum Grove Literary Society which met to discuss politics and issues of local interest, local celebrations of various holidays, rare incidents of crime such as livestock theft, accidents and deaths. Also chronicled are the comings and goings of various businesses and inhabitants of the town and surrounding community. By 1879 the town of Plum Grove boasted a population of 100 people. In addition to the Post Office and stores there were blacksmith shops, a meat packing



**Map 14**

Plum Grove, Kansas, 1885

- |                                                              |                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. W. W. Kemper Blacksmith Shop                              | 10. Lot owned by F. M. Markee       |
| 2. M. C. Snorf Mercantile, previously owned by Stark Spencer | 11. Plum Grove School District #126 |
| 3. Spear's Nursery*                                          | 12. Starr's Hog Pens*               |
| 4. Daffron' Store*                                           | 14-17. Homes*                       |
| 5. Livery Barn*                                              | 18. Kemper Home*                    |
| 6. Kinsey Home*                                              | 19. Town Water Well*                |
| 7. Dr. Seamen Home and Drug Store                            |                                     |
| 8. A home owned by Abraham Claass                            |                                     |
| 9. Hoyt's General Store, lot owned by Dr. I. V. Davis        |                                     |

\*Locations as remembered by Mrs. John J. Kopper in 1965 at the age of 86 years.

plant, photography studio, boarding house, and a school that served double duty as a church for Presbyterians and Methodists.

In 1883 a man that was to become one of America's best known artists moved into the Plum Grove community. His name was Frederic Remington. Remington purchased 160 acres two miles north and one half mile west of the town and tried his hand at sheep ranching. It doesn't seem like his heart was in it and the operation was never successful. Remington was a bit of a free spirit, as most artists are prone to be, and his escapades around Plum Grove were not fully appreciated by many of the residents. He wore out his welcome with a prank that could have had serious consequences on Christmas Eve of 1883. Remington rode into town with a group of companions in search of "snake bite medicine" and ended up at the schoolhouse where a Christmas program was in progress. The entertainment provided wasn't up to Remington's standards and he disrupted the program by throwing paper wads at another spectator. Both were tossed out of the building. Remington soothed his bruised ego with more whiskey at Hoyt's Store and plotted his revenge on the unsuspecting townspeople. He grabbed up a box of packing straw from the store and returned to the school. There he placed the straw at the only door, the entrance, and set it on fire. When the cry of "fire" rang out the terrified people inside the school broke out the windows to escape. Little real damage was done, but the townspeople were not amused at Remington's idea of a prank. Criminal charges were pressed against Remington. Although the trial resulted in a hung jury, Remington must have felt Plum Grove inhospitable. Soon after this incident he sold his land and moved on into history as one of America's premier Western artists.

Most of Plum Grove would follow Remington in leaving by 1889. When the Missouri Pacific Railroad bypassed Plum Grove in 1885 the town began a rapid decline. Buildings were torn down and moved to the nearby town of Brainard and the new town of Whitewater. Businesses were relocated to Potwin and Peabody. On October 31, 1888, the Post Office at Plum Grove ceased operation. By 1889 only the school remained to remind people that a town had been there. The school held classes until 1955 and then that building too was gone, moved to a farm several miles north of the former town.

## **The Emmaus Mennonite Church**

Equal in importance to establishing their homes and farms for these Mennonite immigrants from West Prussia, was their faith and a house of worship. Most of the Mennonite settlers around the

small community of Plum Grove, Kansas, had belonged to the Heubuden and Ladekopp Mennonite congregations in West Prussia. Here in America they formed a new congregation beginning in the winter of 1876-1877 under the leadership of the Reverend Peter Dyck. Dyck's leadership was a temporary solution to the needs of the settlers. A more permanent solution arrived in the spring of 1877. His name was Leonhard Sudermann and he would serve as elder of the new Emmaus Mennonite Church until his death in January of 1900.

Leonhard Sudermann was well known to those that had been members of the Heubuden congregation in West Prussia. He had grown up there before emigrating to the Molotschna Mennonite colony in South Russia as a young man in the early 1840s. As a minister there, Sudermann became increasingly concerned with the loss of exemption from military service for Russian Mennonites and made his decision to emigrate to America in 1876. He used all of his considerable influence and powers of persuasion to encourage members of his Molotschna congregation to follow him to America. Toward that end he gave an impassioned farewell sermon to his congregation at Berdiansk, South Russia, on July 20, 1876. This sermon was translated from the original German to English by Ernest Claassen and printed in the *History Of The Emmaus Mennonite Church* in 1976. The central theme of this sermon is that he, Sudermann, must leave his congregation in order to be true to his faith, not that he wants to go. His anguish at leaving behind his home and beloved congregation is evident. Also he is concerned for the well being of those he leaves. These same sentiments must have been felt by thousands of families that chose to come to America, but rarely are they so eloquently expressed as in this inspired last sermon by Elder Leonhard Sudermann.

In 1878 land was secured for the building of the first Emmaus Mennonite Church, the site of the present church and cemetery. This first building would serve the Emmaus congregation for 20 years. On October 13, 1878, the first baptismal service was held in the then-new building. Among this first group baptized was our grandmother Anna Claassen, 16 years old.

During these early years the Emmaus congregation grew at a fairly rapid rate due to the influx of new settlers and a high birth rate. By 1908 a larger church was needed and subsequently built. This second church was two stories tall, whereas the first one had been a small, single-story building. The site of the second building was just east of the first building. After the first building and its foundation had been removed this area became part of the site of the present cemetery.

The Emmaus Mennonite Church Cemetery is the final resting place for many generations of Dyck, Harder, and Claassen ancestors. It is a place of simple, quiet beauty befitting the lives of



Left: Second Emmaus Mennonite Church building. Built in 1908, it served the congregation until 1928. This is a very early photo taken in 1908 before the church was dedicated on December 20, 1908.

Below: The third Emmaus Mennonite Church building. Built in 1928, it was dedicated on January 20, 1929. It continues to serve the congregation after undergoing two major remodelings.

Photos: Authors' collection.



those buried there. No other place has the visual impact of family history as does this cemetery. Being able to walk from stone to stone following the chronology beginning with Abraham Claassen, born in 1825 in West Prussia, is a moving and rewarding experience.

By 1928 the Emmaus congregation had again outgrown its building. This time the membership used a temporary place of worship while the existing church was torn down to make way for the new building on the same site. This third building continues to serve the membership of the Emmaus Mennonite congregation today, although it has undergone two major remodelings since 1928.

After the death of Leonhard Sudermann in 1900 the Emmaus congregation was served by a succession of ministers and elders. In the Dyck family none was as revered as Bernhard W. Harder. Born July 30, 1878, he was the first child born in the fledgling Emmaus community. Known throughout his life affectionately as "B. W.," he was elected as minister of the Emmaus Mennonite Church on July 20, 1902. "B. W." was the most educated minister to serve the Emmaus congregation, having attended Bethel and Emporia State Colleges as well as seminaries in Ohio and Illinois. He continued his education throughout his life and didn't limit his study to theology. Many years after his retirement he took geology classes at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas, simply because it was something he always wanted to do. On January 7, 1924, "B. W." was ordained as elder of the Emmaus congregation. He served in this capacity until his retirement in January of 1939. Even after retirement he remained active in the lives of many in the Emmaus community. On November 28, 1948, he performed his last marriage, the wedding of Herbert C. Dyck and Alice N. Sitler. On August 12, 1970, Bernhard W. Harder, minister, elder, exceptional man, died at the age of 93 years.



Above: The  
Emmaus Mennonite  
Church, 1997.  
Photo credit: Glen  
Claassen



Left: Grave marker  
of Anna and  
Abraham Claassen  
in the Emmaus  
Mennonite Church  
Cemetery.  
Photo: Arthur N.  
Claassen.

## Claassen Family Lineage and Data

The sources of this information are Ernest Claassen's book *Abraham Claassen: Vistula To Plum Grove* and Agnes Wiebe Harder's compilation *The Ancestors and Descendants of Abraham Claassen and Anna Bergmann, 1630 - 2000*. Ernest's book is an excellent source of genealogical information for the descendants of Abraham Claassen (1825-1910) up to the year 1975. This includes the descendants of Jacob J. Dyck and Marie G. Harder. Although *Vistula To Plum Grove* has long been out of print, many families have at least one copy of this wonderful book. Younger readers are encouraged to ask parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles for a copy to read.

Agnes Wiebe Harder's *Ancestors and Descendants* is a more detailed use of the same records Ernest Claassen used to write *Vistula To Plum Grove*. These records include the journals of Gerhard von Bergen (1741-1790), Gerhard von Bergen (1785-?), Gerhard Claassen (1819-1913), and Abraham Claassen (III) (1825-1910). Ernest had translated a large portion of these journals from the German script to English for use in *Vistula To Plum Grove*. For *Ancestors and Descendants*, Elma Esau (1917- ) continued Ernest Claassen's work of translating and typing the genealogical information contained in these old journals. Martha Claassen Wiebe (1891-1990) and Elsie Claassen Claassen (1908- ) kept the records of genealogical information compiled by Ernest Claassen up-to-date from 1975 through December, 1999. Again, this includes the descendants of Jacob J. Dyck and Marie G. Harder.

### I. Isaak Claassen

b. 14 March 1670, Rückenau, West Prussia

d. 15 December 1731, West Prussia

m. 21 November 1694, West Prussia

Margaretha Bergmann (father - Abraham Bergmann b. *circa* 1630)

b. 13 October 1667, West Prussia

d. 12 September 1736, West Prussia

Issue: 8

### II. Maria Claassen

b. 11 April 1704, Grosslichtenau, West Prussia

d. 30 August 1776, Grosslichtenau, West Prussia

m. (1) Michael Regehr

b. 28 September 1699

d. 3 September 1730

Issue: 3



1. Michael Regehr II
2. Gerhard
3. Abraham
  - b. 15 September 1728
  - d. 11 January 1791

(2) Gerdt von Bergen

- b. 17 January 1704, West Prussia
- d. 29 January 1771, West Prussia

Gerdt was the second elder of the Heubuden Mennonite congregation from 1741 until his death.

Issue: Number of children unknown

1. Margaretha
  - b. 22 September 1736
  - d. 11 December 1794
  - m. 24 August 1764
    - Cornelius Regier
      - b. 27 November 1742
      - d. 30 May 1794

2. **Gerhard**
  - b. 23 November 1741
    - Ellerwald, West Prussia
  - d. 23 April 1790,
    - Lichtenau, West Prussia

2. **Maria**
  - b. unknown
  - d. 12 August 1810

III-A. **Gerhard von Bergen**

- b. 23 November 1741, Ellerwald, West Prussia
- d. 23 April 1790, Lichtenau, West Prussia
- m. (1) 10 October 1766, West Prussia

Lena Mattisen
 

- b. 8 December 1747
- d. 1 November 1772

Issue: 4 All children born at Grosslichtenau, West Prussia

1. Gerdt
  - b. 29 May 1768
  - d. 13 April 1722
2. Behrend
  - b. 26 May 1769
  - d. unknown
3. Elias
  - b. 16 September 1772
  - d. unknown

- (2) 7 March 1773, West Prussia  
Gertrud Lewens

- b. 1 May 1754, West Prussia
- d. 22 December 1773, West Prussia

Issue: 1

- 1. Gertrud
  - b. 17 December 1773
  - d. 17 March 1774

(3) 3 May 1774, West Prussia

Helena Warkentin (father-Hans Warkentin, 1745-1806, mother-Christine Wiebe, 1744- 1821)

- b. 1754, West Prussia
- d. 27 February 1813, Lichtenau, West Prussia

Issue: 11

- 1. Histina
  - b. 18 February 1775
  - d. 9 May 1775
- 2. Gerhart
  - b. 24 April 1776
  - d. 9 May 1776
- 3. Maricke
  - b. 5 December 1777
  - d. 19 January 1778
- 4. Helena
  - b. 27 May 1779
  - d. 19 May 1843
- 5. Justina
  - b. 9 October 1780,
  - d. 6 September 1853
- 6. Maria
  - b. 3 February 1782
  - d. 7 March 1782
- 7. Hans
  - b. 18 November 1783
  - d. 3 December 1783
- 8. Gerhard
  - b. 16 July 1785
  - d. unknown
- 9. Hans
  - b. 12 January 1787
  - d. 27 March 1787
- 10. Catrina
  - b. 14 February 1789
  - d. 14 March 1789
- 11. Margaretha
  - b. 3 January 1791
  - d. 3 April 1791

III-B. Maria von Bergen

- b. date unknown, West Prussia

- d. 12 August 1810, Lichtenau, West Prussia
- m. date unknown, West Prussia
- Abraham Claassen (I)
- b. 30 August 1717, West Prussia
- d. 11 November 1775, Lichtenau, West Prussia

Issue: 2

1. Agnetha
  - b. 17 August 1768
  - d. unknown
  - m. date unknown
  - Abraham Classen
  - b. 14 September 1767
  - d. unknown
2. **Abraham (II)**
  - b. 2 September 1771, Lichtenau, West Prussia
  - d. 7 July 1857, either Lichtenau or Simonsdorf, West Prussia

### III. **Abraham Claassen (II)**

- b. 2 September 1771, Lichtenau, West Prussia
- d. 7 July 1857, Lichtenau or Simonsdorf, West Prussia
- m. (1) 12 April 1796, West Prussia

- Sophia Berckmann (Bergmann)
- b. 23 February 1777, West Prussia
- d. 14 October 1819, Simonsdorf, West Prussia
- Issue: 11, All children born Simonsdorf, West Prussia

  1. Elisabeth
    - b. 9 May 1797
    - d. 4 October 1854, Rosenort, Molotschna, South Russia
    - m. date unknown
    - Gerhard Deleske b. 1802
  2. Maria
    - b. 5 November 1798
    - d. 6 July 1864, Rosenort, Molotschna, South Russia
    - m. date unknown
    - (1) Cornelius Penner
    - (2) David Warkentin
  3. Justina
    - b. 11 February 1800
    - d. 18 October 1843, Rosenort, Molotschna, South Russia
    - m. date unknown
    - Peter Warkentin
  4. Sophia

- b. 1 September 1801
  - d. 29 September 1849, Rosenort,  
Molotschna, South Russia
  - m. date unknown  
Peter Quiring
5. Jacob
    - b. 9 January 1804
    - d. 28 November 1831
    - m. unknown
  6. Johann
    - b. 3 November 1805
    - d. 6 February 1830
    - m. unknown
  7. Abraham
    - b. 13 October 1808
    - d. 19 November 1808
    - m. N/A
  8. Aganetha
    - b. 15 December 1809
    - d. 23 April 1833
    - m. unknown
  9. Margaretha
    - b. 10 December 1812
    - d. 10 October 1876, Rosenort, Molotschna,  
South Russia
    - m. date unknown  
Johann Teichgraeb d. 11 October 1876
  10. Abraham
    - b. 23 April 1815
    - d. 26 March 1822
    - m. N/A
  11. Gerhard
    - b. 3 April 1819, Simonsdorf, West Prussia
    - d. 13 January 1913, Newton, Kansas. Came  
to USA 1876
    - m. (1) 12 August 1881, West Prussia  
Aganetha Mandtler
      - b. 20 August 1836, West Prussia
      - d. 16 December 1884, Newton,  
Kansas
    - (2) 30 July 1885, Beatrice, Nebraska  
Sara Schulz
      - b. 14 January 1844, West  
Prussia
      - d. 13 January 1908 Newton,  
Kansas
- (2) 2 December 1821, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

Justina von Bergen Note: There is in effect a double direct lineage with the marriage of Abraham Claassen (II) and Justina von Bergen because they were first cousins.

b. 9 October 1780, Lichtenau, West Prussia

d. 6 September 1853, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

Issue: 2

1. Helena

b. 30 April 1823, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

d. 1897

m. 27 August 1850

Aron Klaassen

b. 28 May 1826

d. 18 June 1891

Issue 8

1. Johann

2. Justine

3. Helena

4. Anna

5. Aron

6. Abraham

7. Marie

8. Elise

2. Abraham (III)

b. 18 July 1825, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

d. 7 December 1910, rural Whitewater,

Kansas. Came to USA 1876

IV. Abraham Claassen (III)

b. 18 July 1825, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

d. 7 December 1910, rural Whitewater, Kansas, USA.

Family came to America in 1876.

m. 21 July 1857, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

Anna Bergmann

b. 2 May 1838, West Prussia

d. 10 October 1917, rural Whitewater, Kansas,

USA

Issue: 11

1. Helene

b. 21 June 1859, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

d. 25 November 1872, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

m. N/A

2. Johann

b. 18 October 1860, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

d. 12 May 1861, Simonsdorf, West Prussia

m. N/A

3. Anna  
b. 24 June 1862, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
d. 18 September 1949, rural Whitewater,  
Kansas
4. John H.  
b. 16 February 1864, Simonsdorf, West  
Prussia  
d. 9 May 1927, Kansas  
m. 30 December 1890, Kansas  
Elizabeth Thierstein  
b. 27 November 1872, Bowil, Canton  
Bern, Switzerland. To USA 1882  
d. 9 February 1923, Kansas
5. Maria  
b. 4 May 1865, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
d. 4 August 1865, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
m. N/A
6. Maria  
b. 2 June 1866, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
d. 4 January 1873, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
m. N/A
7. Abraham N.  
b. 18 December 1867, Simonsdorf, West  
Prussia  
d. 7 November 1948, Kansas  
m. 1 March 1906, rural Whitewater, Kansas  
Lena Blaser  
b. 13 March 1886, rural Whitewater,  
Kansas  
d. 18 June 1946, Kansas
8. Justine  
b. 2 May 1870, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
d. 11 July 1951, McAllen, Texas  
m. 7 November 1895, rural Whitewater,  
Kansas  
John Entz  
b. 18 August 1868, Simonsdorf, West  
Prussia  
d. 30 April 1937, McAllen, Texas
9. Gerhard  
b. 24 May 1872, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
d. 18 August 1872, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
m. N/A
10. A son, unnamed  
b. 26 January 1877, Peabody,  
Kansas  
d. 26 January 1877, Peabody, Kansas

- m. N/A
    - 11. Helene
      - b. 21 October 1878, rural Plum Grove, Kansas
      - d. 23 April 1968, Kansas
      - m. 7 February 1907, rural Whitewater, Kansas
        - John J. Kopper
          - b. 1 April 1883, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan
          - d. 30 May 1962, rural Whitewater, Kansas
- V. Anna Claassen
  - b. 24 June 1862, Simonsdorf, West Prussia
  - d. 18 September 1949, rural Whitewater, Kansas. Came to the USA in 1876
  - m. 22 February 1881, rural Whitewater, Kansas
    - Jacob Harder (II)
      - b. 28 January 1849, Neumunsterberg, West Prussia
      - d. 28 January 1937, rural Whitewater, Kansas.
      - Came to USA 1878
      - Issue: 13 See Harder family lineage and data Jacob Harder (II)

## The Kopper Connection

Helene Claassen's marriage to John J. Kopper on February 7, 1907, may have been the first union of the two families of our Claassen-Harder and Dyck-Wall ancestors; preceding that of Jacob J. Dyck and Marie G. Harder. Marie Harder Dyck was Helene's niece, but their closeness in age (only six years separate their births) made them close friends as well. John Kopper was close in age to Jacob J. Dyck and the commonality of their Russian origins helped to make them close friends. John and Jacob were also related, having a great grandfather Johann Wall as a common ancestor. Thus Jacob J. Dyck and John J. Kopper were second cousins.

John J. Kopper's family was part of the original group of settlers that started the Am Trakt Mennonite colony in Samara Province, Russia, in 1853-1854. In 1880 the Hahnsau village and farm land of the Am Trakt settlement was sold by the followers of a self-proclaimed visionary and prophet named Claas Epp Jr. Epp lead some 600 Mennonite followers, including the Kopper family, into the wilds of Asiatic Russia in search of a modern version of the Promised Land. Many perished along the way. The Kopper family settled near Aulie-Ata, Turkestan, where John J. Kopper was born. After enduring great hardship, the family emigrated to America in

1893. They lived near Beatrice, Nebraska, and then Whitewater, Kansas, before moving on to America Falls, Idaho, in 1906. John elected to remain in the Emmaus community near Whitewater rather than go to Idaho.

Margarethe Fast van Zandt, niece of John J. Kopper, is the source of the information on the Kopper genealogy.

Peter Kopper m. Justine Wall (no dates of birth or death are available for Peter and Justine)

Issue: Number of children is unknown

John Kopper

b. 23 August 1856, Hahnsau, Am Trakt, Russia

d. date unknown, America Falls, Idaho (family to USA 1893)

m. 3 November 1880, Am Trakt, Russia

Justine Hamm (father-Jacob Hamm, mother-Marie Esau)

b. 1859, Am Trakt, Russia

d. date unknown, America Falls, Idaho

Issue: 11

1. Jacob

b. 1881

d. unknown

m. unknown

2. John J.

b. 1 April 1883, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan

d. 30 May 1962, rural Whitewater, Kansas

m. 7 February 1907, rural Whitewater, Kansas

Helene Claassen

b. 21 October 1878

d. 23 April 1968

3. Peter

b. 1885, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan

d. unknown

m. unknown

4. Marie

b. 1887, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan

d. 1888, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan

m. N/A

5. Dietrich

b. 1889, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan

d. date unknown, California

m. unknown

6. Gerhard

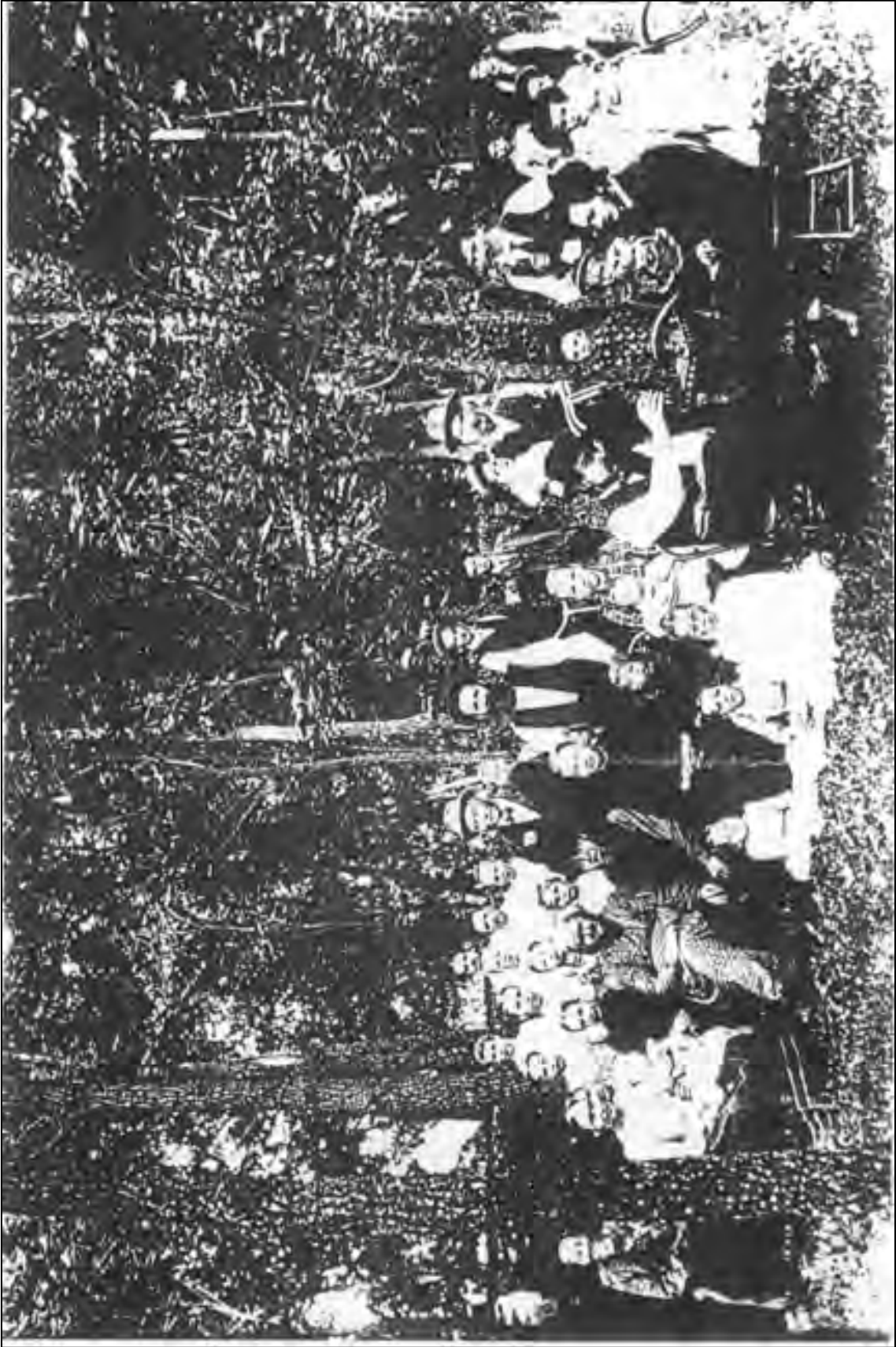
b. 1891, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan (twin)

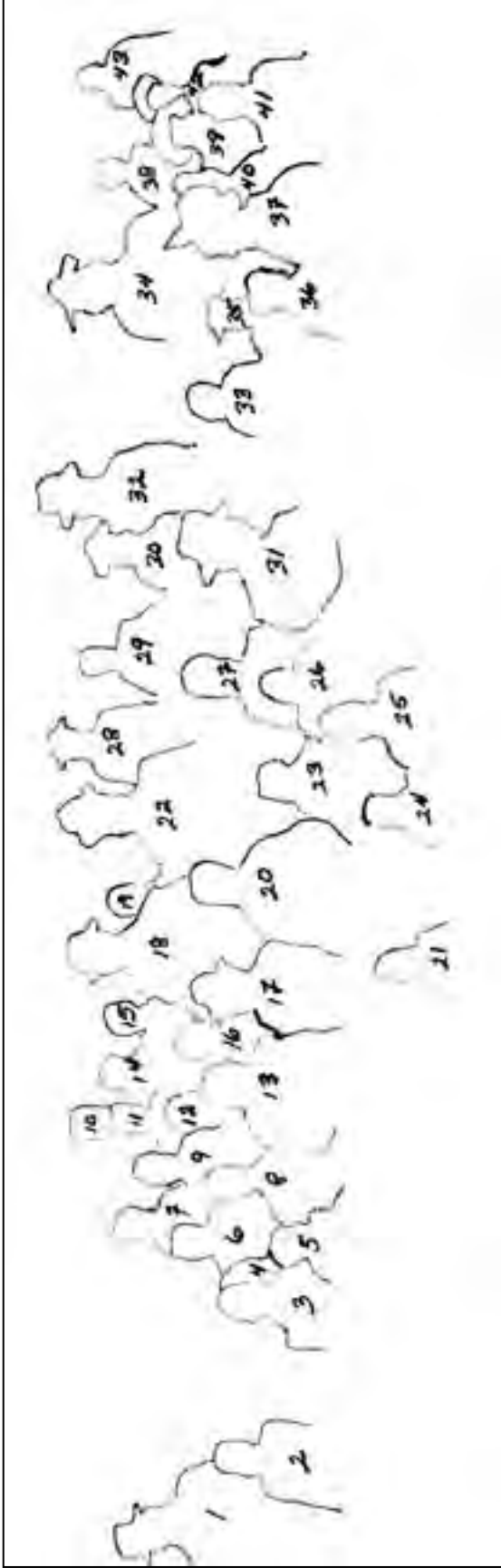
d. 1893



- m. N/A
- 7. Anna B.
  - b. 1891, Aulie-Ata, Turkestan (twin)
  - d. 10 March 1924, Aberdeen, Idaho
  - m. 10 June 1915, America Falls, Idaho
  - Heinrich G. Fast
    - b. 11 May 1876, Halbstadt, West Prussia
    - d. 23 October 1955, Whitewater, Kansas
  - Issue: 5
    - 1. Marie
      - b. 24 April 1916, Aberdeen, Idaho
      - d.
      - m. 5 October 1962
      - Roland Lang
        - d. 27 December 1991
    - 2. Margarethe
      - b. 11 January 1918, Aberdeen, Idaho
      - d.
      - m. 22 December 1948
      - Ted van Zandt
    - 3. Ella
      - b. 22 September 1919
      - d.
      - m. 12 October 1948
      - Russell Lake
        - d. March 1962
    - 4. Martha
      - b. 15 January 1921, Aberdeen, Idaho
      - d.
      - m. unmarried
    - 5. Helene
      - b. 11 February 1923
      - d. 10 March 1924
      - m. N/A
- 8. Helene
  - b. 1893, on board ship to USA
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
- 9. Justine
  - b. 1897
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
- 10. Marie
  - b. 1899 d. unknown m. unknown
- 11. Martha
  - b. 1902 d. 1902 m. N/A







Family/neighborhood gathering in the walnut grove south of the Abraham Claassen (III) farmstead late summer 1905.

(1) Joseph Fahmi and wife (2) Mary Fahmi, (3) Elizabeth Thierstein Claassen holding son (5) Louis Claassen, (4) Mrs. Bartsch, aunt of John J. Kopper Jr., (6) Helen Kopper, (7) Martha Claassen Wiebe, (8) Mrs. Justine Kopper, (9) Clara Claassen Esau, (10) Helene Claassen Kopper, (11) Emma Harder, (12) Helen Bartsch, cousin of John J. Kopper Jr., (13) Anna Bergmann Claassen, (14) Marie Harder Dyck, (15) Bertha Harder Fast, (16) Justina Kopper, (17) Abraham Claassen (III), (18) John J. Kopper Sr., husband of Justine, father of John J. Kopper Jr., (19) Anna Kopper Fast, (20) Anna Claassen Harder, (21) Katherine Berg Regier, (22) Jacob Harder, (23) Sarah Harder Wiebe, (24) Helene Harder Dieck, (25) Minna Harder Wiens, (26) John Berg, (27) Anna Harder Berg, (28) Dietrich Kopper, (29) John J. Kopper Jr., (30) Arnold Claassen, (31) Abraham N. Claassen, (32) John H. Claassen, (33) Carl Claassen, (34) Jacob Berg, (35) Paul Claassen, (36) Esther Claassen Wiebe, (37) Jacob Kopper, (38) Albert Claassen, (39) Ernest Claassen, (40) Mathilda Claassen Andres, (41) Marie Kopper, (42) Walter Claassen, (43) Peter Kopper.

The presence of the Kopper family in this photograph indicates that it was taken before they left Kansas to live in Idaho. Only John J. Kopper Jr. remained in Kansas after 1906. In 1907 he married the youngest daughter of Abraham and Anna Claassen, Helene. Photo: Edith Claassen Graber.



Helene Claassen (1879-1968). Photo *circa* 1900, Butler County, Kansas.  
Photo: Authors' collection



John J. Kopper (1883-1962) and Helene Claassen (1879-1968) just prior to their marriage in 1907.  
Photo: Authors' collection



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

## 4

# The Harder Family

## The Harder Family Name: Origins and Early Ancestry

Anna Claassen's future husband, Jacob Harder, came to the United States in May of 1878. Jacob was the first member of his family to leave West Prussia where the Harder family had lived for hundreds of years. Of the four family names that are the focus of this book, Harder is the only name that doesn't have its origins in Flanders-Holland. Harders were among the original settlers of German origin that colonized the Vistula Delta at the invitation of the Teutonic Knights after the native Pruzzens had been subdued in 1283. Emma Harder, Jacob's daughter, recalled that Jacob said the

Harders originally came from the area around the city of Hamburg in northern Germany.

In *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, Horst Penner says that the Harders were indigenous West Prussians, an old farming dynasty that had emigrated from lands lying to the west, Mecklenburg and Holstein. This corroborates Jacob Harder's belief that his family originally came from Hamburg. Penner lists six Harders as land owners in the Grossenwerder (Vistula Delta) in 1510-1529, with holdings of two to five Hufen (1 hufe = 16.8 hectares, 1 hectare = 2.47 acres, thus 1 hufe = approximately 41.5 acres). Of these six Harders, three are likely candidates for being direct ancestors of Jacob Harder because of their names; Peter of Neukirch, and Hans and Jacob of Schoenhorst. Moving forward almost 200 years, to 1727, Horst Penner states that there is a Peter Harder at Reimerswalde in the Vistula Delta of West Prussia. Reimerswalde is the first village that can knowingly be associated with our direct descendant Harder ancestors. It may be that this Peter Harder is the father of Hans Harder, a direct descendant grandfather born *circa* 1750.

The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* states that the Harder name first appears in the records of the Danzig Mennonite Church in 1677. Horst Penner writes in *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten* that the records of the Danzig Flemish congregation list a Hans Harder as being baptized on September 1, 1667. The two conflicting dates may be due to difficulty in reading these old records. By 1700, it is probable that all Harders living in the Vistula Delta of West Prussia were Mennonites for they are listed in the records of the major Mennonite congregations at Tiegenhagen, Ladekopp, Rosenort, Furstenwerder, and Heubuden. Those Harders listed in Penner's book as landholders in 1510-1529 were most likely still Catholic as this is before the time of Mennonites in the Vistula Delta.

Harders were among the Mennonites that emigrated to the colonies of Russia after 1788. The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* lists many outstanding members of the Russian Mennonite colony at Molotschna with the name Harder. In the United States, Gustav Harder, pastor of the Emmaus Mennonite Church beginning in 1884, and the aforementioned B. W. Harder are notable Mennonites with the Harder family name.

Our oldest known direct descendant with the Harder name is Hans Harder. No information is available about Hans except for his name. His date of birth could be estimated to be *circa* 1750-1760, judging from the birth date of his son Peter. Peter Harder was born April 8, 1784, at Reimerswalde, West Prussia. Peter's wife was Justine Regehr, born November of 1780. The date of their marriage is unknown. Peter died February 23, 1835, at



Neustatterwalde, West Prussia. Justine died three years later on May 24, 1838.

A son, Jacob Harder (I), was born to Peter and Justine on November 15, 1813. There is no record of siblings for Jacob Harder (I). On January 10, 1846, Jacob (I) married Anna Fast at Barenhof, West Prussia. Anna was the oldest daughter of Johann Fast and Catharina Bergmann and was born January 1, 1823. Anna had three sisters; Justine, born August 13, 1824, Maria, born August 1, 1826, Agnetha, born February 15, 1830, and an older half sister, Catrine, born July 21, 1815. She also had a brother Jacob, born April 11, 1832, and a half brother Peter, born January 18, 1817. All of these children were born in West Prussia, but the name of the village is not known. Except for Anna, no further information is available about this generation of Fast children.

Anna's father was Johann Fast, her mother's name, Catharina Bergmann. The Bergmann/Barkman name is the same as that of Anna Claassen's mother Anna, and considering the rarity of this name among West Prussian Mennonites, it is noteworthy that it occurs twice within two generations of our ancestors. Catharina was born March 30, 1789, at Mierauerwald, West Prussia. Her parents were Peter Bergmann, born April 24, 1749, and Helen Fast, born 1763, at Orloff, West Prussia. Peter and Helen were married February 15, 1784, at Ladekopp, West Prussia. Peter Bergmann died January 4, 1808. His wife Helen died March 21, 1832; both at Mierauerwald, West Prussia. It is not known if Peter and Helen Bergmann had any other children. Catharina married Johann Fast on November 15, 1821. Johann was a widower, Catharina was his second wife. Catharina died March 13, 1854, just 17 days shy of her 64th birthday.

Johann Fast was born December 23, 1789, and died January 3, 1839. His father was Peter Fast, born May 3, 1759. Peter died November 22, 1821. No locations are known for these births and deaths. Fast is one of the oldest Mennonite family names known in the Vistula Delta. Horst Penner, in *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*, says that the Fast family originated in Brugge in Flanders (Belgium), that they were Mennonites at the early date of 1553, when Jan van der Veste was baptized in Ghent. On July 28, 1558, the entire family of Jan, including his children, was arrested and held for trial before Roman Catholic inquisitors. One of the children, 15-year-old Hanskin (Hans) van der Veste, made a daring escape from the prison at Brugge with the aid of Cornelis Jansius, a peddler. During the course of her trial, probably under torture, Jan's wife Livine disclosed that members of their Mennonite congregation had already emigrated to Danzig.

According to the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, the Fast name first appears in Wotzlaff, West Prussia, in 1582. This coincides with information supplied by Horst Penner that Gerd Veste signed a



supplication document for the Mennonite Council of Danzig in 1582. In West Prussia the “van der” or “van dem” was dropped from Flemish and Dutch names. Thus by the 18th century van der Veste evolved to Fast. Variations used during this transition include Vasten, Vast, Feste, and Faast. Both the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* and Horst Penner agree that the earliest mention of the Fast name in the Danzig Mennonite Church records is the baptism of Agnetke Vasten in 1669. By 1776 there were 33 families in West Prussia with the Fast name listed in the Mennonite congregations of Ladekopp, Elbing, Furstenwerder, and Heubuden. Members of the Fast family migrated to the major Russian Mennonite colonies, and later to the United States.

The marriage of Anna Fast and Jacob Harder (I) produced seven children that lived to maturity. No children are known to have died in infancy, remarkable for the time. All seven children were born at Neumunsterburg, West Prussia. As with most of our Mennonite ancestors of West Prussia, it is presumed that Jacob Harder (I) was a farmer. Until 1800 almost all Mennonites of the Vistula Delta were engaged in farming as their foremost occupation. It was only after the land reorganization by Napoleon during the French occupation of West Prussia that members of large Mennonite families were more or less forced to take up other trades due to a lack of available farm land. The Harder farm at Neumunsterberg was probably not very big, barely able to sustain a reasonable standard of living for the family of Jacob Harder (I).

Of the seven children born to Jacob Harder (I) and Anna nee Fast, two were daughters; Catherine, born September 13, 1847, and Justine, born June 30, 1862. The five sons were: Jacob (II); our direct descendant grandfather, born January 28, 1849, Peter; born August 24, 1850, John F.; born December 2, 1854, Abraham; date of birth unknown, and Bernhard H.; born November 16, 1865.

As with Johannes Dietrich Dyck, who was sent off at the age of 12 to become a storekeeper, Jacob Harder (II) was apprenticed at an early age to become a cabinet maker/carpenter. Most likely this was to supplement his farming skills. Additionally, Jacob acquired skill as a stonemason. Probably he worked as a laborer for a skilled mason and learned from him. Oral tradition is that Jacob always remained a farmer at heart and that he sought farm-related jobs first, relying on his wood working and masonry skills as a backup. Having numerous skills ensured full-time employment for Jacob, and he was undoubtedly considered a valuable employee by those he worked for. In addition to his manual skills, Jacob possessed a keen mind and memory. His daughter Emma wrote, “Father was a good hand on word work, he learned that in Germany.”

In 1868, at the age of 19, Jacob Harder (II) was baptized and became a member of the Furstenwerder Mennonite Church. 1868 was the 100th Anniversary of the Furstenwerder Mennonite Church

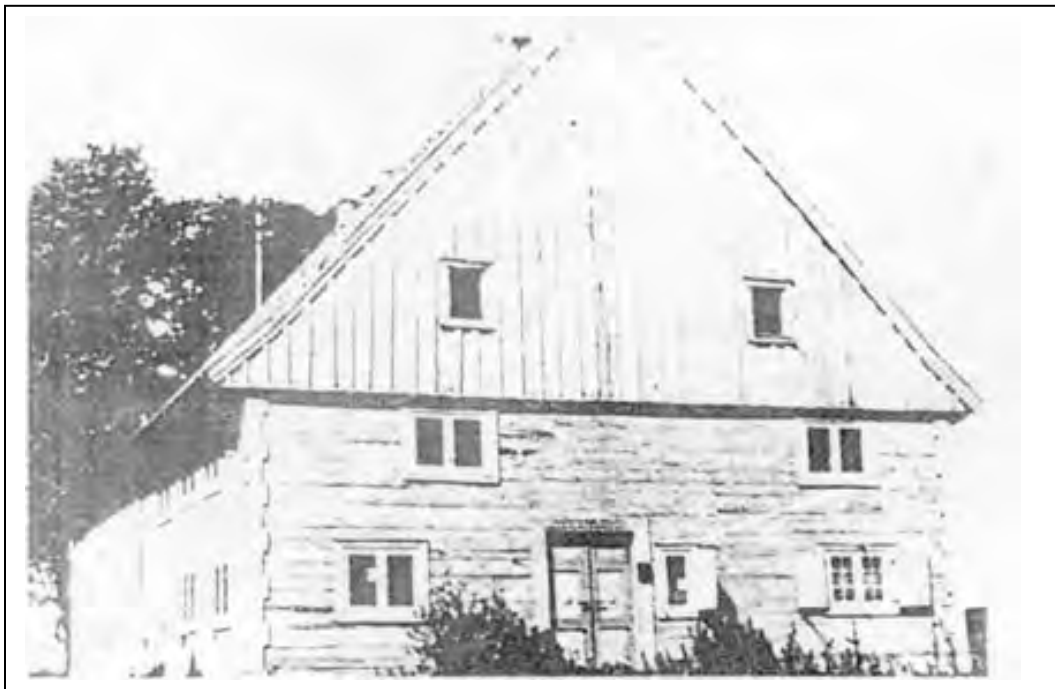
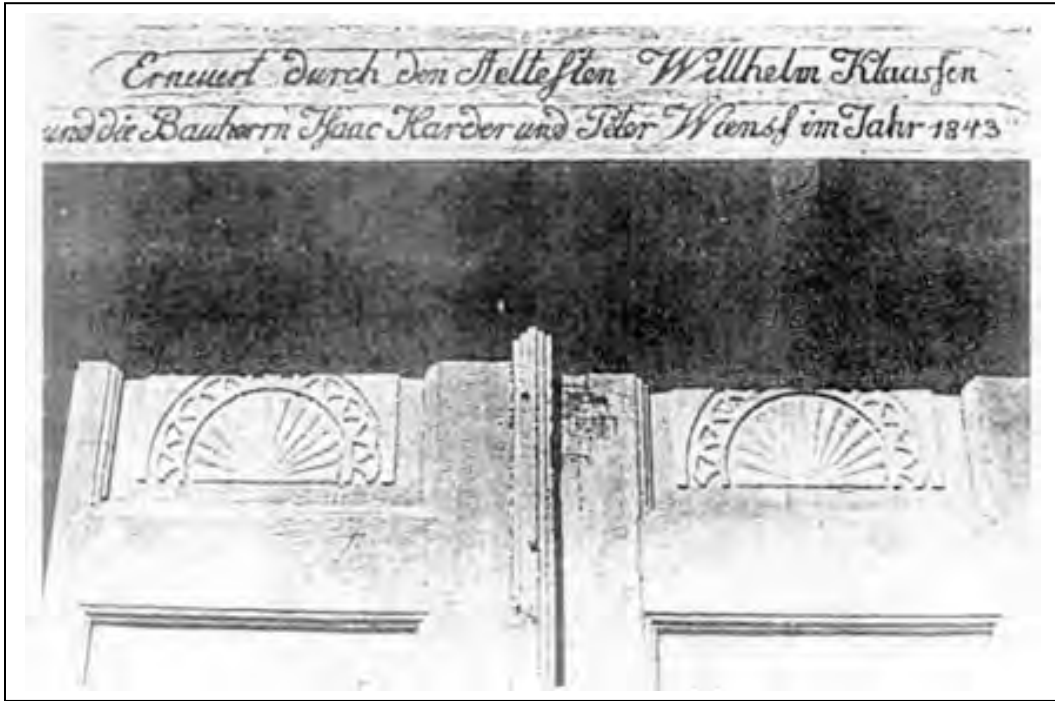


Upper left: Anna Fast Harder (1823-1905) and Jacob Harder (I) (1813-1886). They were married in 1846. Photo *circa* 1875, Tiegenhof, West Prussia.

Upper right: Anna Fast-Harder (1823-1905). Photo *circa* 1890, Tiegenhof, West Prussia.

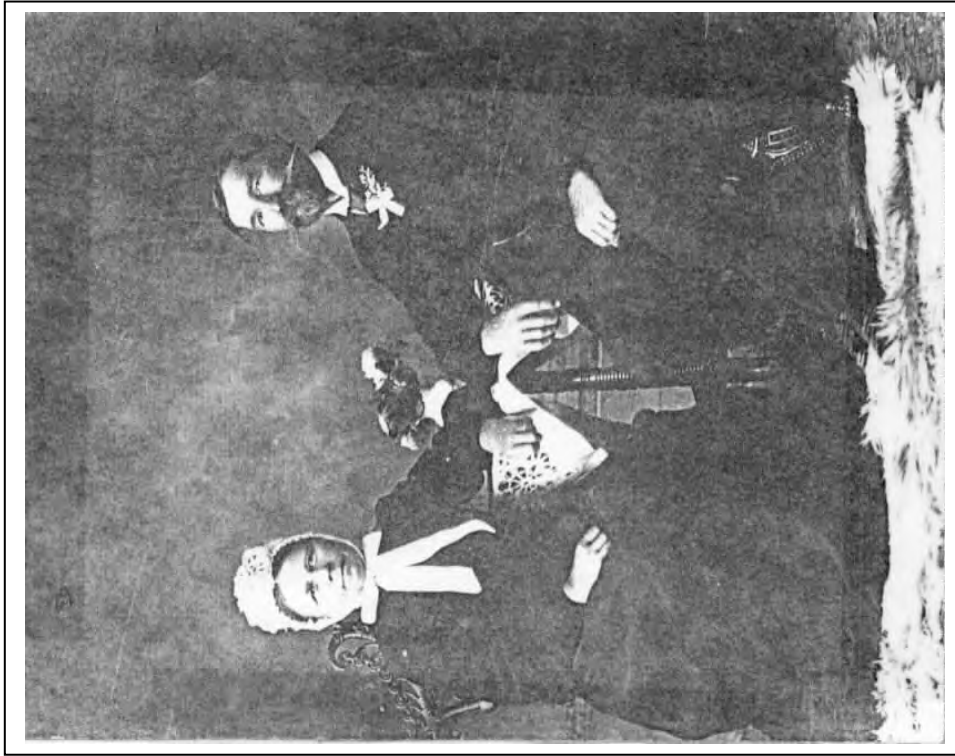
Left: Jacob Harder (II) (1849-1937). Photo *circa* 1875, Tiegenhof, West Prussia.

Photos: Authors' collection.

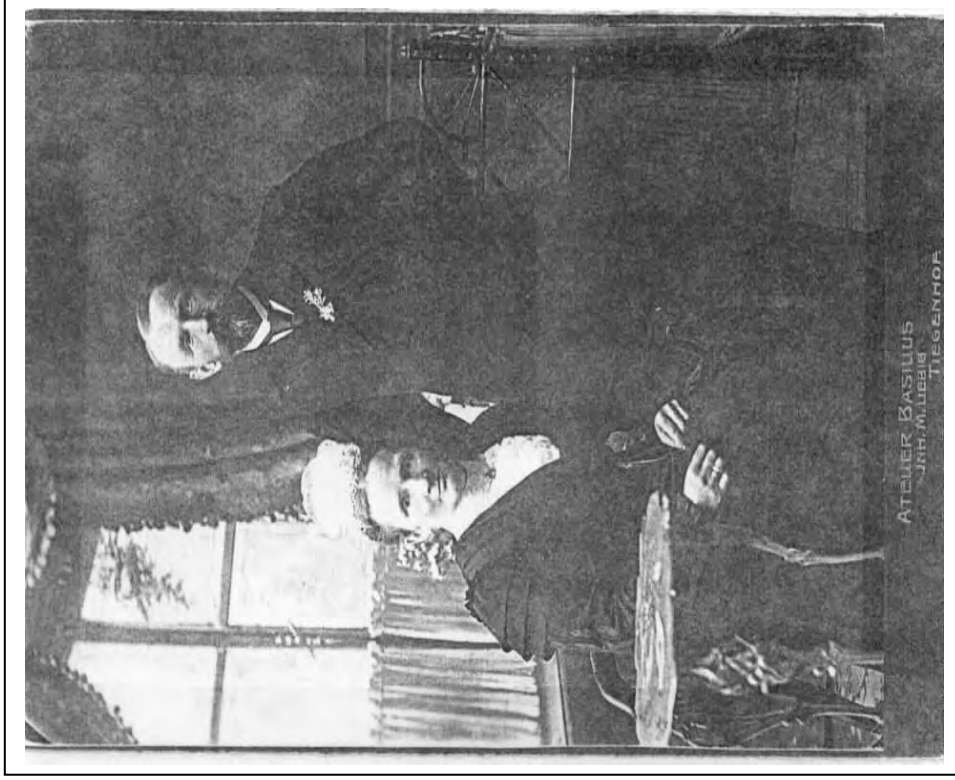


The Furstenwerder Mennonite Church in the Vistula Delta. Built in 1768, the church remained virtually unchanged for 177 years, until destroyed by the Russian Army in 1945. The inscription above the doors (top photo) dated January, 1843, dedicates the then new entrance. Jacob Harder (II) (1849-1937) was baptized here in 1868.

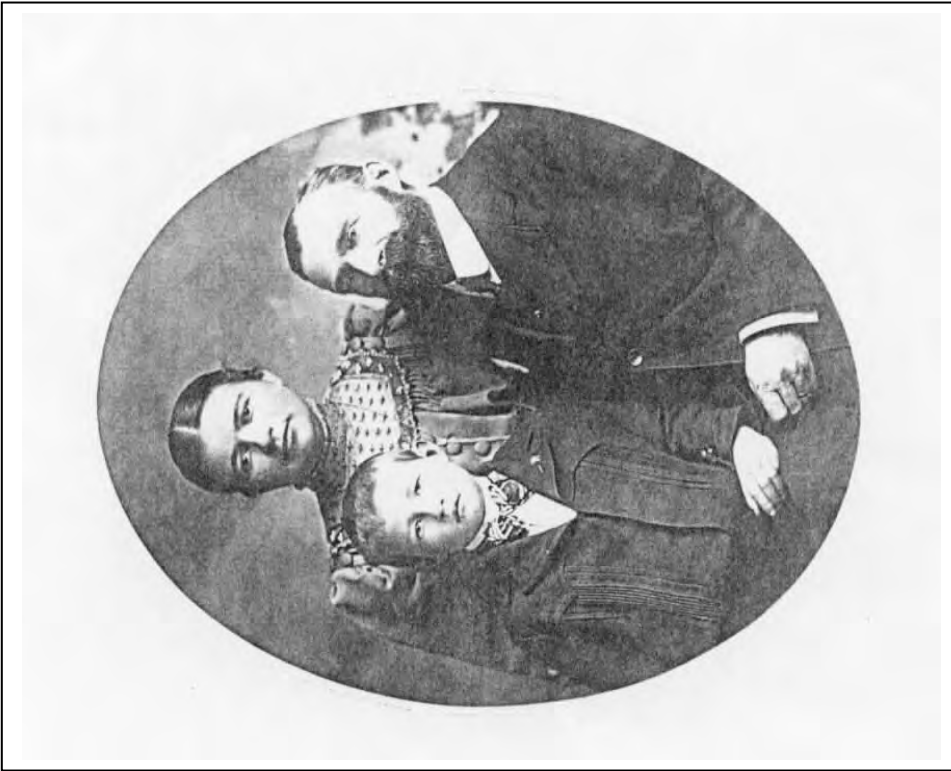
Photos: Horst Penner, *Die ost-und westpreussischen Mennoniten*.



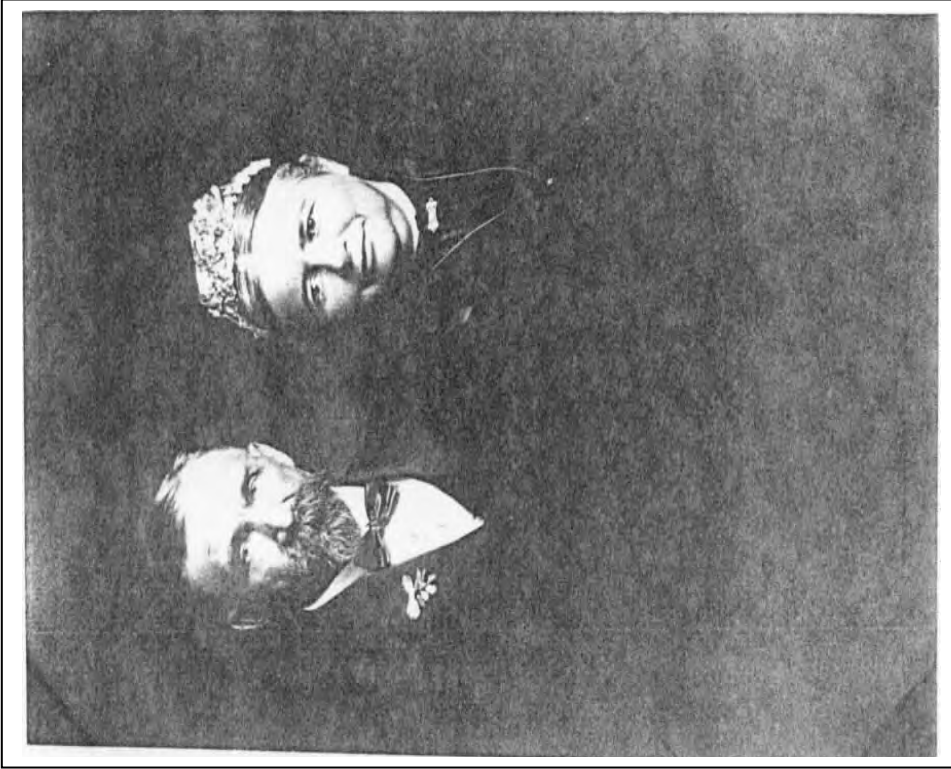
Justine Harder Harder (1853-1915) and John F. Harder (1854-1923). Photo: *circa* 1905, From the collection of John B. Harder.



Abraham Harder, born *circa* 1855, and wife Helene. This brother of Jacob Harder remained in West Prussia and virtually nothing is known of him. Photo: Courtesy of Elsie Dieck Hiebert.



Bernhard H. Harder (1865-1946) with his wife Marie Louise Berg Harder (1877-1957) and their son Jacob, *circa* 1912. Photo: From the collection of John B. Harder.



Bernhard H. Harder and Marie Berg Harder on their Silver Wedding Anniversary, 1924. Photo: From the collection of John B. Harder.

building. The church remained in its original, unaltered condition until destroyed by the Russian Army in 1945. Furstenwerder is near Neumunsterburg, Jacob's birthplace, so it is likely that Jacob lived with his parents, and brothers and sisters, unless employment made commuting too time consuming. For a man that longs to be a farmer, working on farms belonging to others can be an everyday reminder that his dream is gradually slipping away. And it also meant, in those days, postponing marriage and the beginning of one's own family. Jacob's 30th birthday, on January 28, 1878, may have been a self-imposed deadline, or he may have simply come to the realization that he would never be able to buy his own farm in the Vistula Delta of West Prussia. There has been some speculation in the generation of Jacob's grandchildren that he came to America to avoid military service in the German Army. As a reason this seems unlikely, because at 30 years old Jacob was past military age except in the case of an all-out war. Why he chose to go to America rather than to one of the Russian Mennonite colonies was probably due to letters sent by settlers in Kansas. Jacob was acquainted with the Abraham Claassen family in West Prussia before they immigrated with other members of the Heubuden Mennonite congregation to Kansas. There are no surviving letters from Anna Claassen suggesting that she influenced Jacob's decision, but he may have seen letters from her and her family sent to mutual friends. In any event, Jacob Harder (II) left the home and family he loved in West Prussia and set off to make a life for himself in America, in the state of Kansas.

## **Jacob Harder, Reluctant Immigrant**

Jacob traveled exactly the same route leaving West Prussia that the Abraham Claassen family had taken two years before, in 1876. He had received his German passport on May 3, 1878, and it describes Jacob Harder as follows: Stature: Medium, Hair: Dark Blonde, Eyes: Gray Brown, Form: Lean, No distinguishing marks. Jacob kept a short journal of his trip to America in a small, leather bound booklet, written in lead pencil. The old German script is very difficult to read, the writing in pencil has smudged badly over the decades since Jacob wrote it. In contrast to the journal kept by Abraham Claassen, the journal of Jacob Harder is very personal. He was obviously writing out of a deep despondency, a need to express his feelings. A complete translation of Jacob's short journal follows. Illegible words are shown blank, author's notes in parentheses.

(May, 1878) 16th - departed from Marienburg - changed trains in Dirschau at 7 PM - continued to Schneidemuehl where we arrived at 1 am. Rested at the station until --- continued to Berlin There a man met us from --- who claimed to be an agent of Ndl (North German Lloyd, shipping company), we were supposed to pay right away, but we --- he drove us to the Lehrter Station where we waited until 12 midnight until a train left and arrived 10 am in Bremen --- at Helmering who accompanied us to the station and we left at 7:30 am from Bremen to Bremerhaven which took us two hours. In Bremerhaven we boarded and departed at noon time - had "crooked" wind from West --- already at noon were sea sick. Tuesday morning we arrived at Southampton (England), went on land and continued at 12 noon by slow wind between the two pretty countries of France and England. We still could see land until Wednesday morning and then all trace of land left us. Wind from West - the sails were hoisted, the sea is not as rough as in the North Sea and the ship is still pretty even. I am feeling fairly well. My longing that --- my thoughts --- homesickness. Thursday May 23rd: By wind from North straight north-West --- In the evening it was rather --- with sails which rocked the ship. Today is --- strong wind but clear. I am well oh Lord, console my (loved ones) at home. Towards evening the wind became stronger. A rough night. Friday May 24: Just like yesterday. Andreas today rather sick.

Saturday May 25: nice weather - nice sunshine, not much wind - the ocean only moves on the surface. Saw ships Thursday. Yesterday and today nothing. This afternoon without sails - took the wind. The ship rocks slightly. Ach, my dear ones at home if I could send you news how I am faring. You are so worried about me - don't worry-I am fairly well. Bring my greetings and faithful thoughts you --- winds. Sunday, May 26th: Slight wind from the left side - sails fairly good - very foggy - but not as cold on deck as previously - Was rather warm in between deck this morning. Dreamed of you this morning - loved ones, ach, be consoled and don't worry and I am feeling --- the thought of home often makes my heart heavy.

Monday May 27th: Last night heavy winds - in the morning foggy cleared around noon was rather nice - the wind again --- the sea slightly moved saw 3 ships. one close to 100 --- away. Towards evening the wind increased in strength - we sailed along - saw big fish, again foggy.

Tuesday May 28: During the day foggy, and wet. We weren't on deck.

Wednesday May 29: Last night the skies cleared and this morning we had very nice weather Heaven hold the wind calm - somewhat to the North. The sea was smooth --- remained nice all day.

Thursday May 30th: "Corpus Christi Day" nice weather. The sky rather clear - little wind - the sea nearly smooth - somewhat cool. During the night dreamed of home, of father, mother, brothers and sisters, of her, and aunt. I am thinking a lot of you, dear ones.

Friday May 31: Weather foggy and rainy. Couldn't see much. In the afternoon we sailed through the --- of New York and "Habuken" (Hoboken, New Jersey) - from both sides beautifully green and impressive buildings. Landed at 5PM at the landing place for the Bremer Line in "Habuken." 1st and 2nd class left the ship - the in-between deck passengers had to remain on board. We slept that again in our "Kojen" and were taken to New York Saturday June 1st, where we were examined. We were taken to the "Kesselgarten" where we had to give our name, destination and where we came from which took until about noontime. We went to our Hotel, German Immigrant House, had lunch, paid one Mark, then we had to go to Norddeutschen Lloyd where we received railway tickets for our "shines" and left, in spite of warning from our host, around 5 PM for the station which is on Habuken sides, short distance from the water, where a train left right away and we drove through the night with hardly any stops until Sunday 6 am when we remained until 12 night in Dunkirk.

Monday June 3 - 6 am one hour wait in Cleveland.

There are no more entries in the journal after Monday, June 3, 1878. This is a very small booklet and it may be that Jacob continued his journal in some other way. If so, it has been lost. Another possible scenario is that Jacob no longer felt like writing his private thoughts, that the excitement of his unfolding adventure overcame his homesickness.

Like the Abraham Claassen family before him, Jacob Harder made a brief stopover in Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, before continuing on to Kansas. He arrived in Halstead, Kansas, probably in late June of 1878. In Halstead Jacob secured employment at the Wiebe Lumberyard. He didn't work for Wiebe very long before he was employed by Abraham Claassen in his favored occupation, farming, near the town of Plum Grove in the Emmaus Mennonite community.

Abraham Claassen was probably delighted to secure the employment of Jacob Harder. Jacob was a man Abraham knew he could trust in addition to having the necessary skills required for



farming. Their common background of West Prussia; farming, the German language, and the Mennonite religion helped secure an immediate bond. Abraham's farm of 74 acres at Simonsdorf, West Prussia, had required four full time employees. In Plum Grove, Kansas, he would have to rely on his sons, John and Abraham, and his future son-in-law Jacob Harder.

The 320 acres that Abraham owned near the town of Plum Grove was virgin, native prairie that demanded arduous labor to turn it into productive fields for grain crops. Horse-drawn plows that required four or more heavy draft horses could turn only one furrow of prairie 14-16 inches wide, and eight inches deep, at a pass. The tough, native prairie grasses quickly dulled the plowshares often requiring that a fresh edge be filed on the share after only one round of the new field. Once the plowshares had been sharpened several times they would have to be heated in a blacksmith's forge and hammered out to their original size and shape. Equal attention had to be given to the horses. Proper forage and grain was a must for these valuable animals to enable them to work in a field 12 or more hours a day. During the course of a day the horses had to frequently be unhitched from the farm implement they were pulling and led to water lest they dehydrate. A man like Jacob Harder had to be constantly alert for any indication that something was amiss with his horses. The leather collars and harnessing on the horses had to be adjusted correctly so as not to wear sores on their necks. He had to know which teams of horses worked well together and which didn't. It didn't do to have one horse pulling hard and one loafing along. Working virtually from dawn until dusk with horses ensured that a man got to know his charges well. A good farmer knew that healthy, contented animals responded better to the hard work required than animals that were mistreated or abused. Kindness toward, and respect for animals is a trait often attributed to Jacob Harder by his children and grandchildren. Jacob's daughter Emma recalled that the worst a difficult team of horses could expect from her father was to be called "verdante Schildkroete" - damned turtles! Emma also said that such language was never heard around the house and that she considered it a secret she shared with her father.

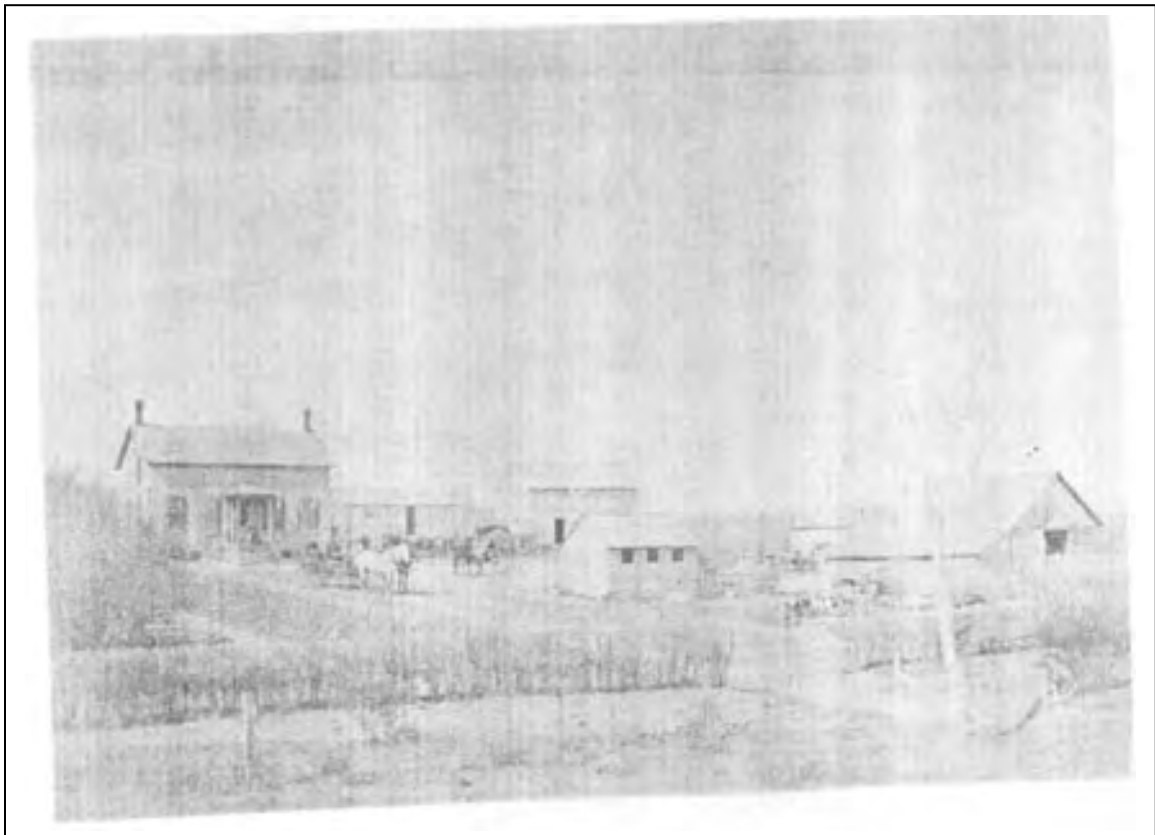
The log cabin that had served as a first home for the Abraham Claassen family in early 1877 was probably Jacob Harder's bachelor home when he went to work for Abraham Claassen. Although it is not known for certain, it is highly probable that at least one barn was built near the log cabin at this time. This would have enabled Jacob to keep horses, implements, and fodder close to where he worked, the "L" shaped 160 acres approximately one mile northwest of Abraham Claassen's home. This arrangement continued for a little over two years, until February of 1881.



Left: Jacob Harder (II) (1849-1937) and Anna Claassen (1862-1949). Wedding photograph taken February 22, 1881, Plum Grove, Kansas.

Below: Jacob and Anna Harder farm circa 1899. The two story stone house is on the far left. Just to the right is the one story log cabin that was the first home of the parents of Anna, Abraham, and Anna Claassen, upon their arrival in Kansas in January, 1877. The two story “red barn” is to the right of the log house. Foreground, left, is a chicken coop. Foreground, right, the granary with its center drive. Visible behind the granary is the large hay barn near the Henry Creek. Jacob Harder is in the carriage on the front lawn with some of the Harder children. Anna Harder is seated on the front porch of the house.

Photos: Authors’ collection.





Left: Anna Harder (1881-1954) and Marie Harder (1884-1973), *circa* 1890.

Below: Jacob and Anna Harder seated on the front lawn of their home with their daughters, standing left to right: Marie, Minna, twins Emma and Bertha, granddaughter Helene, and Anna, *circa* 1899.

Photos: Authors' collection.



On February 22, 1881, Jacob Harder married the eldest daughter of Abraham Claassen, 18-year-old Anna. The wedding took place at the Emmaus Mennonite Church where Anna had been baptized almost three years earlier. A brief biography of Jacob and Anna was written by one of their daughters, Minna Harder Wiens, and a granddaughter, Kaete Dyck, for Ernest Claassen's book *Vistula To Plum Grove*. Minna and Kaete write that on the return trip from the Emmaus Church after their wedding, Jacob and Anna had to cross the Farni ford of the Henry Creek. The creek was flooded by recent rain, deeper and swifter in current than anticipated. While crossing the creek, the wagon Jacob and Anna were riding in began to float and drift with the current. The horses were able to pull the wagon through to safety, but there were a few anxious moments for Jacob and his new bride. Jacob's phrase of "damned turtles" may have been silently coined in those anxious moments.

Crossing the Henry Creek after the wedding at Emmaus Church indicates that the newlyweds were going to the home of Abraham Claassen where they would spend the first couple of weeks of their married life. Anna's younger brother, John Claassen, recorded in his diary that the whole family went to the log cabin and cleaned it up for the newlywed couple on March 5, 1881. Jacob and Anna would live in the log cabin until their house of native limestone was completed in the summer of 1882. Before then, however, Anna gave birth to the couple's first child in the log cabin. Daughter Anna Harder was born December 28, 1881.

Jacob Harder must have written glowing reports of Kansas in his letters back home to West Prussia. Jacob's two brothers, John and Bernhard, followed him to Kansas in the early 1880s. John would be working for Abraham Claassen by 1882. In 1883, Jacob's older sister Catherine came to Kansas with her husband Jacob Dieck. All of them would eventually live and farm in the Emmaus community. Jacob Harder came to Kansas in 1878 with some money, but by no means with the capital it took to buy his own farm and build the necessary buildings. That he would have all of this in a few short years was due to the generosity of his father-in-law Abraham Claassen. Abraham, like all fathers, wanted and hoped for the best for his daughter Anna. But it is unlikely that this alone was responsible for his generosity. Abraham saw in Jacob Harder something else that all fathers wish for their daughters: A hard-working, loving husband and father. That Anna was very much in love with her husband made it easy for Abraham to be so helpful.

In October of 1973, 84-year-old Emma Harder, daughter of Jacob and Anna Harder, wrote a narrative about her parents for her Sunday School class at the Emmaus Mennonite Church. The narrative is a good record of the early years of Jacob and Anna and is reprinted here exactly as Emma wrote it.

Ex. 20:12 Deut. 5:16 Matt. 19:19 Eph. 6:1,2,3  
We children learned to mind our parents and when we were told to do something, did not ask "what do you give me for that?" Mother came with her parents to America in June 1876. They stopped in Mt. Pleasant for one winter. From there they came to Kansas to little Plum Grove that was also the Post Office. Lived in a log cabin for two years, then built a home two miles S.E. Father came to America 1878 in Summer. Found work in a Lumber Yard at Halstead Kans. Since he preferred farming in Oct. came to Plum Grove to the Abraham Claassen farm. On Feb 22, 1881, he was united in marriage to Miss Anna Claassen. To this Union 13 Children were born 8 Girls and 5 Boys. When the Lord said Matt. 19:14 Mark 10:14 Luke 18:16. All 5 Boys and 2 Girls were called Home before 9 months old. After their marriage they moved into the Log Cabin which was furnished with a Bed, Table, Benches, and Wardrobe which was all made by Father before they were married. After 2 years they found the cabin too small. Father with pick, hammer, bar, and wedges went to the hill, broke the rock for a new house, this was built in 1883, the furniture and house is still in use after 90 years.

Father worked with a walking plow and walking cultivator. He was a hard working man and always found time to help others when needed. Mother always had a big garden and chickens. At that time you could not just go to town to pick up just anything to eat like now, and with Horses and it meant more than now with Cars. Grain was harvested different in those days. The wheat was cut with a binder that tied bundles, these were set up 8 bundles in place, later the bundles were hauled and stacked. If they were not threshed right from the field. Corn was husked and and bined, fed in ears or shelled. Oats was raised for Horsefeed. Alfalfa was but 4-5 times from May til October just as it would do good and the weather was right for it. Of time when Alfalfa was cut it would rain, then the hay was not so good. Now the big machines go into the field and also the bailer, also it is done faster as we used to do it.

Washing machines were a Rubbing board, wringing the clothes by hand (no automatic). We all learned to wash dishes (no dishwasher). Things that should stay cool was either carried to the basement or a cooler built where the water run there, pumped by hand or drawn from the well with a bucket (no electricity). Coal oil lamps was the thing that lit the house. And we lived to get old and gray heads.



Above: The home of Bernhard H. Harder, rural Butler County, Kansas. Below: Large hay/cattle barn and out buildings on the farm of Bernhard Harder. Bernhard began living here shortly after his marriage to Marie Berg in 1899. Photos: *circa* 1919, From the collection of John B. Harder.





Wheat threshing *circa* 1910. Bernhard Harder and his brother John owned the machine pictured in these photos. Bundles of harvested wheat were fed into the belt driven thresher that separated the grain from the straw which is being blown into the stack on the left of the upper photo. In the lower photo note the netting on the horses to keep flies at bay. Photos: From the collection of John B. Harder.



We did our own sewing on a treadle machine, knit our own Stockings, did up our own hair, canned and dried fruit, and made our own noodles, planted potatoes and they were better than those we buy, baked Bread. The time we went to School we walked 1¼ miles (no bus). Sometimes when the weather was bad we were taken or stayed at home but one year we had a cripple teacher, then Father would either go on the wagon or if Snow was on the ground we would go slay riding.

When I was sick in the Hospital I received letters and cards, one I especially enjoyed I received from Richard Wiebe telling all that was going on the farm as I was my Father's right hand until the work got too hard for him and for a woman too, and the tractors came on the scene. I never worked with the Tractor. Horses was what I liked. We got the first Auto (a Ford they called them Tim Lizzy) in Feb. 1922. The second (a sedan) in 1929. We had that for 20 years. 1949 in June bought the Chev. which was run into and demolished May 30, 1972, now I landed to a Plymouth which I hope will last until no more are needed.

Ladies, keep your Hands and Mind busy as long as the Lord gives you strength. This is what I am trying to do.

Emma's narrative contains a few minor mistakes of fact. Her mother Anna lived in the log cabin less than a year when the Abraham Claassen family first arrived in Kansas. The distance from the log cabin to Abraham Claassen's stone house was one mile, not two. The stone house that Jacob Harder built was completed in the summer of 1882, not 1883. Emma's writing in English, the capitalizing of nouns, shows that she was more comfortable with her first language of German. Emma was obviously very proud of her parents.

Jacob Harder's abilities as a furniture maker, carpenter, and stone mason were near legendary by the time Emma wrote her narrative in 1973. He seems to have had the gift to be very good at anything he attempted. As Emma states, the furniture and house were indeed still in use 90 years later. The furniture Jacob made was sturdy and utilitarian in nature. All of it was finished with a solid color of paint with the exception of the wardrobes. These received a painted finish that simulated fancy wood grain. While much of this furniture survived for over 100 years, most of it has been lost to the descendants of Jacob Harder, sold at Emma Harder's estate sale. One very special surviving piece that remains in the family is a baby bed made by Jacob Harder in 1881. It was used by all of Jacob and Anna's children, and later by many of their grandchildren.

The grandest surviving example of Jacob Harder's craftsmanship is the stone house that was completed in the summer



of 1882. Along with the stone house of Abraham Claassen, built in 1877, Jacob's house is one of the oldest surviving structures, on its original site, in Butler County, Kansas. Jacob chose to build just a few feet southwest of the log cabin. The basement-cellar was dug down to bedrock and a rough floor hewn into the limestone. The foundation walls were laid with mortar using rough, unfinished limestone quarried from the ridge 3/8 mile south where Andy Patterson had quarried stone for Abraham Claassen's house in 1877. Steps rising out of the basement, on the east side, were single blocks of stone. Quarrying the limestone and hauling it to the building site was back-breaking labor, but undoubtedly a labor of love for Jacob Harder. Few things in life are as gratifying as building one's own home. It is as natural as a bird building a nest. After the foundation was finished, the massive outside walls were built. The exterior stone facing is of finely finished, equal height limestone blocks, rather than the random pattern of stone on Abraham Claassen's house. The joints are tight and finished with a raised, convex bead of red tinted mortar. These outside blocks were about eight inches thick. The lintels above the windows and doors are single blocks of stone. The stone sills below the windows were cut with an outward slope to drain rain and melting snow away from the windows. Inside the exterior stone blocks, rough limestone was laid making a finished wall thickness of almost two feet once a finish coat of plaster was applied to the interior. This wall thickness enabled Jacob to build two brick chimneys into the east and west walls without the chimneys protruding into the living space or the brick showing on the outside wall. These chimneys served to vent the wood burning stoves needed to heat the house. A third chimney was built in the back of the house, the north wall, for the wood-burning cook stove. A separate wood structure was built on the back of the main stone house for the kitchen. The completed house was two stories tall capped by a wood shingle roof. All of the windows had wooden shutters with hand-forged iron hardware. The shutters, and all of the outside woodwork, were painted a dark green that contrasted nicely with the cream-colored limestone.

Inside the house the bottom floor was composed of two rooms separated by a central staircase leading to the upper floor. The stairs started approximately five feet inside of the front door. Entering the house through the front door one must turn left or right, or go up the stairs. Under the stairs was a storage space accessed through a door in the east room. In the west room a mirror image door accessed the stairs to the basement. The stairs leading to the second story bedrooms split into a "Y" going left and right eliminating the need for a landing at the top. After all of the interior walls had been coated with plaster, wallpaper was applied. Small floral prints seem to have been in favor at the time, the 1880s. All of the interior trim was painted white, as were the doors.

Nothing was fancy or ornate, but neither was it crude and plain. At the time it was built, Jacob Harder's home was very fashionable, a sign of prosperity.

Equally impressive was the number of “out” buildings on the farm of Jacob and Anna Harder. Near the Henry Creek was a large hay barn. At the south end of the barnyard was the granary. This building had a center drive with bins for storing grain on both sides. To the east, between the hay barn and the house, was the horse barn. Here, the draft horses vital to Jacob's farming operation were kept. Also in this barn were stanchions for milking cows. The horse barn and “red” barn to the north were built on massive foundation stones from the same quarry that supplied the stone for the house. The “red” barn, named for the coat of red paint it had, is the most interesting of Jacob Harder's out buildings. No other building in the Emmaus community was like it. Viewed from the south it appeared no different than any other barn on any number of farms. Only the stone retaining wall extending to the west gave a hint that something was different. The barn had been built into the hillside and the exposed stone wall was an extension of the inside wall of the lower level of the barn. The upper level of this barn was accessed from the north where a sliding door opened at ground level. By driving up the gradual slope on the west side of the barn a carriage or wagon could be driven directly into the upper level of the barn. At the time of this writing, the “red” barn is the only one left standing on the Jacob Harder farm.

Although there was a spring near the Henry Creek that provided a year-round source of fresh water, it was over 100 yards away from the log cabin and the stone house. Probably one of Jacob's first projects was to dig a well for water and it was located just west of the log cabin. For the storage of perishable food and dairy products a separate well was dug southeast of the log cabin near where the granary was built. This stone-lined shaft was approximately two feet in diameter and over 20 feet deep. A wooden platform inside the well was raised and lowered by means of a rope and pulley. Meat, eggs, and milk placed on the platform and lowered into the well was kept cool even on the hottest Kansas summer days.

In addition to the extensive building program, Jacob and Anna planted trees, shrubbery, flowers, and a garden around their home. Native cedar and cottonwood trees known to be able to withstand Kansas' climate extremes were obvious choices. Cedar trees were planted north of the house as a windbreak and west and south of the house for beauty. Cottonwood trees were planted to border the west side of the lengthy driveway coming from the south. Jacob also planted cottonwood and mulberry trees to mark the northwest corner of his farm. This was a departure from the normal practice of planting Osage orange trees along field borders. These

hedges of Osage orange trees that are a common sight in rural Kansas were also planted by Jacob Harder. One section of hedge marked a portion of the property line west of the house. Another long hedge marked the northeast property line.

Directly west of the stone house was a large vegetable garden, and south of this garden was another devoted to flowers and shrubbery. A series of paths in the flower garden were lined with carefully trimmed boxwood hedges. At the southern most end of the garden Jacob built an octagon-shaped arbor that was covered with flowering vines. In the shaded interior one could rest on benches made by Jacob. Just past the vegetable garden to the west was a small grove of walnut trees and at least one buckeye tree.

On January 22, 1883, Jacob and Anna's first son was born. He was named Abraham after Anna's father Abraham Claassen. Sadly, baby Abraham died before he was four months old on April 15, 1883. The tragedy of losing a baby son that lived a few short months was one that Jacob and Anna Harder would experience four more times. A second son named Abraham was born January 29, 1886, and died on August 14, 1886. Otto was born November 1, 1890, and died August 9, 1891. Arthur was born January 6, 1895, and died July 23, 1895. On June 6, 1899, Herman was born. He died on October 23, 1899. In addition to these five sons, two daughters died in infancy. Helene, born November 6, 1887, died December 31, 1887, and Emilie, stillborn on May 7, 1897.

Offsetting these tragic losses was the birth of six daughters that lived to maturity. In addition to Anna born in the log house in 1881, there was Marie, our direct descendant mother and grandmother, born October 2, 1884. On December 22, 1888, a rare set of twins named Emma and Bertha was born to Jacob and Anna Harder. Minna was born November 10, 1893, and the last child, Sarah, was born November 30, 1900.

The period of 1880-1910 were years of rapid transition for the Emmaus community, as they were for the entire state of Kansas. Towns sprung up seemingly overnight as railroads spread like a gigantic spider web to cover the state. Besides nearby Plum Grove, there was Potwin, Whitewater, Brainard, and Elbing within a 10-mile radius of Jacob and Anna's farm. Hundreds of thousands of acres of prairie that had supported immense herds of buffalo were transformed into productive farms that raised grain and livestock to feed a nation. Native American Indians that survived the onslaught of wars waged to remove them from their land were herded onto reservations in the territory of Oklahoma. By the 1880s very few Indians were freely roaming Kansas. Anna and Jacob Harder saw them only on rare occasion. They would appear from nowhere and ask for food, which Anna willingly gave them before they continued on their wandering journey.



Twins Bertha (1888-1980) and Emma (1888-1988)  
Harder. Photo: *circa* 1890, Authors' collection.



Helene (1897-1988), Sarah (1900-1995), and Minna (1893-1990)  
Harder. Photo: *circa* 1890, Authors' collection.

While railroad travel offered members of the Emmaus community the opportunity to explore the world outside their farms, very few ventured beyond the distance that could be covered in one day's ride by horse and carriage. Once these Mennonite immigrants settled after the long journeys from West Prussia and Russia, they rarely left the closed community they lived in. This was a continuation of a lifestyle Mennonites had adopted out of necessity centuries before. As it had done in West Prussia and Russia, this separate existence could cause tensions with neighbors, "outsiders." Many people in surrounding communities and towns considered Mennonites unsociable and viewed with suspicion the Mennonite faith and way of life. For their part, many Mennonites were openly contemptuous of their neighbors and did little to cultivate good relations with people outside their communities.

Another factor that made West Prussian Mennonites different on the plains of Kansas was their continued use of the German language in all aspects of their lives. Even those Mennonites that came from the Russian colonies used German as their primary language. For the 100 years that they had lived in Russia, Mennonites spoke German in their homes, conducted their church services in German, educated their children in German, and continued to cultivate the German culture they had brought with them from West Prussia. They saw no reason to change upon their arrival in America. Mennonites saw German culture as far superior to anything else on the Kansas frontier. At the time, the late 1800s, it would be difficult to find fault with that reasoning.

While the children of these first-generation Americans continued to learn and use German as their primary language, they also learned English at the Plum Grove and Lone Star schools. In many Mennonite families it was the children that acted as a go-between for their parents with the English-speaking merchants and government officials of the nearby towns. Typical of many Mennonite families, Jacob and Anna Harder viewed their daughters' public school attendance as but one facet of their education. The Emmaus Mennonite Church and the Harder home rounded out the girls' educations. The church not only provided religious education but rare opportunities for socializing for the entire family. At home they learned time-honored skills of Mennonite women from their mother Anna. Tatting, crocheting, and knitting lace, were probably the oldest of these skills, originating in Flanders many centuries ago. Anna was also an accomplished seamstress as may be seen by the fancy dresses in the photographs of her young children. Making quilts provided the family with the many bedcovers needed during the cold Kansas winters.

While teaching her daughters these manual skills, Anna didn't neglect their intellectual development. The Bible was the main textbook of the Harder



Back, left to right: Marie (1884-1973), Minna (1893-1990), Anna (1881-1954). Front: Bertha (1888-1980), Emma (1888-1988) Harder. Photo: *circa* 1894, Authors' collection.



Back: Bertha and Emma. Front: Minna, Sarah, and Marie Harder. Photo: 1908, Authors' collection.

home. This was as much by necessity as choice. Books were a rare commodity on the Kansas frontier and only those in the German language were of practical value to the Mennonites from West Prussia. Most common, and most treasured, were books of poetry by the great German writers Friedrich Schiller, Johann Goethe, and Friedrich Hardenburg. Jacob Harder seems to have had a more liberal and varied education than his wife Anna, probably from his years of working for different employers in West Prussia. From Jacob his daughters learned a lighter side of life. He opened up the world of nature that was all around them on their farm in the prairie, timber, and Henry Creek. His shop in the old log cabin was a place where the young Harder girls could watch their father make furniture, maintain wagons and farm implements, and fashion tools while he told them stories or sang German songs with them.

Close family ties were maintained with Anna's parents, Abraham and Anna Claassen, brothers and sisters, and her uncle Gerhard Claassen. In August of 1880 Gerhard had returned to West Prussia looking for a wife. At 61 years of age he seems to have been the eternal optimist. His perseverance paid off when Aganetha Mandtler consented to be his wife. After a wedding in West Prussia, on August 12, 1881, Gerhard and Aganetha returned to America and lived in Newton, Kansas. Gerhard rented out the farmland he owned in the Emmaus community and worked as a skilled farm laborer for others. Gerhard's marital happiness ended a scant three years later when Aganetha died on December 16, 1884. The matchmakers of the Mennonite community were quickly on the job for Gerhard and he traveled to Beatrice, Nebraska, to meet a woman recommended to him as wifely material. On July 10, 1885, Gerhard became engaged to 41-year-old Sara Schulz, presenting her with an engraved ring to mark the occasion. They were married on July 30, 1885, and traveled to Gerhard's home in Newton, Kansas.

Throughout the two decades of the 1880s and 1890s Abraham Claassen's meticulous records show that his farming operation prospered. He had sold to his son-in-law, Jacob Harder, 160 acres of land (under very liberal terms) that comprised half of his initial land purchase in 1877. But by 1900 he had acquired an additional 560 acres of farmland and pasture, most of which adjoined his original farm. As Abraham's remaining children, John, Abraham, Justine, and Helene, married, they built homes and started families on parcels of land owned by their father.

Anna Claassen Harder's brother John Claassen married Elizabeth Thierstein on December 30, 1890, and like Anna he lived with his parents, Abraham and Anna, until his own house was built just ¼ mile northeast of his parents' home. Between 1891 and 1914 John and Elizabeth would have 15 children and many of their descendants continue to live and farm in the Emmaus community.



Anna Harder (1881-1954) and Jacob Berg (1879-1942). They were married March 7, 1902. Photo: Authors' collection.



Four generation photograph. Seated left is Anna Claassen (1838-1917), seated right is Anna Harder (1862-1949), standing is Anna Berg (1881-1954). Being held by Anna Claassen is Catherine Berg (1902-1984). Photo: circa 1903, Authors' collection.



Following John, Anna's sister Justine married John Entz on November 7, 1895. They made their home in the Emmaus community until 1903 when they moved to Caddo County, Oklahoma. In 1926 John, Justine, and their ten children moved to Hidalgo County in southern Texas.

After the turn of the century Anna's brother Abraham married Lena Blaser on March 1, 1906. Abraham and Lena lived ½ mile east of Abraham's parents on 160 acres that had been purchased in 1892. On February 7, 1907, Abraham and Anna Claassen's last child, Helene, married John Kopper. John and Helene continued living with Abraham and Anna Claassen, looking after the aging couple.

Jacob Harder and his brothers also prospered as farmers during the closing decades of the 19th century. Jacob purchased an additional 160 acres that lay at the northeast corner of the original 160 acres he purchased from his father-in-law Abraham Claassen. Jacob's brothers, John and Bernhard, had followed Jacob to Kansas after 1878 and worked for Abraham Claassen until they too could purchase their own farms. John returned to West Prussia in 1880 and married Justine Harder, born August 30, 1853, at Klein Mausdorferweide, West Prussia. They had known each other before John emigrated to America and there is a probability that they were distant cousins. Upon returning to Kansas in 1880, John and Justine Harder lived on their farm two miles southwest of Jacob and Anna Harder. They had one child, Henry Hans born July 22, 1881, and raised a foster daughter, Lena Blaser, future wife of Abraham Claassen (1867-1948). John Harder died on November 19, 1923, Justine on January 28, 1915.

Bernhard Harder married Marie Berg in Bulter County, Kansas, on October 10, 1899. Marie was born at Ellerwald, West Prussia, on October 12, 1877, and came to America with her parents Peter and Anna Berg. Bernhard and Marie lived and farmed in the Emmaus community until their deaths; Bernhard on June 16, 1946, and Marie on October 10, 1957. They had one son, Jacob B. Harder born November 17, 1904.

Jacob Harder's older sister Catherine, born September 13, 1847, married Abraham Dieck on April 3, 1883, at Neumunsterberg, West Prussia. Abraham was born June 11, 1844, probably at, or near, Neumunsterberg, West Prussia. They immigrated to America and lived on their farm five miles west of Jacob and Anna Harder. Their son Jacob Dieck (1885-1952) would marry Jacob and Anna Harder's oldest grandchild, Helene Harder (1897-1988). Catherine died March 20, 1925, Abraham on August 3, 1930.

Three of Jacob Harder's siblings remained in West Prussia: Peter, born August 24, 1850; Abraham, date of birth unknown-circa 1855; and Justine, born June 30, 1862. Of these three, Justine is the

only one for which there is conclusive information. There is scant information about Peter, and virtually none about Abraham except that his wife's name was Helene. Justine Harder married Abraham Claassen (b. November 23, 1866) circa 1897 in West Prussia and died March, 1937, at Altendorf, West



Prussia. Abraham died November, 1944, in West Prussia. They had four children: Justine, born December 28, 1898, Grete born 1900, Maria born 1902, and Anna born May 11, 1903. Of these four children, only Anna is known to have survived World War II and the subsequent Russian occupation of West Prussia. She escaped West Prussia in the closing moments of World War II with her husband Waldemar Mueller (1902-1984) and their three children. They lived in post-war West Germany near the city of Frankfurt. Anna died in 1984.

Peter Harder, born at Neumunsterberg West Prussia, married Catrine Wiebe on January 28, 1890. Catrine was born November 24, 1853, at Reimerswalde, West Prussia, and died February 25, 1917, at Danzig, West Prussia. Peter died September 17, 1928, in West Prussia, exact location unknown. Nothing definitive is known of the children of Peter and Catrine. A World War II era photograph in the authors' collection is believed to be that of Peter and Catrine's son Bernhard Harder. With Bernhard are his wife, son Kurt, daughter-in-law, and infant grandchild. Bernhard is in the uniform of the German Field Police and his son Kurt is wearing the uniform of the German Army. Before the United States entered World War II, after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, mail was still received in the United States from Germany. This would date the photograph of Bernhard Harder and family at between September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, and December, 1941, when Germany declared war on the United States. The fate of this Harder family is not known.

Jacob Harder maintained contact with his parents and siblings in West Prussia by mail and it appears to have been a lively correspondence. Uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends would often add a few lines so that one letter contained news from three or four

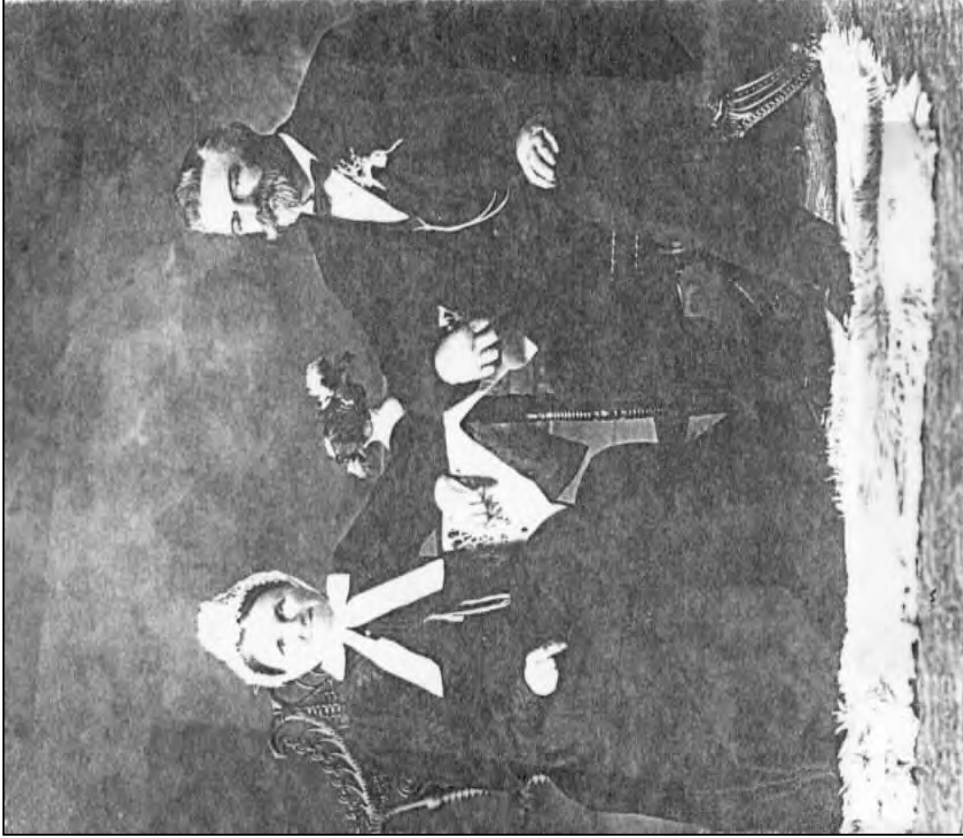
(Above) Seated on the far right is Bernhard Harder in the uniform of the German Field Police. The author believes that Bernhard is the nephew of Jacob Harder (II), the son of Peter and Catrine Harder. Seated in the middle is Bernhard's son Kurt in the uniform of the German Army. Kurt is holding his child, his wife is standing to his left. On the far left is Bernhard's wife. Photo: circa 1941, Authors' collection.

people. These letters would be shared with many people in the Emmaus community who knew the writers as friends. Jacob's return letters undoubtedly carried greetings from many in the Emmaus community.

Letters from West Prussia were not always an occasion for happiness. In 1886 Jacob learned that his father, Jacob Harder (I), died on September 9, aged 72 years. Jacob's brothers, Peter and Abraham, continued to farm the Harder land at Neumunsterberg while his mother, Anna Fast Harder, moved to the nearby city of Tiegenhof, West Prussia. Anna died there on November 19, 1905, at age 82.



Left to right, Abraham Dieck(1844-1930), son Jacob (1885-1952), daughter Anna (1888-1908), Catherine Harder Dieck (1847-1925). Photo: Courtesy of Elsie Dieck Hiebert.



Catherine Harder Dieck and Abraham Dieck on their Silver Wedding Anniversary, 1908. Photo: Courtesy of Elsie Dieck Hiebert.



Silver Wedding Anniversary photograph taken in 1906. Anna Claassen Harder (1862-1949) and Jacob Harder (1849-1937).

Photo: Authors' collection.

## Harder Family Lineage and Data

The sources of the information on the Harder lineage are Emma Harder, John Harder, Marie G. Harder-Dyck, and Walter Mueller. Additional information was obtained from old papers and letters in the possession of Emma Harder and Marie G. Harder-Dyck. These papers were written in German and mailed from West Prussia by writers unknown except by their first names. Included in these papers is a statement by the Tiegenhofer Creditbank-Central Office, Berlin, Germany, concerning settlement of the estate of Anna Fast-Harder (1823-1905). In the following data our direct descendant Harder grandfathers and grandmothers are underlined and in bold type.

- I. **Hans Harder**
  - b. *circa* 1750, West Prussia
  - d. unknown
  - m. unknown
  - Issue: Number of children unknown
- II. **Peter Harder**
  - b. 3 April 1784, Reimerswalde, West Prussia
  - d. 20 February 1835, West Prussia
  - m. date unknown, West Prussia
    - Justine Regehr
    - b. 17 November 1780, West Prussia
    - d. 24 May 1838, West Prussia
    - Issue: Number of children unknown
- III. **Jacob Harder (I)**
  - b. 15 November 1813, Neumunsterberg, West Prussia
  - d. 9 September 1886, West Prussia
  - m. 10 January 1846, West Prussia
    - Anna Fast (daughter of Johann Fast (1789-1839) and Catharina Bergmann (1789-1853))
    - b. 1 January 1823, West Prussia
    - d. 19 November 1905, Tiegenhof, West Prussia
    - Issue: 7, All children born Neumunsterberg, West Prussia
      1. Catharine
        - b. 13 September 1847
        - d. 20 March 1925, Butler County, Kansas, USA
        - m. 3 April 1883, Neumunsterberg, West Prussia
          - Abraham Dieck
          - b. 11 June 1844, West Prussia

- d. 3 August 1930, Butler County,  
Kansas, USA
- 2. **Jacob (II)**
  - b. 28 January 1849
  - d. 28 January 1937, Butler County,  
Kansas, USA. To USA in  
1878
- 3. Peter
  - b. 24 August 1850
  - d. 17 September 1928, West Prussia
  - m. 28 January 1890, West Prussia  
Catrine Wiebe
    - b. 24 November 1853,  
Reimerswalde, West Prussia
    - d. 25 February 1917, Danzig,  
West Prussia
- 4. John F.
  - b. 2 December 1854
  - d. 19 November 1923, Butler County,  
Kansas, USA. To USA *circa* 1880
  - m. 1880, West Prussia  
Justine Harder (Justine's parents  
were Jacob Harder and  
Justine Harder. Possibly a  
case of cousins marrying)
    - b. 30 August 1853, Klein  
Mausdorferweide, West  
Prussia
    - d. 28 January 1915, Butler  
County, Kansas, USA
- 5. Abraham
  - b. *circa* 1855-1860
  - d. unknown
  - m. date unknown, wife's name was  
Helene
- 6. Justine
  - b. 30 June 1862
  - d. March 1937, Altendorf, West Prussia
  - m. *circa* 1897-1898, West Prussia  
Abraham Claassen
    - b. 23 November 1866, West  
Prussia
    - d. November 1944, Altendorf,  
West Prussia
- 7. Bernhard H.
  - b. 16 November 1865
  - d. 16 June 1946, Butler County, Kansas,

USA. To USA *circa* 1880  
m. 10 October 1899, Butler County,  
Kansas  
Marie Berg  
b. 12 October 1877, Ellerwald,  
West Prussia  
d. 10 October 1957, Butler  
County, Kansas, USA

IV. **Jacob Harder (II)**

b. 28 January 1849, Neumunsterberg, West Prussia  
d. 28 January 1937, Butler County, Kansas, USA Came to  
America in 1878  
m. 22 February 1881, Emmaus Mennonite Church, Butler  
County, Kansas, USA

**Anna Claassen**

b. 24 June 1862, Simonsdorf, West Prussia  
d. 18 September 1949, Butler County, Kansas, USA.  
To USA in 1876. Issue: 13. All children born on  
the Harder farm, Butler County, Kansas

1. Anna  
b. 28 December 1881  
d. 26 October 1954, Kansas  
m. 7 March 1902, Butler County, Kansas  
Jacob Berg (brother of Marie  
Berg, wife of Bernhard H.  
Harder)  
b. 21 June 1879, West Prussia  
d. 30 January 1942, Kansas
2. Abraham  
b. 22 January 1883  
d. 15 April 1883, Butler County, Kansas  
m. N/A
3. **Marie G.**  
b. 2 October 1884  
d. 29 October 1973, Whitewater, Kansas
4. Abraham  
b. 29 January 1886  
d. 14 August 1886, Butler County,  
Kansas  
m. N/A
5. Helene  
b. 6 November 1887  
d. 31 December 1887, Butler County  
Kansas  
m. N/A
6. Bertha  
b. 22 December 1888 (twin)



d. 7 August 1980, Kansas  
m. 19 January 1926, Kansas  
Henry (Heinrich) Fast  
b. 11 May 1876, Halbstadt, West  
Prussia. Henry was a  
widower, his first wife was  
Anna B. Kopper.  
See Kopper data.  
d. 23 October 1955, Whitewater,  
Kansas

7. Emma  
b. 22 December 1888 (twin)  
d. 11 August 1988, Newton, Kansas  
m. unmarried
8. Otto  
b. 1 November 1890  
d. 9 August 1891, Butler County, Kansas  
m. N/A
9. Minna L.  
b. 10 November 1893  
d. 11 February 1990, Kansas  
m. 23 July 1937  
William P. Wiens  
b. 10 June 1892  
d. 16 February 1951
10. Arthur  
b. 6 January 1895  
d. 23 July 1895, Butler County, Kansas  
m. N/A
11. Emilie  
b. 7 May 1897  
d. 7 May 1897, Butler County, Kansas  
m. N/A
12. Herman  
b. 6 June 1899  
d. 23 October 1899, Butler County,  
Kansas  
m. N/A
13. Sarah C.  
b. 30 November 1900  
d. 28 August, 1995  
m. 22 February 1932  
Ernest A. Wiebe  
b. 23 March 1904  
d. 15 February 1976

V. Marie Gertrude Harder  
b. 2 October 1884, Butler County, Kansas

- d. 29 October 1973, Whitewater, Kansas
- m. 22 February 1911, Butler County, Kansas

**Jacob J. Dyck**

- b. 17 August 1881, Am Trakt, Russia
- d. 30 November 1954, Kansas

Issue: 15. See Dyck family lineage and data

VII. **Jacob J. Dyck (V)**



## Our Heritage in Heirlooms

In addition to the many photographs of our Mennonite ancestors there is a material legacy of heirloom home furnishings and personal belongings. They range from the striking beauty of the inlaid dowry chest to the simple, painted wash stand. Two of these pieces appear in the above photograph: the cherry wood chest of drawers brought from West Prussia to America by Gerhard Claassen (1819-1913) in 1876, and the baby bed made by Jacob Harder (1849-1937) in 1881.

Dowry chests, such as the three pictured on the following pages, are part of a tradition that began in Europe during the Middle Ages. These chests were presented to daughters by their parents and used to store bed and table linen, clothing, and personal treasures that the young woman would take with her when she was married. A dowry chest of hardwood, with intricate inlay and finely finished metalwork, represented a significant investment that only the more affluent Mennonite families could afford. The inlaid chest pictured here represents the very finest that money could buy. The pale blue chest would have been purchased by a family of modest means.

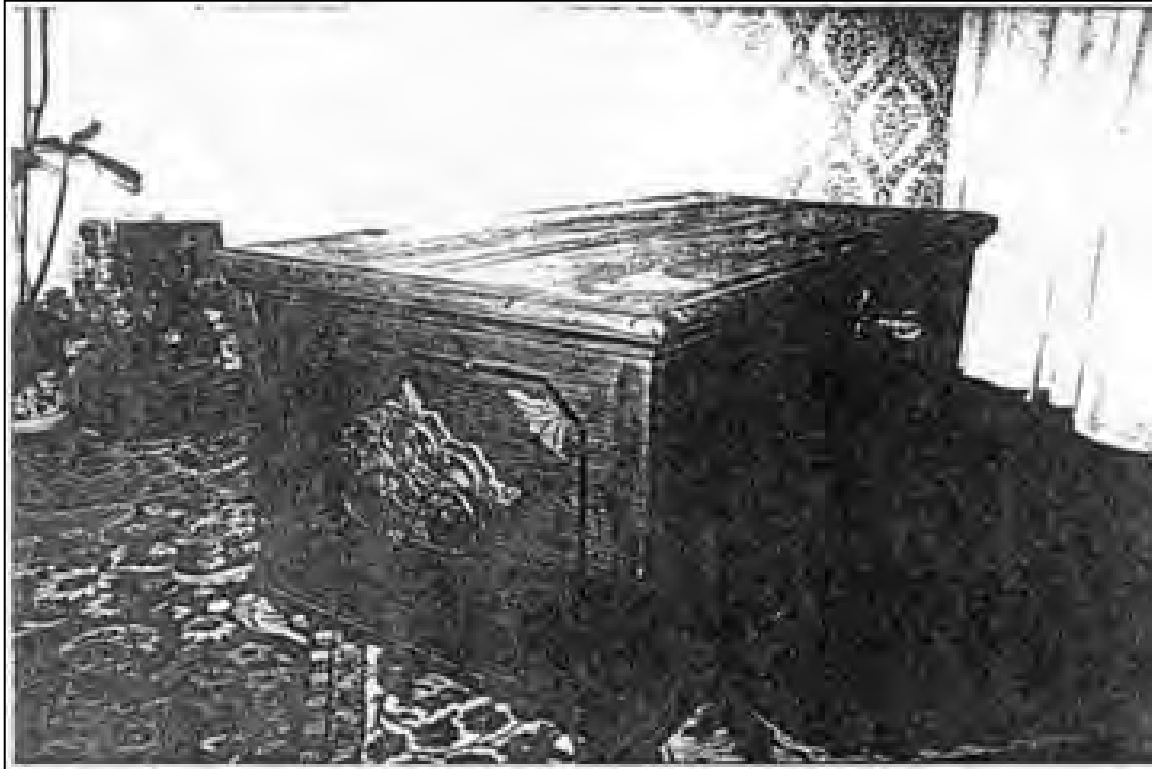
Two of these dowry chests came to America with the Abraham Claassen (III) family in 1876 and are representative of a style of dowry chest that was developed in the Vistula Delta of West



Prussia. They have features in common despite their differences in appearance. The four corners of these chests are joined with finely crafted dovetails. Both chests have the obligatory till on the inside, always placed on the left. This small compartment with a hinged lid was used to hold small, precious items. The inlaid chest also has a secret compartment in the till that is revealed by releasing a hidden catch that allows the false floor to pivot. The long strap hinges, lock mechanism, handles, and handle plates have an obvious similarity that belies the huge difference in the initial quality of these two chests.

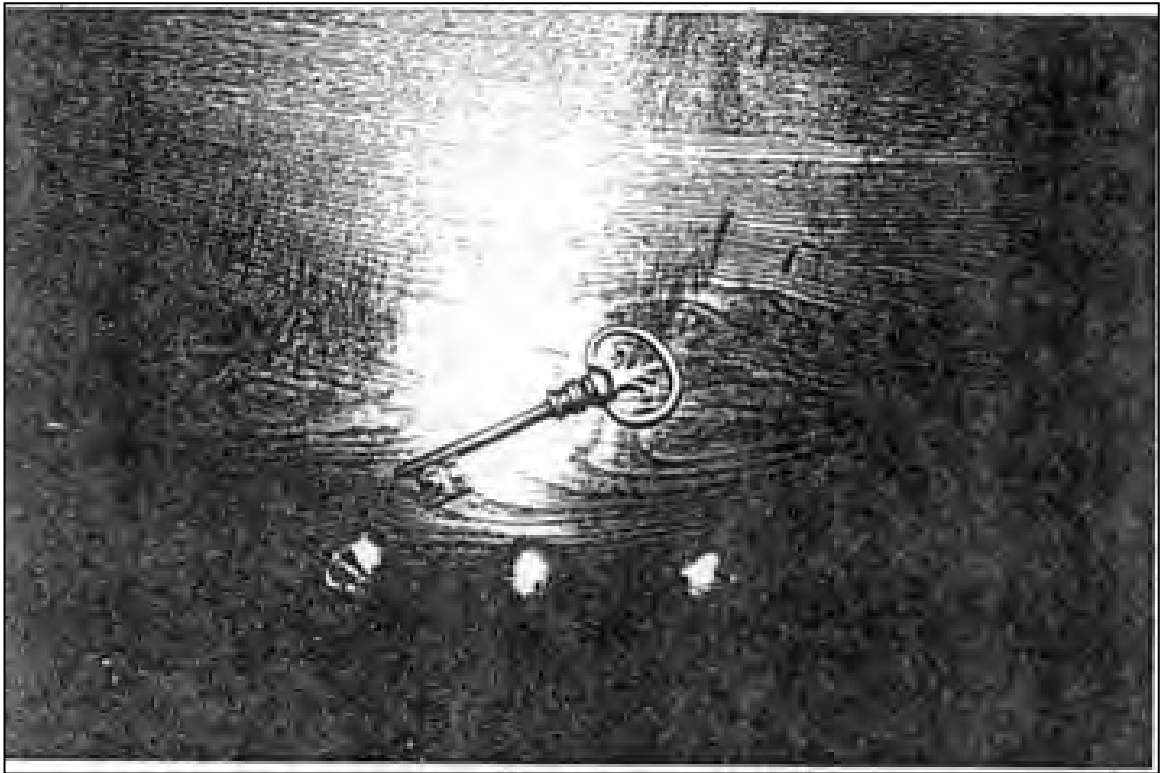
Reinhild Kauenhoven Janzen, co-author of the book *Mennonite Furniture*, after viewing the inlaid chest, offered the opinion that it was made *circa* 1800 and is baroque/ rococo in motif. The front, lid, and two sides of this chest are of ash wood inlaid with darker wood, possibly walnut. The floor and back are walnut. The inside till is ash wood. The hinges and lock are iron that has been tinned to prevent rust and enhance appearance. Finely chiseled engraving further adorns the hinges. Brass bosses on the lid hide the large bolts used to secure the hinges and lockwork. The key is iron with a cut brass handle. The lock escutcheon plate is made from cut brass. The handle plates are embossed, cut sheet metal that has been tinned. The handles are cast brass that has been finely engraved. Missing from this magnificent piece is its five-footed, skirted base. All Mennonite dowry chests from the Vistula Delta in West Prussia had these bases that were approximately six inches tall,

Above: Front view of the Justina von Bergen dowry chest showing the floral design inlay. Photo: Authors' collection.

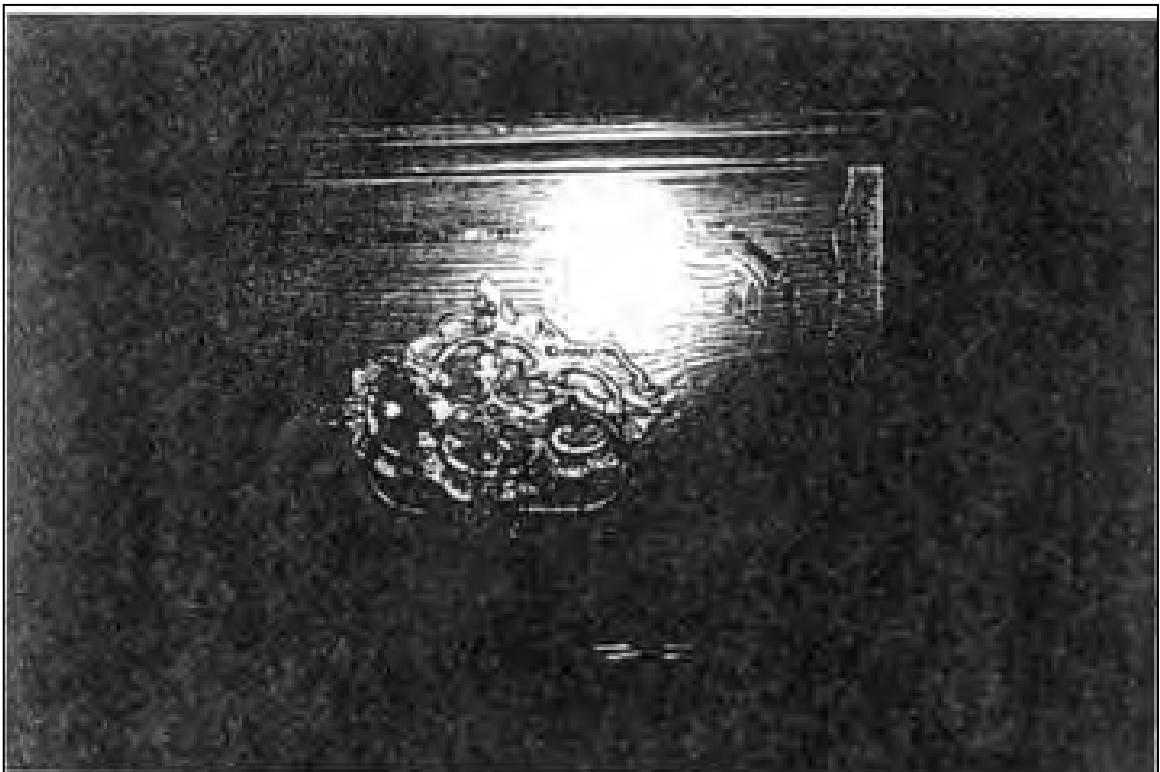


The Justina von Bergen dowry chest. Above: Photo shows the embossed, tinned handle plates and cast brass handles. This chest is constructed of ash wood with thin veneers of darker wood for the inlaid design. Below: Interior of the chest with its tinned iron hinges and lock mechanism. Also seen is the till with false-floor-hidden compartment. Photos: Authors' collection.





Above and below: Justina von Bergen dowry chest. (Above) Iron key with cut brass handle. The dented brass bosses described by Abraham Claassen (III) in his journal are clearly visible. Chest measurements are: Width, 57", Height, 21", Depth, 27". The missing five-footed base would add approximately 6" to the height. Photos: Authors' collection.





The “Blue” dowry chest as described in the journal of Abraham Claassen(III). Above: The repaired top is visible, as is the outline of the cut brass key escutcheon plate. Below: Interior of the chest showing the iron hinges and ash wood till. This dowry chest is constructed of pine throughout with the exception of the till. Photos: Courtesy of Christine E. Dyck Sehnert.





Two end views of the “Blue” dowry chest. Above: Iron handle plates and handles with their engraving. Right: Another view of the ash wood till and the iron lock mechanism. Measurements for the “Blue” chest are: Width, 50”, Height, 20”, Depth, 25 ½”. Photos: Courtesy of Christine E. Dyck Sehnert.





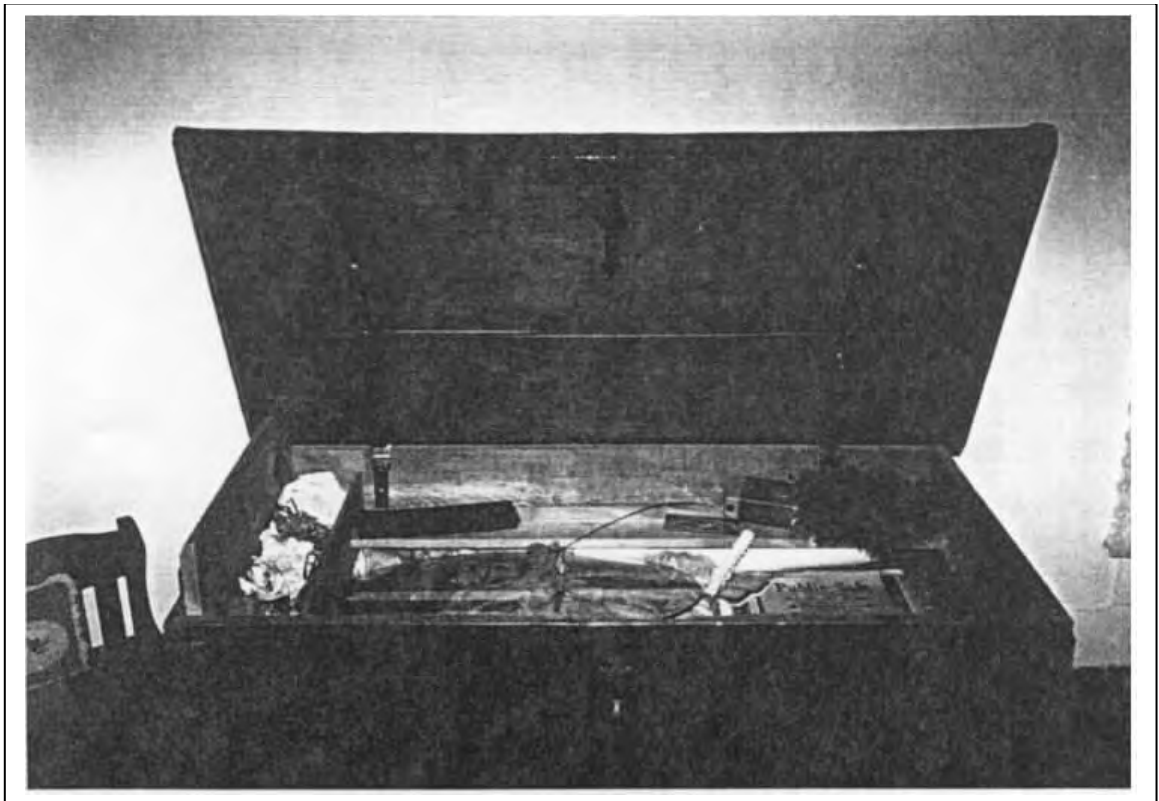
the chests never rested directly on the floor. In the passage from Abraham Claassen's journal quoted in Chapter 3 he remarks that, "...the ornamental plates on top are dented, ..." from rough handling during unloading of the family's belongings at New York's harbor. These damaged brass bosses are clearly visible in one photograph. Abraham wrote that this particular chest was his, which means that he most likely inherited it from his mother, Justina nee von Bergen (1780-1853).

The pale blue dowry chest also received rough handling during unloading in New York. From Abraham's journal: "On the blue chest a strip was torn loose,...". This would account for the two pieces of wood across the top of this chest, a repair made after the family's arrival in Kansas. The original finish of this chest is unknown. A dark blue paint is visible beneath the current pale blue. Even this dark color may not be the original. Dating from *circa* 1850 this may have been the dowry chest of Abraham's wife, Anna nee Bergmann (1838-1917). It is constructed of pine, although the till on the inside is made of ash wood. The strap hinges, lock, handles, and handle plates are all made of iron. The handles and handle plates are lightly engraved. There are two brass bosses on the lid that conceal the lock securing bolts. The lock escutcheon plate is cut brass, although it has been painted. The key is missing as is the five-footed base that is customary for Vistula Delta dowry chests. The relatively poor condition of this chest can be attributed to its use as a storage bin for seed grain in Jacob Harder's barn. Although equally deserving of the loving care that the inlaid chest received throughout its life, this dowry chest could no doubt tell amazing tales the fancy chest could not.

The painted dowry chest came to Kansas from Ellerwald, West Prussia, with the family of Peter Berg. Peter was the father of Marie Berg (1877-1957) who married Bernhard Harder (1865-1946) in 1899. This dowry chest was made *circa* 1810 of pinewood painted to imitate mahogany wood in grain and color. Once the surface was painted, the floral design was applied to imitate inlaid wood. The key plate is cut brass and the brass bosses cover the hinge and lock bolts on the lid. The handle plates are embossed, cut sheet metal. The hinges and lock are forged iron. The always-present till on the left side helps to support a narrow board that is called a *doekbord* in Low German. The small support for the right side of the *doekbord* is seen in both the inlaid von Bergen chest and the "Blue" chest. The back of this chest is painted with the name "P. Berg" and his destination upon arriving in America from West Prussia, "Newton, Kansas".



Above: Front view of the Berg dowry chest showing the painted floral design that imitates inlaid wood, the cut brass key plate, and the brass bosses that cover the hinge and lock bolts.  
Below: Interior of the Berg chest showing the till, *doekbord*, and iron lock and hinges.  
Photos: Courtesy John B. Harder.





End view of the Berg dowry chest showing the embossed, cut, sheet metal handle plate and iron handle that is broken. The painted columns on the corners of this chest hide the dovetails used in construction. Measurements for this dowry chest are: Width, 54", Height, 21", Depth, 28". The missing five-footed base would add 6" to the height. Photo: Courtesy John B. Harder.

Traveling to America with the two dowry chests brought by Abraham Claassen in 1876 was Gerhard Claassen's chest of drawers. This finely crafted piece of furniture, *circa* 1850, is made from cherry wood, hence its deep red glow. The ornate brass pulls are not original to the piece, having been added *circa* 1900. Prior to the addition of these pulls the drawers were opened and closed using the large key that fit the locks of each drawer. This chest of drawers was inherited by Gerhard's niece, Anna Claassen Harder, after his death in 1913. It remained in the Harder house and was used by Anna's daughter Emma until her death in 1988. After Emma's death the chest was cleaned of its contents, and found carefully wrapped in a fine linen handkerchief was the engraved engagement ring that Gerhard Claassen had given to his second wife Sara Schulz in 1885. On February 22, 1881, Jacob Harder and Anna Claassen were married in the Emmaus Mennonite Church. Several weeks later they were living in the log cabin that had been home to the Abraham Claassen family from 1877 until their stone house was finished in 1878. Within a short time the young Anna would tell her new husband that they were expecting their first child. So it was

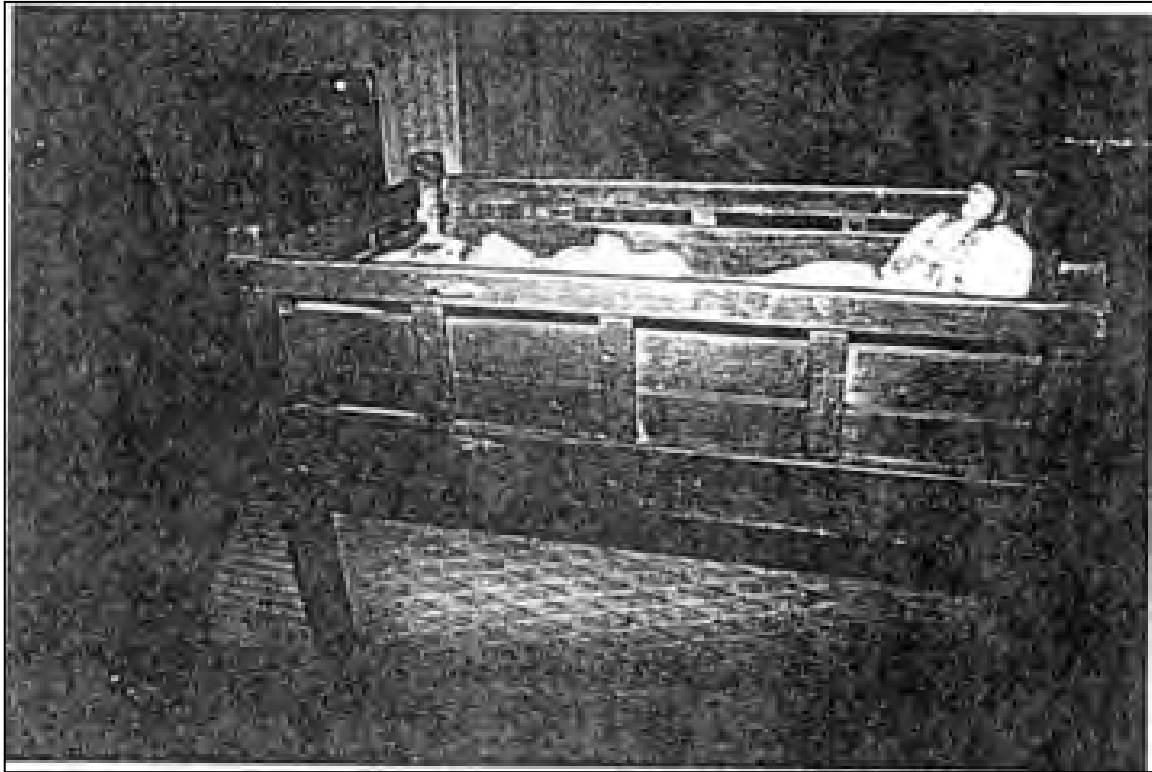
in the summer or fall of 1881 that Jacob Harder lovingly made a baby bed for his daughter Anna born December 28, 1881. It is easy to imagine Jacob working by lantern light of an evening, in the log cabin while Anna watched in admiration of her husband's skill. This baby bed was used by all of Jacob and Anna's 13 children and then passed along to their daughter Marie when she married Jacob J. Dyck on February 22, 1911. Marie and Jacob kept the bed filled with their 15 children beginning with Kaete born December 6, 1911, and ending with Linda born April 6, 1929. Many of Jacob and Marie's grandchildren slept in this bed when their parents were visiting the Dyck farmstead. Five generations after Jacob Harder made this baby bed it still holds his sleeping descendants.



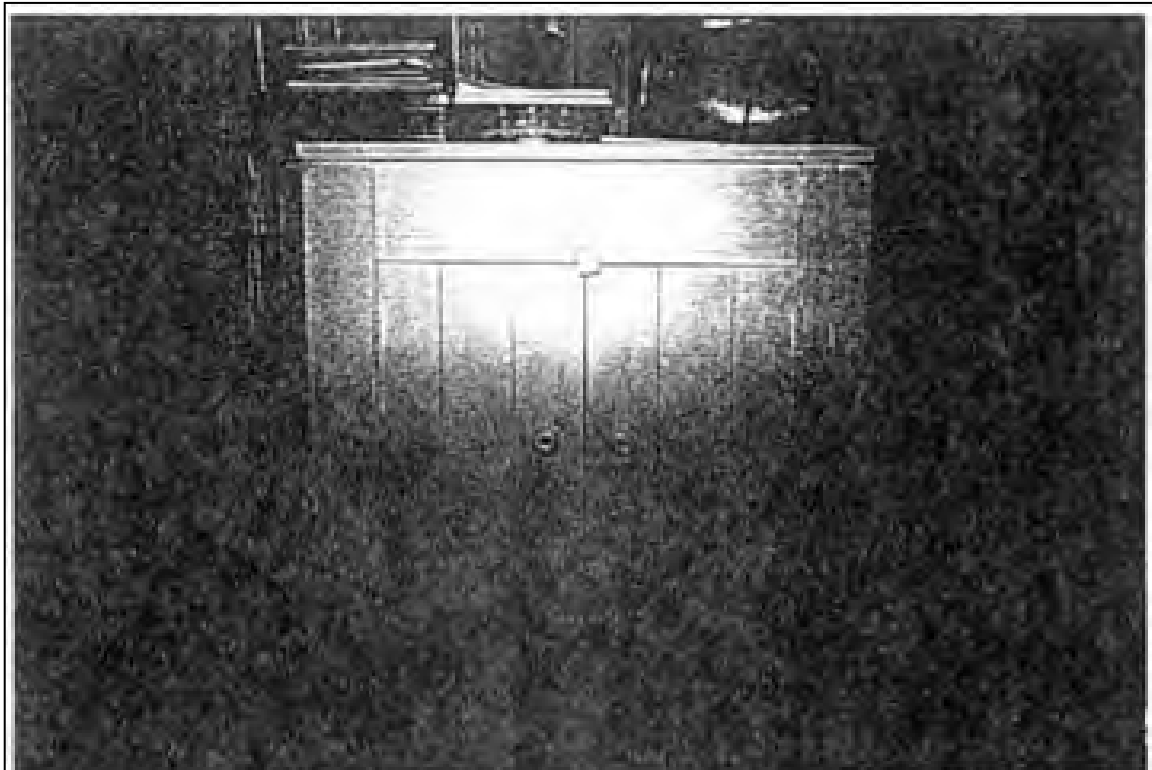
One more example of Jacob Harder's furniture making ability is pictured. It is a simple washstand, and like the baby bed is more characteristic of rural 19th century America rather than Mennonite furniture from the Vistula Delta. These pieces filled an immediate need and were not crafted to last beyond the maker's lifetime. When Jacob and Anna Harder needed a piece of furniture for their home, Jacob made it. Although the intrinsic value of the beds, cabinets, and benches Jacob made is not high, they are priceless links to our family history.

Anna Claassen Harder's skills were equal to those of her husband Jacob. This is clearly visible in the photographs of her young children, with their carefully crafted clothing. In addition to Anna's skill as seamstress, she produced lace to decorate bedding and clothing, made dozens of quilts over her lifetime, and crocheted beautiful bedspreads. Two examples of Anna's lovely work are

Cherry wood chest of drawers that Gerhard Claassen brought to America from West Prussia in 1876. Gerhard's niece Anna Claassen Harder inherited this piece after Gerhard's death in 1913. Width, 39", Height 35", Depth, 22". Photo: Authors' collection.



Above: Baby bed made by Jacob Harder (1849-1937) in 1881. All of Jacob and Anna's children used this bed. After the marriage of their daughter Marie to Jacob J. Dyck, this baby bed was used for the 15 Dyck children. Below: Wash stand/dry sink made by Jacob Harder *circa* 1890. Photos: Authors' collection.



pictured. The rose pattern of the quilt is taken from the front panels of the inlaid dowry chest brought to America by Anna's father Abraham. Anna had inherited this dowry chest and it occupied a prominent place in the Harder house. Anna hand sewed the top for this rose quilt, finishing it in 1940, but never completed the quilt. The top remained carefully stored in the Harder house by Anna's daughter Emma until 1968. Emma was as accomplished at quilting as her mother was, a fact well known within the family. When Alice Sitler Dyck asked Emma to make a quilt for her, Emma asked her niece Alice what type of pattern she would like. Alice said that she was particularly fond of roses and wondered if Emma could make roses the theme of a quilt. Emma quickly led Alice into the



Harder house and opened one of the drawers of Gerhard Claassen's cherry chest of drawers. Emma brought out her mother's rose quilt top and asked if this would do. Two years later the quilt was finished. It is one of the last quilts that the then 82-year-old Emma Harder would make, and certainly one of the most beautiful.

The crocheted bedspread made by Anna Claassen Harder is representative of a skill and patience that has virtually disappeared since this piece was completed over 70 years ago. Hundreds of hours of labor were required to make a bedspread of this size and reportedly Anna made several for her Dyck grandchildren. The pattern is perfectly symmetrical radiating from the center. As the spread neared completion material was added so that the hanging portion of the spread would form natural pleats. These bedspreads were rarely used and as a result most of them have survived to be cherished by Anna's great-grandchildren.

The "Rose Quilt" that was 30 years in the making. The top for this quilt was made by Anna Claassen Harder, finished by 1940. Anna's daughter Emma completed the quilt in 1970, when she was 82 years old. Photo: Authors' collection.

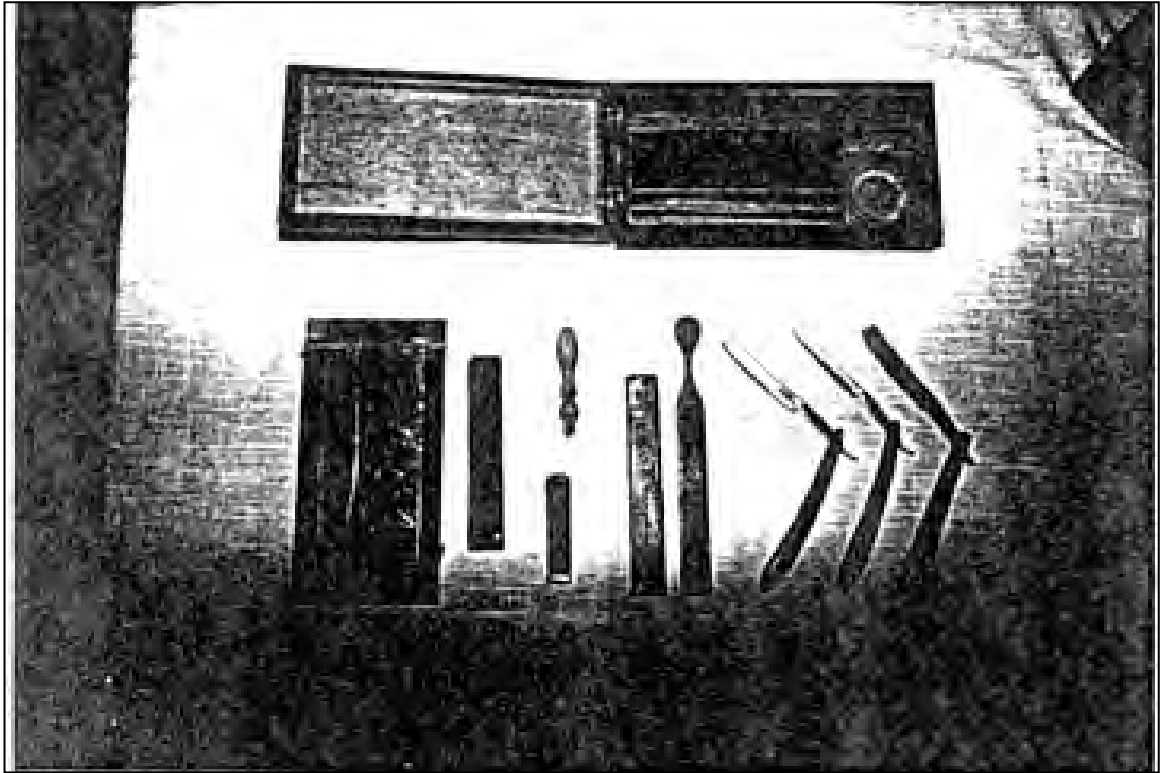


Crocheted  
bedspread made  
by Anna Claassen  
Harder *circa*  
1930. Photo:  
Authors'  
collection.

The shaving kit of ivory handled razors, wood framed mirror, brush, soap tin, and strops for sharpening the razors is the oldest heirloom pictured. The handles of the razors are carved with the initials "GVB" for Gerhard von Bergen (1741-1790), or possibly his father, Gerdt von Bergen who died in 1771, and was the second Elder of the Heubuden Mennonite Church in West Prussia. Gerhard was the father of Justina von Bergen who became the second wife of Abraham Claassen (II), and it was in Justina's inlaid dowry chest that this shaving kit traveled to America in 1876 with her son Abraham Claassen (III). Fittingly, the shaving kit still rests in this dowry chest that has been its haven for over 200 years.

In 1924 Jacob J. Dyck's older half sister Anna Dyck Tjahrt (1872-1945), her husband Peter Tjahrt ( -1924), and their son Bruno

(1909- ) arrived at the Dyck farm from Am Trakt, Russia. They had escaped the starvation and purges of Stalinist Russia and were searching for a place to settle. While in Kansas, Anna and Peter presented Jacob and Marie Dyck with a belated wedding gift, a mantle clock. Although not an expensive piece, it represented a considerable expenditure for the refugee Tjahrts. This clock marked the passage of time at the Dyck farmhouse for decades and is probably the most recognizable piece pictured for many of Jacob and Marie's descendants.



Above: Razors and shaving kit belonging to Gerhard von Bergen (1741-1790), or his father Gerdt von Bergen who died in 1771. The initials “GVB” are carved on the handles of the razors.

Right: Mantle clock given to Jacob J. Dyck and Marie as a wedding gift in 1921 by Jacobs’s half-sister Anna Dyck Tjahrt and her husband Peter. Photos: Authors’ collection.







From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

## 5

### Jacob J. Dyck

#### From the Steppes of Russia to the Plains of Kansas

##### Early Years in Kansas

After Jacob J. Dyck's arrival in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 19, 1907, he traveled by train to Newton, Kansas. Arriving in Newton on April 25, 1907, he was met by his stepbrother, Peter Penner. Peter was the son of Anna Penner, the second wife of Jacob Dyck (IV), and had immigrated to Kansas from the Am Trakt colony in Russia with his friend, Edward Esau. Jacob J. Dyck lived with Peter in Newton for a month until Jacob found employment at the ranch of Al Moore near the community of McLain, Kansas.

McLain was located three miles south and about one mile east of Newton. It was approximately 15 miles due west of the farm of Jacob and Anna Harder. Jacob worked for Al Moore for two years and attended church services at the Emmaus Mennonite Church. It was here that he met his future wife, Marie G. Harder, daughter of Jacob and Anna Harder.

Jacob Harder was 58 years old when Jacob J. Dyck arrived in Kansas in 1907. For nearly 30 years he had worked his farm virtually alone. His daughter Emma was his primary source of help, his "right hand man" as Emma said. Although Emma was an eager and willing worker, working as a farm hand was not accepted practice for young Mennonite women. Jacob Harder's brothers-in-law undoubtedly helped him on occasion, but by 1907 they were married and farming their own land. As Jacob Harder had worked for his future father-in-law in 1878, now Jacob J. Dyck did in 1909. Jacob J. Dyck's employment as a farm worker in the Emmaus community was similar in other respects to the experience of Jacob Harder 30 years earlier. In addition to their working knowledge of farming, they both came to America alone, and both were Mennonites and had the German language in common. Although Jacob J. Dyck's family had lived in the Am Trakt Mennonite colony in Russia since the 1850s, his ancestors had lived but a few miles from the Harders of the Vistula Delta in West Prussia for hundreds of years. In spite of all these points in common with the Mennonite families in the Emmaus community, Jacob J. Dyck was not easily accepted by some of these families. His Russian origins set him apart from the primarily West Prussian Emmaus Mennonites. His difficult life and worldly experiences in Russia shaped a character that some in the Emmaus community saw as suspect.

John Kopper had experienced some of this same scrutiny for the same reasons. Attached to John Kopper was the added stigma of having come from a family that had followed "visionary" (some said insane, crackpot-fanatic) Claas Epp Jr. on the ill-fated trek from Am Trakt into Asiatic Russia. John Kopper's engaging personality enabled him to overcome these obstacles and he probably helped his cousin Jacob Dyck navigate around potential problems with some Emmaus families.

Jacob J. Dyck's first home in the Emmaus community was a bachelor quarters he shared with Jake Farni. This stone house was just south of Abraham Claassen's home along the Henry Creek and was originally owned by Henry Comstock, for whom the Henry Creek was named. Jacob Dyck recalled that the summer of 1910 produced a bumper crop of grapes near the house and that Jake Farni put these grapes to good use in making wine. When word got around about the good fortune of the "two Jakes,"

they made many new friends, some coming under cover of darkness and requesting that their identities remain anonymous.

Jake Farni's wine was at least partly responsible for saving Jacob Dyck's life. Jacob became very ill and experienced severe abdominal pain indicating appendicitis. The famous "horse and buggy" Dr. Hertzler was summoned and performed an emergency appendectomy. No anesthetic was available, so Jacob drank a large quantity of wine before Dr. Hertzler began his operation. The wine may have marginally dulled the pain, but primarily it prevented the onset of shock, which could have been fatal. After consuming the wine, Jacob was held down on the kitchen table by six strong men while Dr. Hertzler removed the infected appendix. Thankfully, Jacob's recovery was uneventful, the episode adding to the legend of Dr. Hertzler.

If Jacob Harder heard any whispers about his future son-in-law's dabbling in the vintner's trade he would have probably kept it to himself. That also probably would not have been the reaction of his wife Anna or his daughter Marie, the future bride. The prohibition against the use of alcohol by Mennonites was fairly strict, the strictness varying by congregation. Mennonite congregations in Kansas were stricter than many of their counterparts in West Prussia and Russia. In the early years of the Emmaus community there was a benign tolerance of alcohol in conjunction with holidays and special occasions. This tolerance gradually disappeared and was completely erased by Federal prohibition in the 1920s.

In the winter of 1910 the patriarch of the Claassen family died on December 7. Abraham Claassen was 85 years old at the time of his death. Although he had sold his original farm and home to his daughter Helene and her husband John Kopper in 1907, Abraham and his wife Anna continued to live in the stone house he had Andy Patterson build for him in 1877. Abraham also maintained active interest in farming operations in his semi-retirement. By any measurement Abraham was a remarkable man who lived a remarkable life, and his passing was mourned by the entire Emmaus community.

After the death of Abraham Claassen in the winter of 1910, signs of an early spring, the season of renewal, came in late February of 1911. The marriage of Jacob J. Dyck and Marie G. Harder occurred on February 22, 1911, the 30th anniversary of the marriage of Jacob and Anna Harder. The wedding ceremony was in the bride's parents' home with a reception for friends and family in the second story of the "red barn." Portable kerosene stoves had been placed in the barn to provide heat and the rowdy play of some of the children present upset one of the stoves, starting a small fire. A quick-thinking guest extinguished the blaze with a large bowl of juicy peaches.

Gifts for the married couple were probably on the practical side, but not without their own beauty. Handmade quilts, linens, and lace as well as cooking utensils and dishes. One very practical gift arrived late. From Marie's close friend and aunt, Helene Claassen Kopper, and her husband, Jacob's cousin John Kopper, this note was among the gifts:

Whitewater, Kans.  
on your wedding day

Very dear Nephew, beloved Mrs. Niece!

You will have looked in vain among the wedding gifts for a sign of life from us. It is delayed; it was only ordered a week ago since we couldn't decide what it should be. Usually one only thinks of the bride when it comes to wedding presents. We wanted to do that differently. And so you will find enclosed a picture of a little keepsake.

Your affectionate, all best wishing,  
well intentioned,  
Uncle and Aunt  
John and Helen Kopper

Enclosed with this note was a picture cut out of a catalog showing a David Bradley No. 7 Sulkey Plow complete with description. Only the price had been removed. When the plow arrived is not known, but it was still in use in 1936. Jacob and Marie's youngest son Herbert remembered his older brother Robert hitching this plow to a team of three horses preparatory to plowing on the Jacob Harder farm. Eighty-seven-year-old Jacob Harder was present and Herbert recalled that Robert spoke to their grandfather in Low German, addressing Jacob as "Grusspapa."

As Jacob and Anna Harder had done, Jacob and Marie Dyck spent their first married weeks living in the home of the bride's parents. When the weather improved, Jacob and Marie set up a modest household on the top floor of the "red barn" where their wedding reception had been held. The couple's new house of frame construction was built in 1912 on the quarter section (160 acres) Jacob Harder had purchased before the turn of the century. This tract of land was across the Henry Creek from the Harder home to the east-northeast. The earliest known photograph of the Dyck home, *circa* 1915, shows the house as originally built, a large barn to the north of the house, and a shop building west of the barn. Between the house and barn is a tall windmill over the water well. This well produced exceptionally good water; many people from neighboring farms came to the Dyck farm for their drinking water. It also produced water in great quantity, never running low even in

the years of extreme drought. Behind the house is a chicken coop. In the foreground can be seen young cedar trees. Other trees were planted for shade, mostly elm. Behind the house fruit trees were planted; mulberry, apricot, peach, crabapple, and cherry. Marie's garden of vegetables and flowers was also behind the house. This garden would be one of Marie's pleasures for over 50 years, as well as a major source of food for her family. Besides vegetables and flowers in the garden there would be several rows of well-tended grape vines; for jelly and juice, not wine. But perhaps in a fitting coincidence, these grapes were always ripe on Jacob J. Dyck's birthday of August 17.

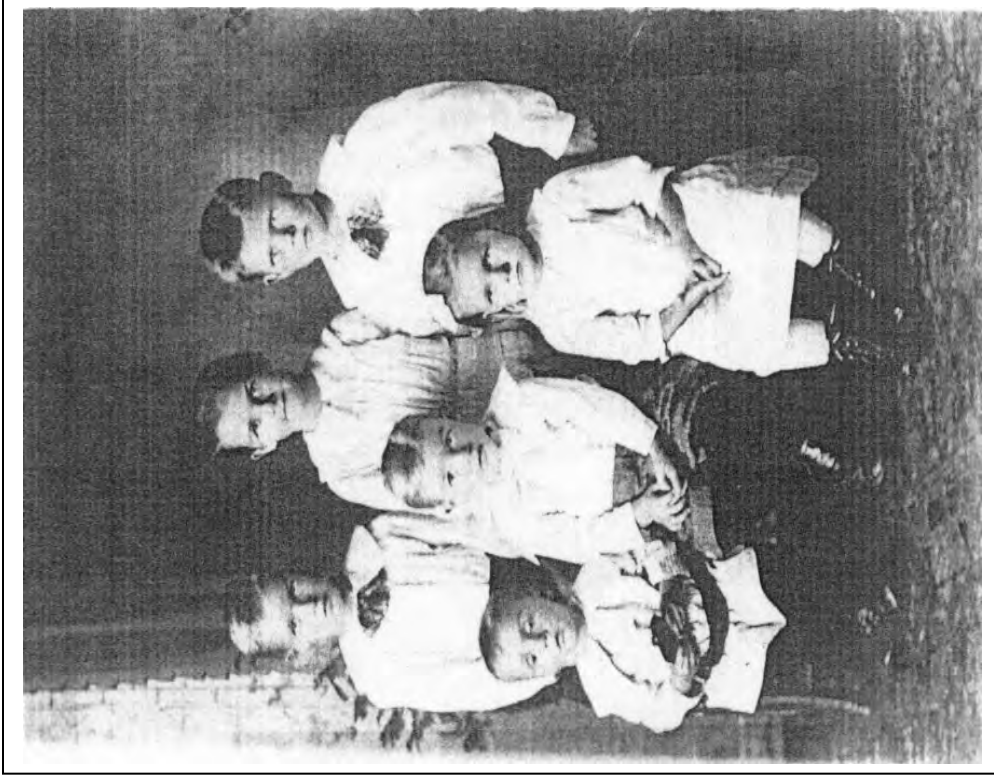
Jacob and Marie's first child, a daughter named Kaete Justine, was born December 6, 1911, at the home of Marie's parents, Jacob and Anna Harder. Improvements in the field of medicine in the early 20th century, and the difference an attending physician can make, are evident in the healthy births of Jacob and Marie's first six children before 1919. This is in sharp contrast to the generation of the parents of Jacob and Marie. After Kaete came Edward Jacob on February 17, 1913. Edward's birth came just weeks after the death of Gerhard Claassen on January 13, 1913. Gerhard had outlived his second wife Sara Schulz by exactly five years. Sara died January 13, 1908. Gerhard's death left Anna Bergmann Claassen, wife of Gerhard's brother Abraham, as the matriarch of the expanding family she brought to Kansas from the Vistula Delta of West Prussia in 1876. Anna Bergmann Claassen died October 10, 1917, living her final years in the care of her youngest daughter Helene Claassen Kopper in the house that had been her home for 40 years. In addition to being the mother of five children that lived to reach adulthood, Anna was the grandmother of 30, and great-grandmother of ten children at the time of her death.

Of these ten great-grandchildren, four were the children of Anna Harder Berg, six were the children of Jacob and Marie Dyck. In addition to Kaete and Edward were Will Gustav, born March 17, 1914, Irene Anna, born July 16, 1915, Robert Hans, born September 20, 1916, and Bruno George, born September 4, 1917. These first six Dyck children are shown in a group photograph taken *circa* 1919. Irene Anna would die on October 5, 1920 and this is the only known photograph of her. The death of Irene Anna, from diphtheria, devastated her older sister Kaete. Their mother Marie recalled that 8-year-old Kaete put away her dolls and never played "house" again.

During the years of the first two decades of the 20th century, farming continued to be done primarily with horses. It was difficult for one man to farm more than a couple of hundred acres. Until Jacob Dyck's sons were old enough to be of real help, he and his aging father-in-law, Jacob Harder, were the primary support for



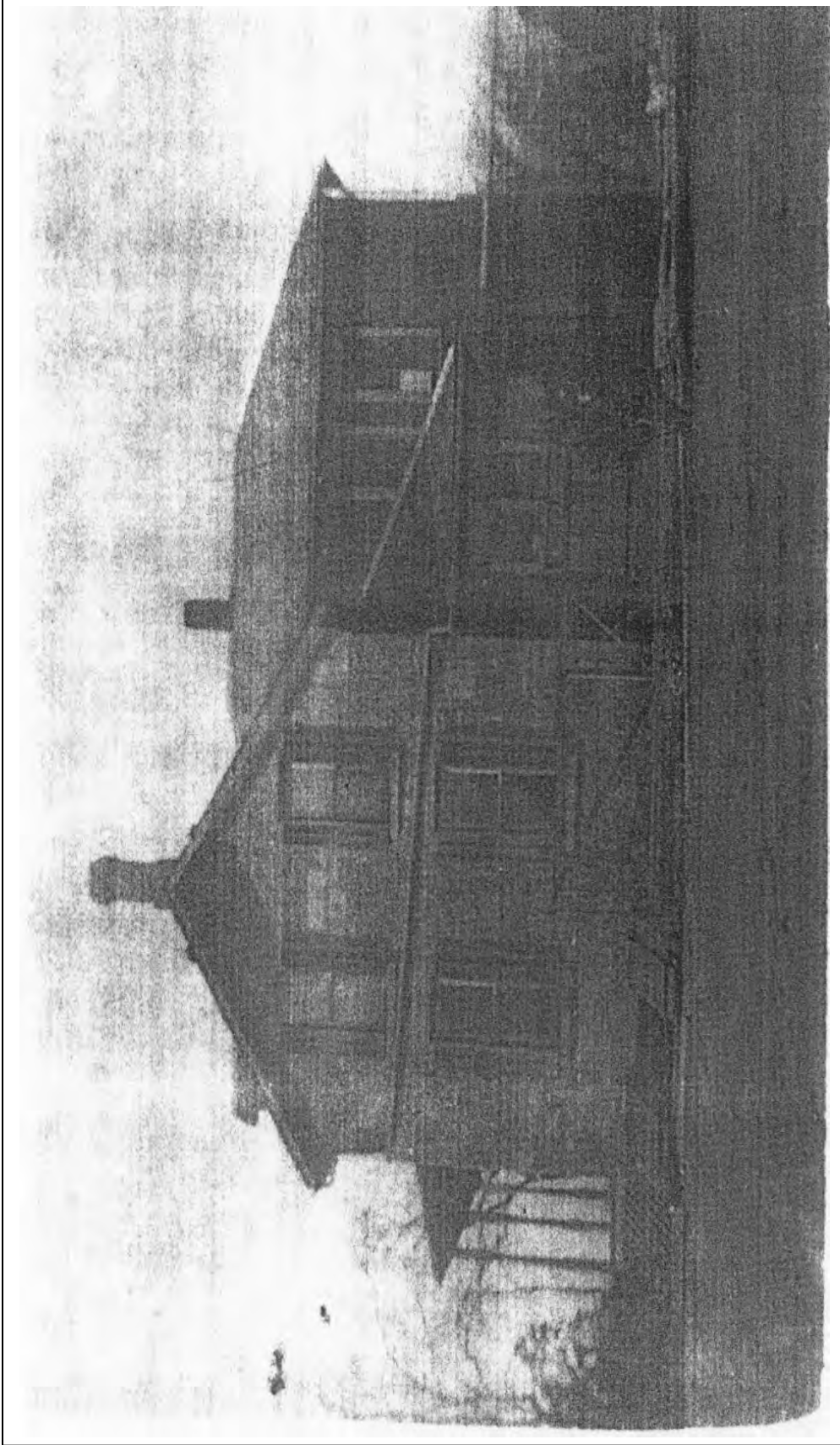
Marie G. Harder (1884-1973) and Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954).  
This photo was taken several months after their wedding on  
February 22, 1911. Photo: Authors' collection.



Dyck children, back row left to right: Will (1914-1974), Kaete  
(1911-1987), Edward (1913-1960), front left to right: Bruno  
(1917-1984), Robert (1916-1966), Irene Anna (1915-1920).  
Photo: Authors' collection.



The Jacob J. Dyck farmstead *circa* 1915. Rural Whitewater, Butler County, Kansas.  
Photo: Authors' collection.



The Jacob Harder home *circa* 1915. A large frame addition has been added to the north side of the house since its initial construction in 1881. Photo: Authors' collection.





Helene Harder Dieck (1897-1988) and Jacob Dieck (1885-1952),  
wedding photo, 15 November 1917.  
Photo: From the collection of John B. Harder.



Standing, Helene and Jacob Dieck. Seated,  
Abraham Dieck holding his grandson, Abraham born  
1918. Photo: From the collection of John B. Harder.

their two families that totaled 14 people in 1919. Marie's sister Emma continued to work with her father in her non-traditional role on the farm and was increasingly invaluable as Jacob Harder neared 70 years of age. Emma's importance may have cost her the opportunity to marry, that and her young age of 16. In her later years Emma would talk around this subject of a suitor that she wanted to marry, never revealing his name. Her own writing may give a hint, but it is perhaps unfair to speculate too much. When the subject of marriage was broached with Emma's father, Jacob Harder refused to give his consent, citing her young age.

While the German and Russian Mennonites in America were prospering in a country with a seemingly unlimited future, their relatives in Europe were witnessing the beginning of the end of an era. In August of 1914 World War I began in Europe. For the first time many young men of the Mennonite faith served in the German Army in some capacity. Because of a series of interlocking alliances these Mennonite men of Prussia found themselves in armed conflict with a country many of them had relatives in, Russia. The war on the Eastern Front between Germany and Russia was fought on a massive scale involving millions of men. In one of the great, decisive battles of the war, the German army under the command of General Paul von Hindenburg defeated the numerically superior Russian army at the Battle of Tannenberg just south of the Vistula Delta. This battlefield had been the site of the defeat of the Teutonic Knights by the combined forces of Polish and Lithuanian nobility in 1410. Many Germans saw Hindenburg's victory at Tannenberg as a settling of accounts for the defeat of 1410.

On the Western Front the German army had invaded its old enemy France by way of neutral Belgium. This violation of Belgian neutrality resulted in a massive propaganda campaign by American newspapers that vilified any and all things German. Outrageous exaggeration and outright lies of atrocities committed by the German army in Belgium fueled anti-German feelings in America. By the time America entered the war on the side of England and France in 1917, these anti-German sentiments were at a fever pitch. The consequences of this virulent propaganda campaign were felt by Mennonite communities in Kansas, including the Emmaus community. Residents of nearby towns that were probably ignorant of their own German origins targeted Mennonites as an outlet for their over-exuberant "patriotism." Mennonites were threatened when they came to town, people speaking German (which all Mennonites did at that time) were accused of being "un-American", or a possibly a spy. Some businesses even refused Mennonite customers. Groups of men roamed the countryside seeking to tar and feather Germans in their midst. Tests were devised to challenge the loyalty of recent immigrants. On one occasion a German-Mennonite farmer was asked if he could sing the "Star

Spangled Banner.” He could and did, much to the chagrin of the challenging group that didn’t know the entire song themselves. The purchase of “Liberty Bonds” was another test Mennonite farmers passed with flying colors. In those counties of Kansas that had large Mennonite populations, sales of “Liberty Bonds” were higher than non-Mennonite counties.

Probably nothing rankled the self-appointed “super-patriot” more than the refusal of Mennonites to serve in the American military. Most Mennonite men of military age received exemption from service because their occupations as farmers were considered vital to the war effort. But it was a system filled with bias, and individual draft boards made obtaining these exemptions as difficult as possible. Many Mennonite men were threatened with imprisonment at the Federal Military Prison at Leavenworth, Kansas for refusal to swear the oath of allegiance. Mennonites did not single out this particular oath. The swearing of any oath was prohibited to them by their belief in the teachings of Jesus in His “Sermon On The Mount.”

This strict adherence to their beliefs by the Mennonites of Kansas, and the Emmaus congregation in particular, should have come as no surprise to those people that knew their history. Unfortunately, few people in government and the general population did. Although mild in comparison to persecution they had endured in centuries before, Mennonites of the newer generations learned a valuable lesson from these events during World War I. They saw how quickly their fellow countrymen would turn on them when it suited their purposes to do so. Life would gradually return to normal after the war ended on November 11, 1918, but the lessons not forgotten.

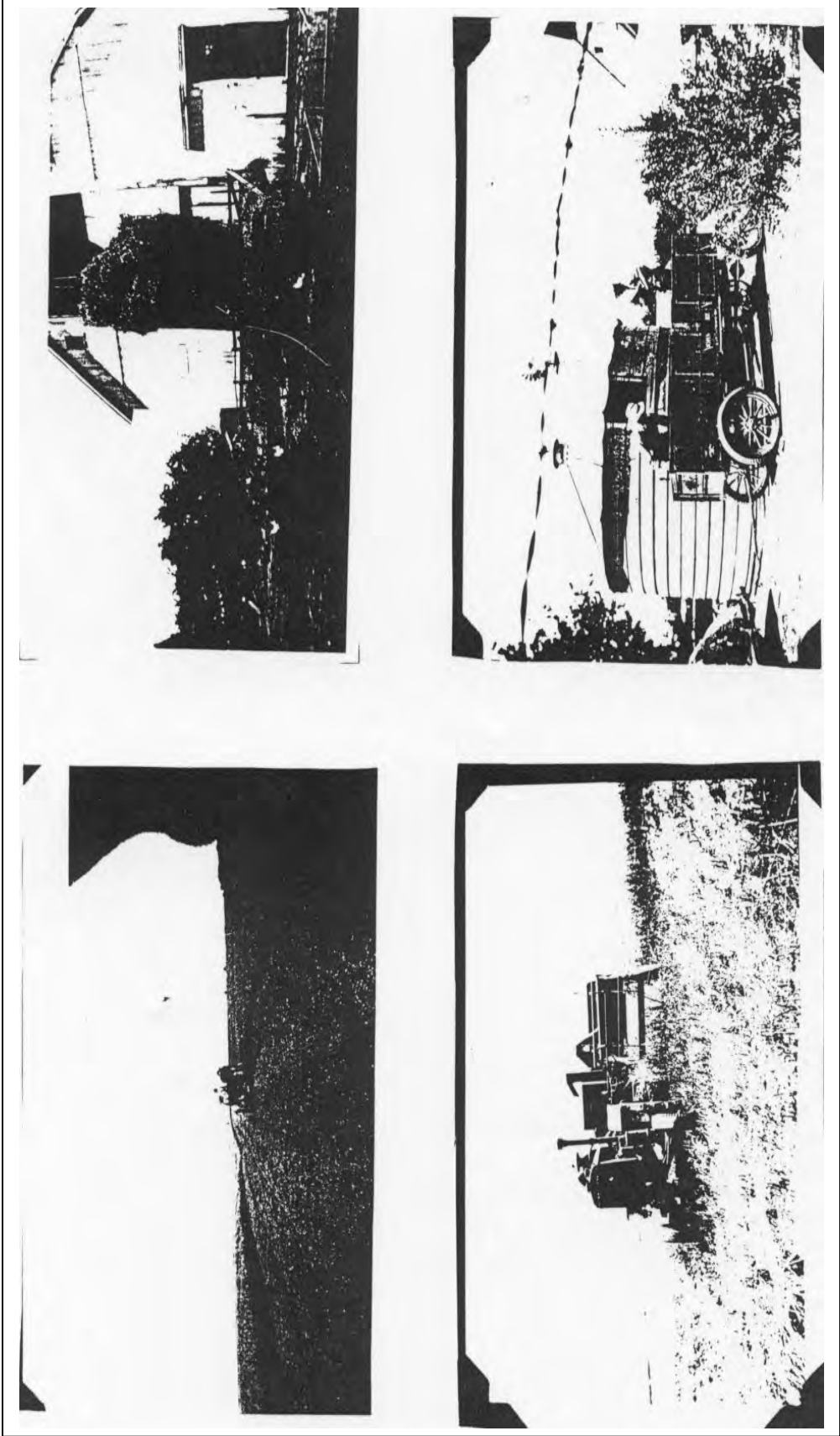
Another event occurred during World War I that would have fatal consequences for millions of people in Russia, including tens of thousands of German-Mennonites living in their colonies in Russia. In March of 1917 the Russian Czar, Nicholas II, abdicated his throne and the Russian Revolution began. Communists led by Vladimir Lenin gained control of the government in Moscow in November of 1917. Lenin quickly signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ending Russia’s participation in World War I. From 1918 until 1929 civil war raged throughout Russia with the Red Army emerging victorious. One hundred and thirty years of German-Mennonite presence in Russia would be savagely and systematically destroyed by the Communists under Lenin and his brutal successor Joseph Stalin.

## Between the World Wars

Mechanization of farming began in earnest in America after the end of World War I. Unlike their Amish brethren, mainstream Mennonites embraced every new farm-related machine to come along. During the 1920s mechanized farming, and a growing number of sons, allowed Jacob Dyck to increase the number of acres he had under cultivation and to gradually increase productivity. Like most Mennonites during this time Jacob was loath to borrow money to expand his farming operation. The only way he could acquire more farmland without borrowing money was to rent it. The most common terms of farm rental gave 1/3 of the income of the land to the owner with the renter keeping 2/3. The renter supplied his own machinery, seeds, and labor. Put more simply, the renter assumed virtually all the risk. As Jacob's sons came of age he began renting land as it became available. Eventually he would rent nearly 500 acres in addition to farming the 160 acres he lived on and the 160 acres of his father-in-law Jacob Harder.

In 1927 Jacob and Marie became the parents of their 12th child, Herbert. The Dyck house had remained its original size and was most certainly overcrowded before Herbert arrived. However, it seems that child number 12 provided the impetus to expand the house to more than three times its original size. The American economic boom of the 1920s gave Jacob the confidence to take out a substantial loan for construction of the large house addition. Fortunately, as it turns out, he borrowed this money from his wife's family and a friend, Bill Paulson. A building contractor and distant relative to Jacob, Bill Wiens, built the addition to the house that included a large dining room and kitchen with a wash room and porch on the bottom floor. The second story addition consisted of two very large bedrooms, making a total of four bedrooms upstairs. The completed house provided ample room for the Dyck family that eventually totaled 13 children when Linda was born in 1929. A massive dining room table allowed the whole family to sit together during meals.

Feeding this large family was a task that fell to the diminutive Marie. Not quite five feet tall, Marie shouldered burdens that are almost beyond imagining today. She gave birth to 15 children in 18 years, from 1911 to 1929. In these years before electricity, indoor plumbing, washing machines, and supermarkets, she daily washed diapers by hand and cooked meals for her ever-expanding family on a wood-fueled stove, and baked up to a dozen loaves of bread twice a week. Individual attention to children was nearly impossible, and the older children became self sufficient at an early age, their childhood cut short by the demands placed on them. Such a



Farming operation on the Jacob J. Dyck farm, Butler County, Kansas. Photos: *circa* 1930, Courtesy Charles R. Dyck.

situation was not unique to the Dyck family during this time; many farm families experienced similar circumstances. But many families would not survive the cataclysmic upheaval that is known to us today as the “Great Depression.” The large Dyck family fared better than many and this is due in no small part to the strength and character of Marie Dyck.

While most of Marie’s waking hours were filled with the drudgery of cooking, washing, and cleaning, in addition to caring for her children, she found time to indulge in simple pleasures. Marie liked to recite poetry and had memorized many poems in both German and English. One of her favorites was Friedrich Schiller’s ballad, “Das Lied von der Glocke” (The Song of the Bell). This ballad is over 400 lines long and Marie knew it completely by heart. Marie also had a lifelong interest in astronomy. By mail she received a quarterly publication that contained diagrams of the major stars, planets, and constellations visible in the northern hemisphere according to the season. Marie’s knowledge of the heavens was extensive and her enthusiasm for sharing this knowledge was a delight to see.

Following the stock market “crash” of October 1929, America, and the world, experienced an economic decline unparalleled in its history. Banks in rural America failed by the hundreds, wiping out the savings of their depositors. In an effort to recoup their cash, banks called in loans on farms. When farmers were unable to meet the demands of the banks, they lost their farms. Families that had farmed land for generations were without any means to make a living, or a place to live. Most Mennonites of the Emmaus community owned their farms debt free. Their ingrained avoidance of debt saved them from the foreclosure visited on many farmers. The loan that Jacob Dyck had made for the addition to his house had been personal rather than with a bank. This saved his family the indignity of losing their home. Although it would be many years before Jacob could pay off the loan, Bill Paulson had no interest in dispossessing the Dyck family. Holding onto their land gave farmers hope for a better day. But that day was a long time coming. Prices for everything farmers produced fell to a point where it barely covered their expenses, and sometimes didn’t even do that.

Kansas was “The Wheat State”, the heart of the Midwest’s “breadbasket.” Nothing symbolized the greatness of the land and its farmers more than the “amber waves of grain.” For Jacob Dyck few things on earth equalled the beauty of a field of wheat ripened under a blazing June sun. Jacob’s youngest son Herbert recalled seeing his father standing in the middle of a large field of wheat, his arms outstretched as he slowly turned in the grain undulating in the wind. Herbert had the sensation that his father was floating on a sea of wheat.

Many days of hard labor later, the grain having been cut, bundled, and threshed, Herbert rode with Jacob to the town of Potwin pulling a wagon that held 55 bushels of newly-harvested wheat. Before the Depression this would have been a day of excitement. Now it was a time of trepidation. After the wagon was weighed and unloaded at the granary, Jacob received a check for his wheat. It was in the amount of \$15.40, or \$ .28 per bushel. Herbert remembered this as one of the few times he saw his father with tears in his eyes. It was a long, silent ride home.

Other visits to town with his father were remembered with more fondness by Herbert. On one occasion Jacob decided to hitch a team of horses to a grain wagon and travel to the small community of Brainard with his load of wheat. While horses were still used for farming, making the seven-mile journey to Brainard with a horse-drawn wagon was a nostalgia trip by the 1930s that took all day. Herbert rode on the wagon with his father and listened as Jacob described the land they saw and the families that lived on the farms.

With prices for farm products so low during the Depression the family would not have survived without the older children of Jacob and Marie working to maintain the family. For some of the children it meant postponing their educations and plans for marriage. Unemployment in the United States reached 30% by the mid-1930s, so seeking employment away from the farm was not a viable option for most of the older Dyck children. Jacob and Marie's son Will secured a rare job at the Vickers Oil Refinery in Potwin at this time. Born in 1914, Will became the main financial support for the Dyck family during the worst years of the 1930s. His paycheck from the refinery provided the only steady supply of cash the family had at this time.

While this was indeed a grim time for the Dyck family, it was not without its happier moments. Many of these happy times were associated with grandparents Jacob and Anna Harder. For children the Harder farm was a land of enchantment. The acres of timber along the Henry Creek were the site of many family picnics. At Easter there was an egg hunt in the pasture north of the Harder home. At Christmas the family would gather in the large north bedroom of the Harder house where the traditional German Christmas tree was decorated. Every grandchild of Jacob and Anna Harder knew that something special awaited them when gifts were handed out. Most often the gift was the handiwork of Grandmother Anna Harder and Aunts Emma, Bertha, Minna, and Sarah.

Of the four Aunts Harder, Emma seemed to have the best relationship with her nieces and nephews. Emma had always been more of an outdoors person than her sisters and she had her father's knack for building things with materials at hand. This included toys. Emma helped the Dyck children construct miniature

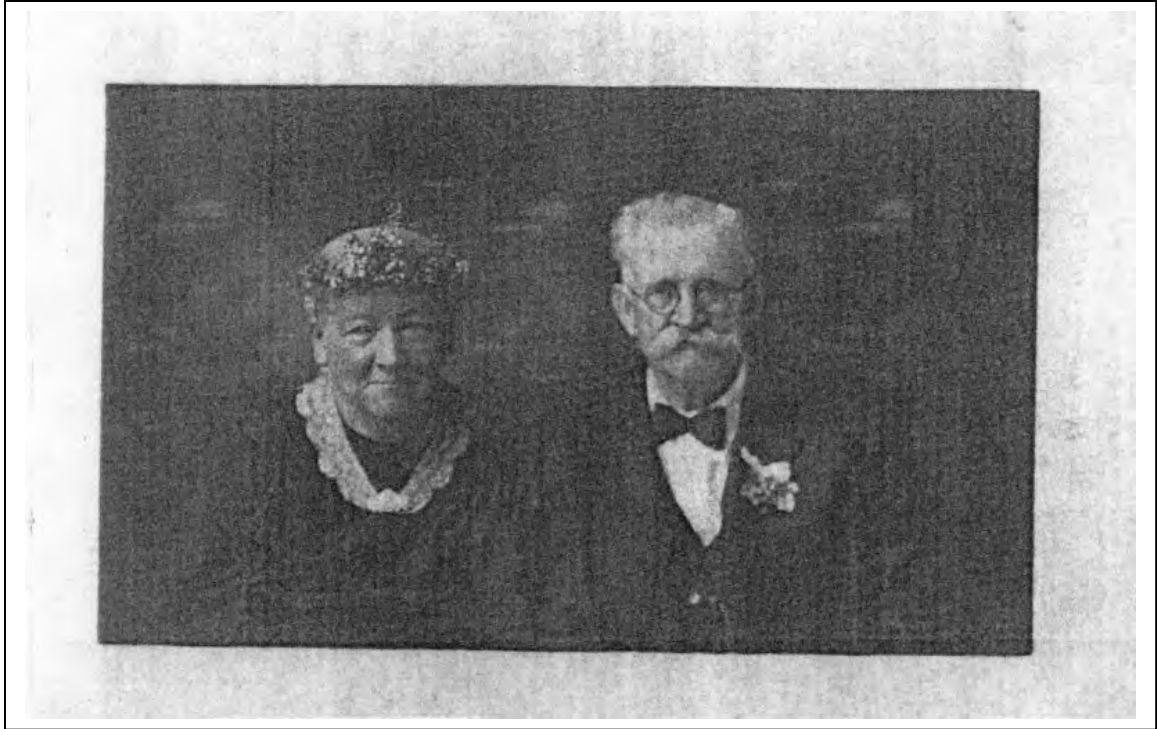
farm buildings complete with livestock. Empty thread spools became sheep once legs and head were attached. Cattle were made from buckeyes gathered from the buckeye tree west of the Harder house. Emma was also known as a soft touch when it came to discipline. Oftentimes when one of the Dyck children had been banished to a corner or the stairs to contemplate the error of their ways by someone else, it was Emma that brought a peace offering of cookies accompanied by kind words.

Jacob and Anna Harder had celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary on February 22, 1931. Photographs of the couple taken on this occasion show Anna with a smile that suggests she had never lost her girlish passion for Jacob. Jacob and Anna's grandchildren remember that even as the couple entered the twilight of their lives they openly exhibited their love for one another. Granddaughter Esther Dyck recalled 84-year-old Jacob coming into the house from the garden with a single rose that he silently placed on Anna's lap. Anna reciprocated this attention in a way vividly remembered by Esther. Jacob's favorite food was bread made from rye that he grew in a field along the drive to his farm. When the rye was ready to harvest he cut it himself and took it to be ground into rye flour. Anna baked this special bread for Jacob and made a crumbly cheese that he carefully spread on his bread. From a small white bowl Jacob sprinkled the cheese with caraway seeds. Jacob's ritual of preparing this treat, perfected over many decades, was an obvious pleasure for him. It also showed his appreciation for Anna's gift to him. When Jacob had finished eating Esther noted that he lightly licked his finger and carefully dabbed all the crumbs from the oilcloth that covered the table.

The summer of 1936 was one of the hottest on record in the United States. Eighty-seven-year-old Jacob Harder suffered from the intense heat and developed severe rheumatic pains the following winter. On January 25, 1937, Jacob suffered a stroke from which he would not recover. He died at 2:00 A.M. on January 28, 1937, his 88th birthday. On the Sunday following Jacob's death his wife Anna remained at home rather than attend church services at the Emmaus Mennonite Church. Granddaughter Esther was selected to sit with her grandmother, to attend to her during her grief. Esther considered this duty a high honor. Throughout the day Esther watched as Anna sat silently at the kitchen table, alone with her thoughts of the man she had loved since childhood.

With many Dyck, Wall, Harder, and Claassen relatives still living in Russia and Germany, news from Europe was avidly followed by these families in America. The rise of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party in Germany during the 1930s was generally viewed favorably by German Mennonites in Kansas. This was due in no small part to their knowledge of what Communism under Lenin and Stalin had meant to their relatives living in Russia. The entire





Anna Claassen Harder and Jacob Harder on their Golden Wedding Anniversary, February 22, 1931. In the photo below Anna and Jacob are joined by three of their six daughters. Left to right, Minna, Sarah, and Emma. Photos: Authors' collection.





German-Mennonite colony at Am Trakt, Russia, had been destroyed by Stalin. Farm equipment and livestock was confiscated and those people that lived at Am Trakt that had not been starved to death or executed were shipped off to slave labor camps throughout Russia. From 1917, when the Russian Revolution began, to 1940, it is generally accepted that 45 million people died in Soviet Russia due to the brutality of the Communist dictators Lenin and Stalin.

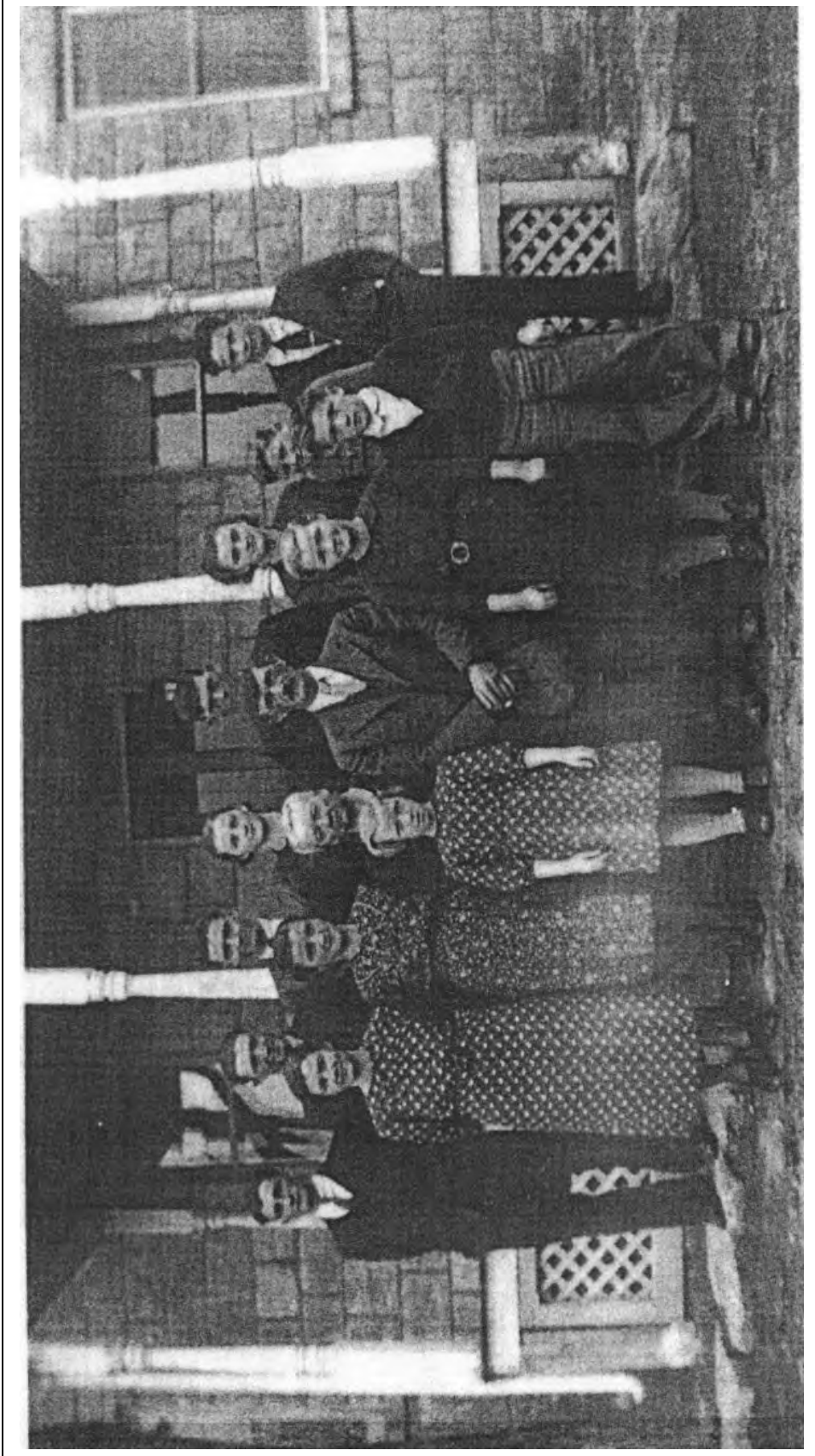
Rural electrification came to Kansas during the 1930s and Jacob Dyck acquired a radio that enabled him to keep abreast of developments in Europe. Four times a day Jacob tuned the radio to the news and demanded absolute quiet until the broadcast was over. While Jacob and his family benefited from the New Deal policies of President Roosevelt, Jacob remained a conservative Republican and admired Robert Taft, Senator from Ohio. When World War II began with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, Jacob fastened a map on the wall near the radio and placed pins on the map to mark the ebb and flow of the armies of Europe.

## 1940-1954

President Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" policies had done much to alleviate the adverse effects of the Depression on the American economy. But real relief only came with America's entry into World War II. On December 7, 1941, the United States was attacked by the Japanese Empire and war was declared against Japan by the American Congress. In a show of unity with his ally Japan, Adolf Hitler declared war on the United States just as Germany was suffering its first setbacks on the battlefields of Russia.

On June 22, 1941, Germany had violated a non-aggression pact with Russia by launching a massive surprise attack against the Communist country. From June until December the Russian Army suffered defeat after defeat giving up vast expanses of Russian territory. In many areas of Russia the divisions of the German Army were welcomed as conquering heroes. This was especially true in the German-Mennonite colonies of the Ukraine, Molotschna and Chortitza.

Until America's entry into the war Mennonites in this country were generally favorably disposed towards the German Army's successes in Russia. Many of them knew first hand, or through letters from relatives in Russia, that vague terms like "collectivization" in reality meant mass murder on an unparalleled scale. Jacob Dyck's attitude was probably typical of many Mennonites. As a matter of religious principle Mennonites abhorred war for any reason and most Mennonites in America



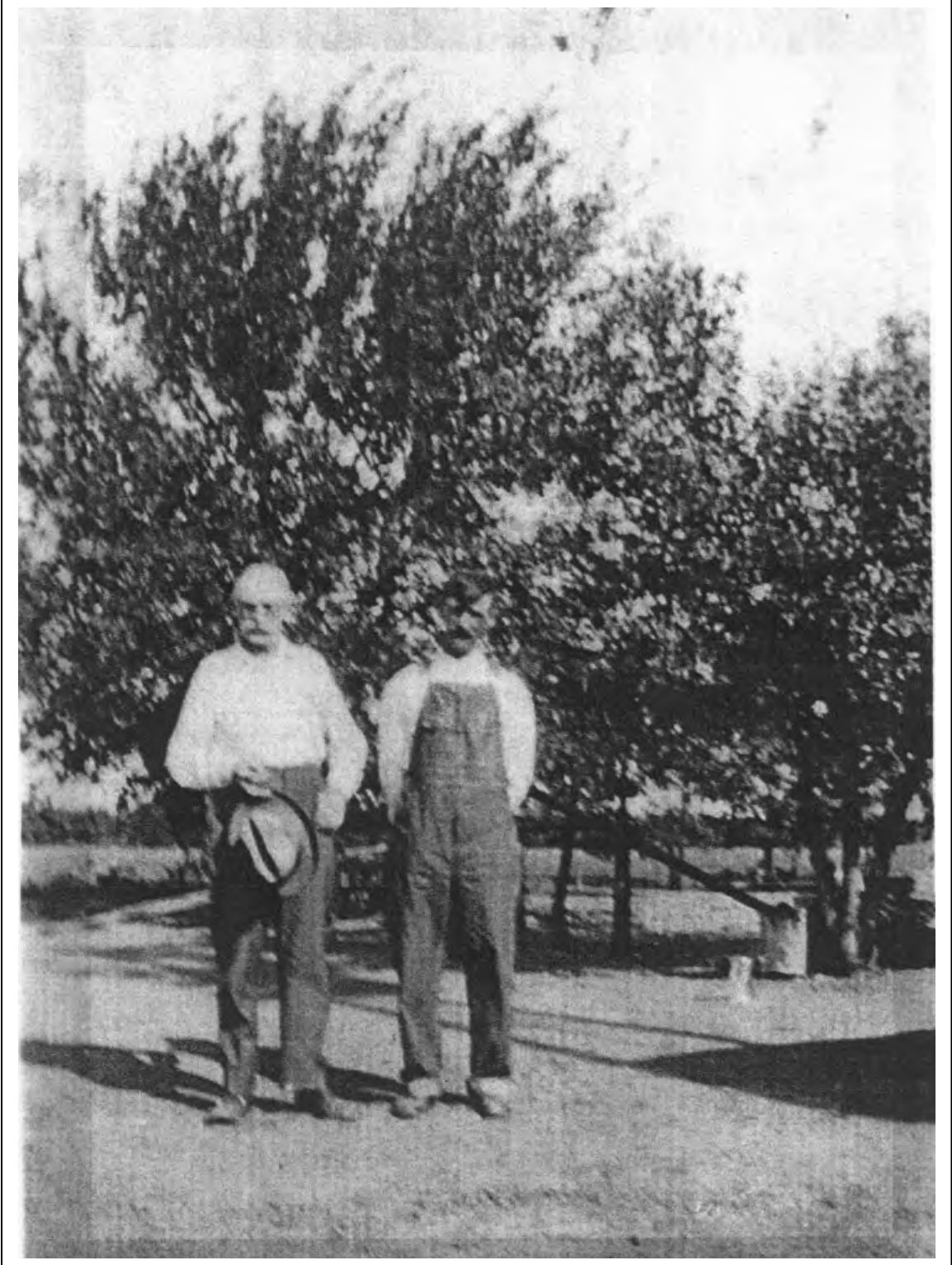
Jacob J. Dyck family gathered for the funeral of Jacob Harder, who died January 28, 1937. Back row, left to right, Bruno, Robert, Will, Gertrude, Edward, Louise, Arthur, Walter. Middle row, left to right, Kaete, Esther, Marie, Jacob, Irene, Herbert. Foreground, Linda. Photo: Authors' collection.

strictly adhered to the precept of non-resistance which forbade any participation in the military. This certainly was the stance of Jacob's wife Marie whose ancestors had immigrated to America from West Prussia rather than compromise their beliefs in this regard. But Jacob's stance was tempered by the knowledge of what had happened to his family in Am Trakt, Russia. He despised news broadcasters that referred to the Germans as "Huns" and embraced the murderous Joseph Stalin as our ally "Uncle Joe." Jacob was understanding of his son Will's service in the U.S. Army and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during the war and approved of it. Certainly Marie did not. In 1945, Jacob agreed to sign the papers that enabled his 17-year-old son Herbert to enlist in the U.S. Navy rather than being drafted into the Army when he turned 18. In mid-October, 1945, Herbert was notified to report for boot camp in San Diego, CA. On the drive to the Newton train station, Jacob's only advice to his son was an admonishment: "Herbert, leave the whiskey and women alone."

Jacob Dyck's struggles of conscience were not limited to America's alliance with Soviet Russia and whether or not his sons should participate in the war. The war represented an economic boom for farmers. Suddenly everything they produced was in demand and profits were high. How could Mennonites reconcile their refusal to actively participate in the war with their profits from it? Most made no attempt to. Jacob Dyck was aware of the incongruity of profiting from war and it probably explains his attitude toward the military service of his sons during the war.

Jacob also refused the opportunity to use German prisoners of war for labor on his farm. There was a POW camp near the town of Peabody that held German soldiers captured in the North Africa campaign. Many of these POWs welcomed the opportunity to leave the prison camp and work for farmers in the surrounding countryside. On the farms of Mennonites they found people that spoke the German language, treated them well, and fed them much better than their U.S. Army guards did. Jacob enjoyed speaking with the POWs that worked on neighboring farms and recognized the benefits they received from being able to leave the POW compound. But he made a decision not to employ these German POWs in benign forced labor.

And it certainly wasn't that Jacob couldn't have used the help. This was especially true in the summer of 1944. Jacob relied on his sons that remained at home to help with farming and he needed their help the most at harvest time. It was at the beginning of the wheat harvest that son Arthur decided to "follow the harvest" by working for a crew of custom threshers. Arthur left in the middle of the night without telling his parents his plans and hitchhiked west along U.S. Highway 50. He met up with the crew just east of Dodge City, Kansas, at the small town of Spearville. From there Arthur



Above left, Peter Penner (1870-1957), stepbrother of Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954) standing right. This photograph was taken in 1940 when Peter was visiting Jacob at the Dyck farm. Peter died in Reedley, California. Photo: Authors' collection.

traveled with the crew as they followed the ripening fields of wheat north into Nebraska and the Dakotas. It was hot, dusty work from sunup til sundown, but Arthur loved the travel and camaraderie. When he sheepishly returned to his parents' farm late in the summer he had no regrets except that he had caused Jacob and Marie some concern about his welfare.

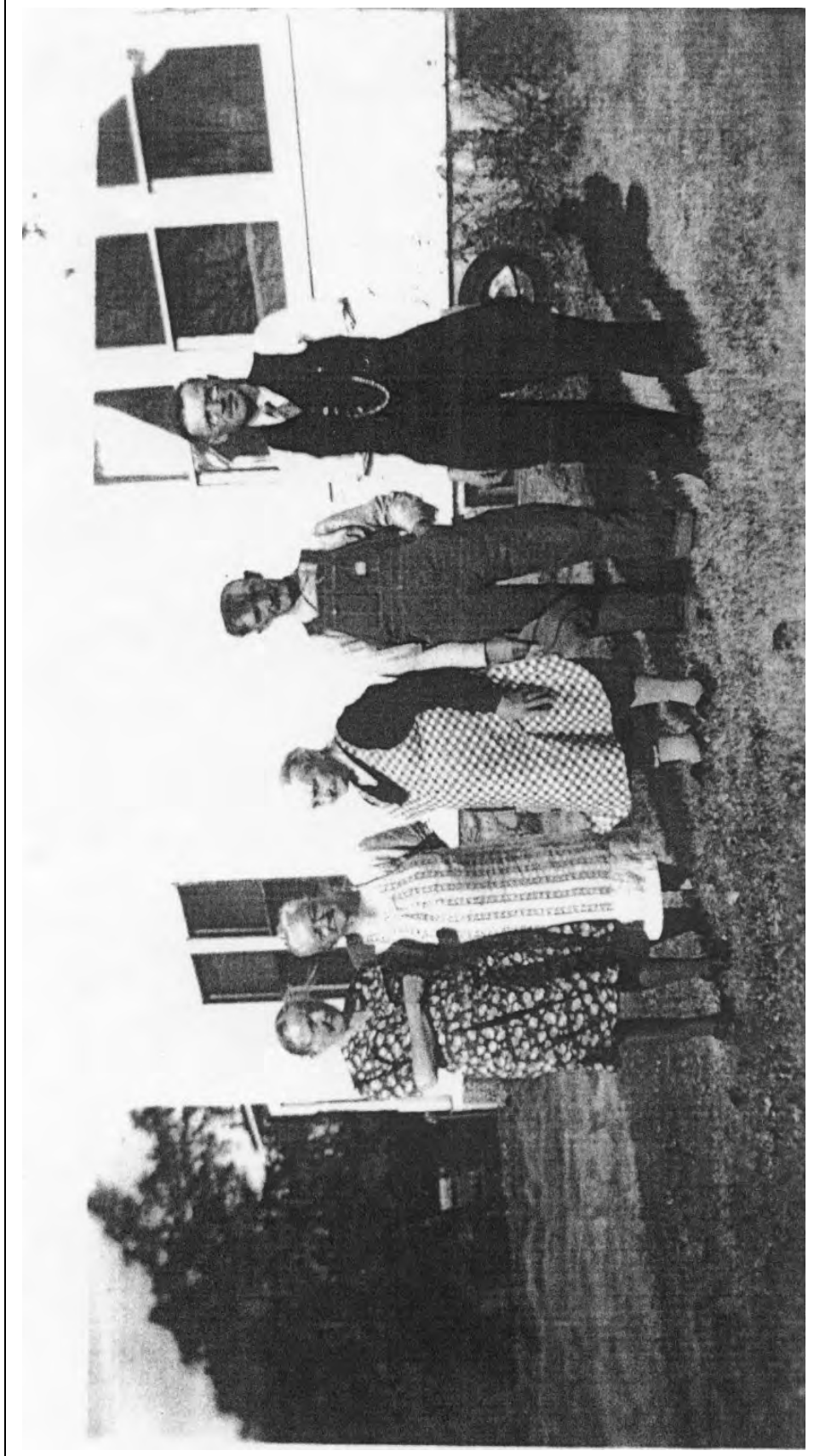
With the surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, World War II ended. Normalcy gradually returned to people's lives. Interrupted educations were pursued and marriage plans were made by many of Jacob and Marie's children. Travel restrictions due to wartime rationing of gasoline were gone. This enabled Jacob's sister Maria to travel from Canada to Kansas for an extended visit.

Jacob had not seen his sister since 1928 when he had made the journey to Canada by car with his wife Marie. Maria had settled in Saskatchewan, Canada, after leaving Am Trakt, Russia, with her husband Henry Dyck. Maria traveled to Kansas with Elise Dyck Isaac (1896-1972) and her husband John (1889-1971). Elise was the daughter of Johannes J. Dyck (1860-1920) and granddaughter of Johannes Dietrich Dyck (1826-1898), the "49er" and Mayor of Am Trakt, Russia. [For a history and genealogy of the descendants of Johannes Dietrich Dyck see: *A Pilgrim People, The Dyck, Isaac, Quiring, and Wiebe Story* compiled and edited by Cornelius and Wilma Dyck.] Thus Elise Dyck Isaac was a first cousin, one generation removed, to Jacob and his sister Maria Dyck. Elise had immigrated to Canada from Am Trakt, Russia, with her family in 1927. This was the first time Jacob Dyck had seen any member of his family since his older stepbrother Peter Penner (1870-1957) had come to visit in 1940. It would also be the last time.

After the death of her husband Jacob Harder in 1937, Anna Claassen Harder lived on in her own house cared for by her daughter Emma. Emma was the only one of the six Harder daughters that didn't marry. Daughter Anna had married Jacob Berg in 1902, Marie married Jacob Dyck in 1911. Bertha, Emma's twin, had married Heinrich (Henry) Fast on January 19, 1926. Henry was a widower who had been married to Anna Kopper, sister of John Kopper, and was the father of four living children. Bertha and Henry would have no children of their own, a great disappointment to Bertha. She was, however, a devoted stepmother to Henry's daughter Martha, who remained with Bertha because of physical and mental handicaps. Martha now resides in a nursing home. On February 22, 1932, daughter Sarah married Ernest Wiebe and on July 23, 1937, Minna married William Wiens.

It was while visiting her daughter Sarah at Independence, Missouri, that Anna Claassen Harder died on September 18, 1949. Her body was transported back to Kansas for her funeral and she was buried next to her beloved husband Jacob in the Emmaus Mennonite Church Cemetery. In addition to her six daughters,





On the south lawn of the Dyck home on the occasion of Maria Dyck's visit from Canada in 1946. Standing left to right: Elise Dyck Isaac (1896-1972), Marie Dyck (1884-1973), Maria Dyck (1876-?), Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954), John Isaac (1889-1971). Photo: Courtesy Louise Dyck.





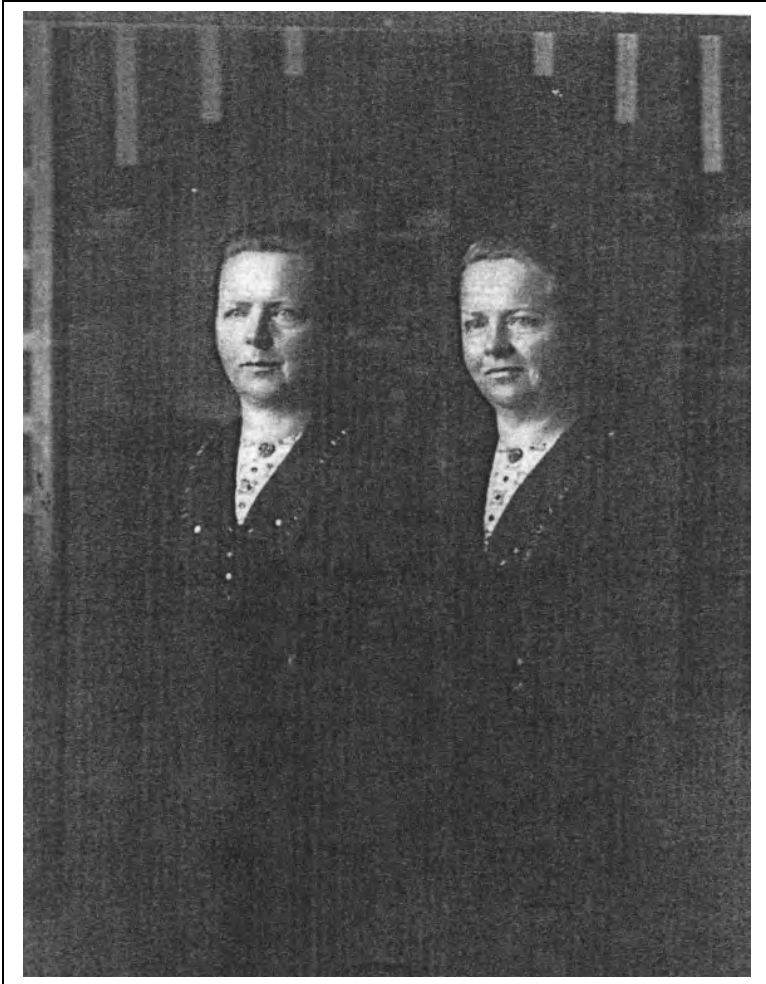
Left: Wedding photo of Minna Harder (1893-1990) and William Wiens (1892-1952), July 23, 1937.

Lower left: Wedding photo of Sarah Harder (1900-1995) and Ernest A. Wiebe (1904-1976), February 22, 1932.

Below right: Wedding photo of Bertha Harder (1888-1980) and Henry Fast (1876-1955), January 19, 1926.

Photos: Authors' collection.





Left: The twin daughters of Jacob and Anna Harder. Bertha (1888-1980), left, and Emma (1888-1988), right. Photo: *circa* 1925, Authors' collection.

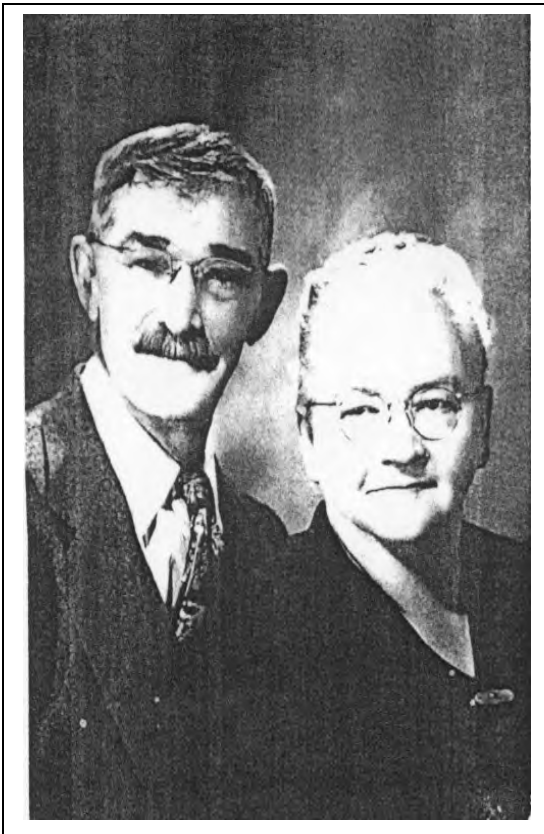
Below left: Seated is Anna Claassen Harder (1862-1949). Standing behind her are her six daughters on the front lawn of the Harder home, 1946. Left to right, Emma 1888-1988), Bertha (1888-1980), Sarah (1900-1995), Marie (1884-1973), Anna (1881-1954), and Minna (1881-1990). Photo: Authors's collection.





Above left: sister and brother, Maria Dyck (1876-?) and Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954), 1946 on the Dyck farm in Butler County, Kansas. Photo: Courtesy Louise Dyck.

Above right: Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954) at his farm, 1950. Photo: Authors' collection.



Left: Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954) and Marie G. Harder Dyck (1884-1973) on their 40<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary in 1951. Photo: Authors' collection.

Anna was survived by two sisters, Justine Claassen Entz and Helene Claassen Kopper, 25 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren.

Emma lived in the Harder house by herself for only a couple of years. On November 17, 1951, Jacob and Marie's son Arthur married Wanda Swarts and moved into the Harder house with 62-year-old Emma after an additional kitchen was built onto the house for the newlywed couple. By 1952 only Arthur and his older brother Edward remained to farm with their father Jacob. Edward would never marry and remained living in the Dyck house with his parents.

After World War II, for the first time in their married life together, Jacob and Marie enjoyed a small measure of financial security and had time for some leisure activity. Their daughters Kaete and Louise treated them to a vacation in Colorado. On February 22, 1951, Jacob and Marie celebrated their 40th Wedding Anniversary. They visited their married children and Jacob particularly delighted in his growing numbers of grandchildren. On yearly trips to attend the Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson, Kansas, Jacob indulged his passion for horses by spending almost the entire time watching trotter races. Marie pursued her interest in gardening with a little less urgency now that her family was grown, but not by much. She was often chided for canning fruits and vegetables as though she still had 13 children at home to feed. Gradually though, flowers took precedent over vegetables in Marie's garden. For Marie, more so than Jacob, the Emmaus Church was the center of social life. After Sunday morning services Marie enjoyed gathering in front of the church with her friends and relatives to make small talk and catch up on news in the community.

On November 30, 1954, 73-year-old Jacob Jacobovich Dyck died at Newton, Kansas, after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage. After Jacob's funeral at Emmaus Mennonite Church all 13 of his children and their spouses joined Marie for a rare group photograph.

Discussions about Jacob Dyck by his children became a ritual at family gatherings in later years. Opinions expressed about Jacob varied widely. He had detractors and defenders. It is perhaps significant that Jacob's wife of 43 years remained silent for the most part during these discussions. Marie continued as she had always done, working in her kitchen to prepare a meal, or cleaning up after one, while her children discussed the man that she knew better than any of them.

## Epilogue

After her husband's death Marie Harder Dyck continued to live on the Dyck farm with her son Edward Jacob. Edward was a favorite uncle to many Dyck grandchildren and he reciprocated their love. Sadly, Edward died from cancer at the young age of 47 on September 20, 1960. Marie was particularly heartbroken over her son's early death.

In 1965, after suffering a heart attack, Marie moved to the home of her daughters Kaete and Louise in the nearby town of Whitewater, Kansas. In 1966 Marie learned of the death of another son, Robert Hans. Robert too died of cancer at the young age of 50. He was buried in El Centro, California. A memorial service for Robert was held at the Emmaus Mennonite Church. Robert's favorite songs, all Western classics, were used as the prelude to the service.

On October 29, 1973, Marie Harder Dyck died at the home of her daughters Kaete and Louise in Whitewater, Kansas. She was 89 years old. Marie was survived by four sisters, 11 children, 29 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

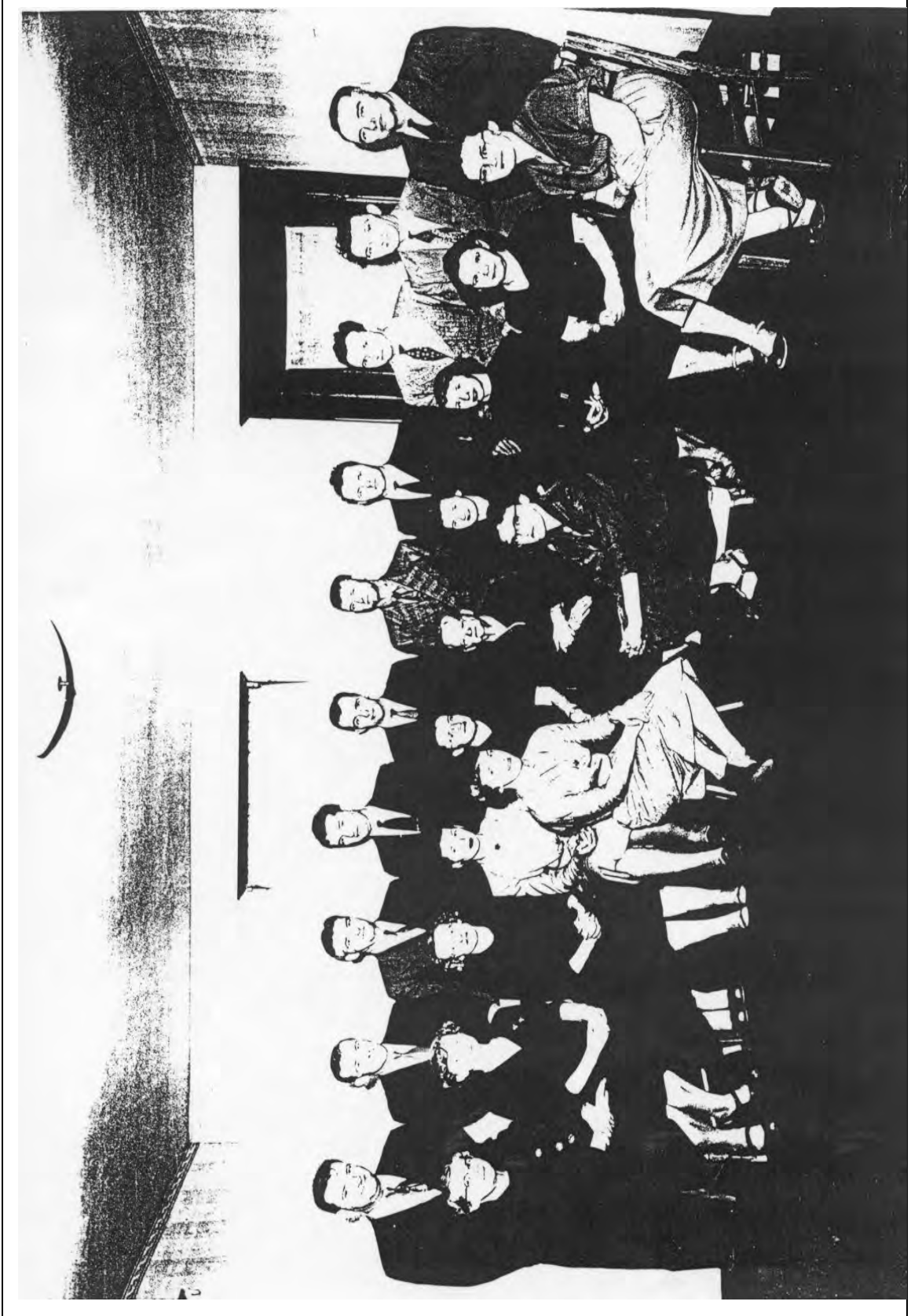
In accordance with the will of Jacob J. Dyck the Dyck farm was sold after Marie's death and the proceeds of that sale divided equally among the surviving children. The buyer of the farm, a descendant of Abraham Claassen, Olin Claassen, sold the Dyck house separate from the farm some years later. Only the house and garage remain standing at the time of this writing. The barn and other "out" buildings fell into disrepair and collapsed by 1999.

The stone house that Abraham Claassen had had built for his family by Andy Patterson in 1878 was also sold separately from the farmland and no longer remains in the family. This house has undergone extensive remodeling and none of the original barns remain.

The stone house that Jacob Harder built while he and his wife Anna lived in the log cabin still stands in nearly unaltered condition. A large addition was added to the north side of the house in the early 20th century and a smaller addition in 1951. Jacob and Anna Harder's daughter Emma lived in the house with her nephew Arthur and his wife Wanda Dyck until the early 1980s. Emma had inherited the house and farm upon the death of her mother Anna Harder in 1949. In 1959 Emma sold the farm and house to Arthur and Wanda with the stipulation that she be allowed to live there the rest of her life. Emma lived the last few years of her 99 years in a home for the aged in Newton, Kansas, in spite of her desire to die in the house where she was born in 1888. Arthur Paul Dyck died in 1991 and his wife Wanda became the sole owner of the house and 160 acre farm. In order to insure that this wonderful

piece of family history remained with the descendants of Jacob and Anna Harder, Wanda came to an agreement with her niece Christine Dyck Sehnert. This agreement gave possession of the house and 40 acres to Christine, a great-granddaughter of Jacob and Anna Harder and a great-great-granddaughter of Abraham and Anna Claassen who originally purchased this farm in 1876. The stone Harder house, built in 1882, is currently being renovated with care to preserve its original integrity.

Facing page: The children of Jacob J. Dyck with their spouses and mother gathered on the occasion of Jacob's funeral, December, 1954. Standing left to right, Robert Hans Dyck(1916-1966), Arthur Paul Dyck (1924-1991), Will Gustav Dyck (1914-1974), Herbert Cornelius Dyck (1927- ), Walter J. Schmidt (Esther's husband), Edward Jacob Dyck (1913-1960), Ernest G. Claassen (Irene's husband), Walter Dietrich Dyck (1922- ), Bruno George Dyck (1917-1984), Ernest H. Schmidt (Gertrude's husband). Seated left to right, Kaete Justine Dyck (1911-1987), Wanda J. Swarts Dyck (Arthur's wife), Muriel C. Binford Dyck (Will's wife), Alice N. Sitler Dyck (Herbert's wife), Esther Helena Dyck Schmidt (1923- ), Marie G. Harder Dyck (1884-1973), Irene Emma Dyck Claassen (1926- ), Barbara Kroll Dyck (Walter's wife), Pearl S. Curtis Dyck (Bruno's wife), Gertrude Marie Dyck Schmidt (1920- ). Seated in the foreground, left, Linda Sarah Dyck (1929- ), right, Louise Irene Dyck (1921- ). Photo: Authors' collection.







Above: The Jacob Harder home in 1998. The small addition on the northeast corner was added in 1951.

Below: The Jacob J. Dyck home in 1998. The large addition was added in 1927.

Photos: Courtesy of Arthur N. Claassen.







Above: The Jacob Harder home in 1998. The original front porch is missing and two dormers were added *circa* 1900. Below: The “red barn” on the Jacob Harder farm in 1998. It was in the top story of this barn that the wedding reception for Jacob and Marie Dyck was held on February 22, 1911. Photos: Courtesy of Arthur N. Claassen.



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# Sixty Years of Silence

## The Dyck Family in Soviet Russia

by  
Alice Sitler Dyck

### The Memoirs of Gustav Dyck

Translated by Herbert C. Dyck  
Edited by Alice Sitler Dyck



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

**For Brothers and Sons**

**Johannes “Krollyer” Dyck  
Jacob J. Dyck**

**Johannes “Hans” Dyck  
Gustav Dyck  
Herbert C. Dyck**

*So with love -  
Sighs from the deep sea of affection;  
Laughter from the colorful field of the spirit;  
Tears from the endless heaven of memories.*

*Kahlil Gibran*

## Foreword

We have “always” known there were Dyck relatives still in Russia. As the years went by the probability of their existence seemed less and less. Always intrigued by family history, I decided some effort should be made to find them. In 1990 I wrote to the Russian Embassy asking if there were any avenues open for finding these “lost” persons. They were not encouraging but did send two addresses, one being the Red Cross in Moscow. Months later, while still pondering this possibility, we received a letter from an Emilie Wall Pauls in Canada in which she enclosed an address (in Russian, i.e., Cyrillic alphabet) of a man who had given it to her before she left Russia to emigrate to Canada. He was a maternal cousin of Emilie. He was looking for relatives and hoped someone in Canada might know of his father's family. Years earlier I had corresponded with Helene Dyck Funk, a second cousin who lives in Laird, Saskatchewan. Emilie got our address from her and sent the slip of paper with the address. In the early 1960s our two oldest children, Frederick and Maria, were taking Russian in their grade school. A mini course of only a few weeks was offered to adults. I enrolled hoping it would help me help the children with their homework because of the Cyrillic alphabet. Actually, it was to be 30 years before the true benefit of this tiny course came to fruition: I could read the address and in Russian fashion at the bottom, the name of the sender, U. U. Duk which translates to J. J. Dyck. Our excitement knew no bounds! This was Johannes “Hans” Dyck, son of our father's brother, it just had to be! We had learned of Hans through my correspondence with Meta Esau Toews, also in the 1960s.

Immediately, I wrote a letter which Herbert, my husband, translated into German for me. We could only hope Hans could read German. I enclosed several photographs and carefully addressed the envelope in my best Russian handwriting. It was June



1990. Several weeks went by and we despaired that my writing was faulty and the letter never received or that Hans could not read German or, worst of all, that Hans was not our cousin. Finally, in August we received a reply, written on the 17th, the day our letter had been received (and coincidentally, the birthday of our father, Jacob J. Dyck). Hans wrote, "...I am so happy that I can't even write. I have thought of you my entire life. ...I want to excuse that I write so badly in German. I have not written German for 59 years. ...I am not going to call you "cousin," instead, I will write "brothers" and "sisters." That is for me, easier and closer to my heart. ...I was 12 years old when my father [Johannes "Krollyer"] died. That which he gave me had to suffice my entire life. I was and am very faithful to my father. That's why my entire life I wanted to hear something of my relatives."

Our correspondence continued until early in 1992 when Hans' letters ceased. In March, 1994, we received a letter from a Gustav Dyck in Germany, of whom we knew nothing. Gustav told us he was Hans' brother, that Hans had died of a heart attack on 6 April 1992 in Omsk. Gustav had found some of our letters to Hans and, so, wrote to us about his death. Strangely, Hans had never told us he had any siblings and because Meta Toews had only written to us about Hans, we erroneously assumed Hans to be the only living child of Onkel Johannes "Krollyer." We never received Gustav's first letter. Because Gustav did not receive an answer from us, he concluded (correctly) his first letter was lost saying "that happens in Russia often."

Gustav went on to explain that he and his wife had come to Germany 29 January 1994. Their eldest son, Edgardt and family and youngest daughter, Maria and family, had preceded them to Germany. Gustav's wife, Katharina, was suffering from heart disease. Her health was fragile at best. She had been terribly affected by the death of their daughter, Magda, her husband and two children in Kazakhstan in 1990 (car wreck). A daughter, Eugenie, who was not with them survived. On their arrival in Germany, they learned of the death of Edgardt which had occurred only days before. Katharina's heart could not withstand this terrible tragedy. Edgardt was the infant son who survived the long years of Gustav's absence with her. She died only 11 days after coming to Germany and is buried in the cemetery at Baidt next to Edgardt.

Hans had two children, Helene and Alexander, from his second marriage to a Russian woman whose given name was Anna (last name unknown). They never learned any German. After Hans' death Helene and Alexander chose to keep the photographs I had sent to Hans but gave Gustav our letters which were written in German. Gustav has told us he sometimes corresponds with Alexander but that Helene has not been heard from since her

father's funeral. She lived in Vladivostok and was married to a Russian Army officer.

The influx of ethnic Germans from Russia to Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall was almost overwhelming for both Germany and Russia. Germany offered temporary housing, medical care, living subsidies and pensions for retired persons. German Russians married to Russians could come with their spouses and families. Gustav's children are all married to Russians. For their part, Russia lost many of the industrious Germans who had migrated there from the 1790s until the mid-1800s and who had contributed so much to the economic development of the areas where they settled. After the German invasion of Russia in 1941, all remaining Volga Germans were "resettled" in Kazakhstan and other parts of Central Asia. Although having to live in harsh conditions, working in labor camps, forbidden to speak German and denied access to higher education, the restrictions were gradually lifted in later years. According to an article in the 3 April 1999 issue of *The Economist*, the numbers of Germans in Kazakhstan fell from almost a million in 1989 to about 220,000 presently and in Kirgizstan, from 100,000 to 13,000. The German consul in Kazakhstan expects a new census will show the actual number of Germans living there to be 400,000 because many Germans were reluctant to indicate their true nationality in the past. The Russians began to make overtures to those who remained in an effort to get them to stay with offers of a return to their former homesites, or economic aid and better homes. Kazakhstan offered "real money" to the parents of the first 2000 babies born there in 2000 - 100,000 tenge (\$1150), almost an annual average wage.

In January 2000, an offer was made by the governor of Saratov to families of German Russians, formerly of that area who had been arrested, to obtain any official records of those persons including KGB and GPU (local police authority). The offer was extended for only a very short time and was limited to inquiries on two persons. I furnished the required information on both Hans and Gustav; my inquiry was acknowledged, with the notation that information could be expected in two-three months. In addition, I learned of another offer of assistance from a committee in Russia who call themselves "Memorial." I also sent information on Hans and Gustav to them. They, too, confirmed my inquiry saying it would be several months before I could expect a reply. As of this writing, I have not received any information from either source.

Today, Gustav lives in the small town of Baidt, in southern Germany, with his youngest daughter, Maria, and her Russian husband, Alexander Schiroki. They have two daughters, Katya and Anna. Nearby lives his son, Rudi, and his wife, Vera, and their sons, Mark and Johannes and their families. Gustav's son, Johannes, and his wife remain in Kazakhstan. Johannes' son,

Maximilian, and his wife, Galina recently moved from Kazakhstan to Germany.

Alice Sitler Dyck  
Washington, Kansas  
February 2000

## Postscript

On 28 April 2000, I received information from the Memorial Committee in Russia concerning Hans and Gustav. I had applied for this information from the Saratov GB. They are the official records from the governor's office. A translation of these records is as follows:

Dyck, Ivan Ivanovich, b. 1909, Orloff, kanton Lysanderhoeh. Out of work. Lived in Engels, wife Yelena Korneevna, daughter Ella 11 months old.

Arrested 9 Oct 1935, sentenced 5 March 1936 for eight years. (Art. 58.10, 11) by Hauptgericht of ASSR [Autonomous Republic of Saratov] NP. In 1960 lived in the Transportny Twp. of Ten'kin Rayon [county], Magadan Oblast [province]. In exile until 1956. Rehabilitated [fully cleared of all charges] 5 Feb 1960 by Russian Federation Supreme Court. End.

Dyck, Gustav b. 6 Dec 1913 in Medemtal. Worked as a cashier at Lysanderhoeh Machine Tractor Station and lived in Lysanderhoeh. Wife Katharina, daughter of Julius, born 1915, daughter Eugenia b. 1936, son unnamed b. 1937.

Arrested 15 Dec 1937, sentenced 27 Dec 1937 by the troika [non judiciary body] for 10 years (Article 58.10 - anti-Soviet agitation). Served in the Unzhlag, Makariev Rayon, Kostroma Oblast. [Camp was named after river Unzha, left influx of the Volga.] Rehabilitated by Saratov Oblast Court 1962. In 1990 he lived in Novosibirsk Oblast, Tchany Twp. End.

I was advised that I might request certain other documents which are in the files. Only documents specifically requested are furnished. A request for the records of Hans' tenure in the gold mines at Kolyma, Magadan, was denied but I have been advised to make a second request adding additional information. I also hope to receive documents concerning the mobilization of Katharina and Helene in Siberia and Kirghiz after they were "dragged off" from Am Trakt in 1941 as well as the trade-union certificates of both Hans and Gustav. June 2000. ASD.



From *Sketch Book No. 2*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

# 1

## The Dyck Family in Soviet Russia

### Family Circumstances

[The spellings used here will be “Jakob” for Jakob Dyck (1832-1882), the father, and “Jacob” for Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954), the son and our father. ASD]

The silence of the years from 1930-1990 in the lives of some of the Jakob Dyck family in Russia is at once sad and understandable. That we have been able to discover what is now known about the lives of many of these relatives far surpasses what had been hoped for years ago. Even so, the failure to unearth so little information about Justine Wall Dyck Froese (Wall’s Tinchén), third wife of Jakob Dyck and our grandmother is deeply

disappointing. Following the departure of Jacob J. Dyck, back to Am Trakt from the homestead in Siberia in 1906 and thence to Kansas in early 1907, information about Justine all but ceased. No photograph of her seems to exist here in America or in Canada or in Europe. Perhaps none ever existed although most families seem to have managed to have photographs taken. Jacob J. Dyck brought photos of his father, brother and two of his three sisters with him in 1907 but none of his mother. The photograph of his father shows a mature man, hence the possibility it might have been taken about the time of his marriage to Justine Wall in 1873. Cousin Gustav Dyck provided several additional photos of his father, Johannes "Krollyer" (Curly). We may deduce that Jacob J. may have resembled his mother, Justine, because he does not resemble his father at all or his brother, Johannes, who shows some resemblance to their father, Jakob. The photographs of his sisters, Justine and Johanna, as young women are interesting in that they do not resemble each other. Justine has fine features and is unusually attractive for the times whereas Johanna has a more typical appearance with her severe hair and clothing. Johanna appears to have what we have always called "the Dyck chin" but, since neither Jakob, Johannes nor young Justine has this feature, it might more correctly be called "the Wall chin."

Johannes "Krollyer" Dyck (1878-1921) told his sons many stories about the family but neither Hans nor Gustav remembered hearing anything of their grandmother from him. Nor, Cousin Gustav recalls, were there ever any photographs of their grandmother in their home. This is surely true because his mother, Maria Wall Dyck (1886-1974), carefully kept the old family photographs through all the years of terror and privation. Gustav now has these photographs and through his generosity, many of them appear in this book.

Meta Esau Toews (1901-1995) married Aron Toews, a widower, who was the son of Catherine Penner Toews, daughter of Jakob Dyck's second wife, the widow Anna Penner (d. 1872) and her first husband, Peter Penner. Later Meta would be a cousin-in-law to some of Johannes' children. Meta never knew Justine Wall Dyck Froese because Justine and her second husband, Cornelius Froese, a widower, had gone to Siberia in 1904 with some of the children from their previous marriages. Meta knew those who remained, however, and knew other relatives and friends of the family. The general opinion of those who had known Justine was that she was a fine woman and very good-natured as were her Siebert half siblings and Johannes (Krollyer), Justine's son, as well as Krollyer's children. As a group they were "beloved people."

There are no kind words about Justine's second husband. He had five children, names and ages unknown, when he married Justine; Justine had five of her own. Justine's stepchildren,

Catherine and Peter Penner and Anna Dyck were taken by the Penner family some time after Jakob died, perhaps when she decided to marry Cornelius Froese who was deemed “unsuitable.” In fairness, though, it would have been difficult for Justine to provide life's necessities for so many children and the Penners were able to do this. In close communities, reputations, whether warranted or not, become known to everyone. Like “old wives’ tales” there is usually some truth there. It may be that Justine's gentle nature saw good where others found fault. Later, there is no doubt but that she knew of her new husband's shortcomings. By then, though, she really had no choice but to live with her situation. The Penners also took the “inheritance” of the Penner children and Anna Dyck (who was their half sister) which might have included the house in which Justine and the children lived. Anna and Peter Penner were in the process of building a new house when Peter died unexpectedly several months before young Peter was born. When Anna and Jakob were married, they had lived in this home. Cornelius Froese was a heavy drinker and time proved he also had a bad temper. Justine, however, managed to maintain her serenity and perseverance under these circumstances and would seem to have passed along these qualities to her children, including Wilhelm and Gustav Froese, the two sons born to Justine and Cornelius.

By the time Jacob went to America in 1907, his sister, Maria, had married the Rev. Heinrich Dyck (not a relative) on 18 October 1897. They were living near Tomsk in 1907. Heinrich may have been practicing his profession as pastor of a Mennonite Church there. Jacob's half-sister, Anna Dyck, had married Peter Tjahrt in December 1891. (Tjahrt is sometimes seen spelled as Tgahrt because there was no “j” in the Cyrillic alphabet.) Their only child, Bruno, was born in 1909. Johannes “Krollyer” had married Maria Wall 29 December 1904. Their first child, Maria “Mimi”, was born in November 1905. It seems likely that Jacob's sisters, Justine and Johanna, were still with their mother and stepfather in Siberia. Johanna, Jacob's twin, married Jakob Cornelius Froese 16 May 1907 (after Jacob had gone to America). They lived near Omsk. It is not known whether he was Johanna's stepbrother (his name suggests the possibility). Jakob and Johanna Dyck Froese had no children of their own but some time after their marriage they adopted a daughter, Anna, b. 1905 and later a son, Cornelius, b. 26 March 1918.

Much loved by Jacob J. Dyck and his siblings were their two half brothers, Gustav (b. 1888) and Wilhelm Froese (b. 1892), born to Justine and Cornelius Froese at Am Trakt. Both accompanied their parents to the Barnaul, Siberia, homestead in 1904. Wilhelm died at age 15, in 1907, when he was thrown from a horse onto icy ground. It is possible Jacob did not know of Wilhelm's death until after he reached Kansas in April 1907. The death date of the

stepfather, Cornelius Froese, is not known but it is generally accepted that Justine was a widow for a number of years.

In the early 1900s immigration from Russia to China began. Many German Russians went to the area of Harbin, Manchuria, where the German government had established a consulate to accommodate the many ethnic Germans there. The majority of these immigrants were Lutherans and Catholics but many Mennonites went there also. The famine in Siberia in the 1920s had caused some Mennonites to start a new settlement along the Amur River in the far eastern part of Siberia. When Stalin invoked the Five Year Plan (1928), these settlers crossed the river into Manchuria. It was the hope of all these people to go to Canada but Canada was not willing to take them all. The Chinese had tolerated the earlier influx of Germans but did not welcome these refugees. Through the efforts of the German and American consuls, the American Mennonites and the League of Nations, arrangements were made by 1932 to disperse these refugees to the United States, Paraguay, and Brazil. Oral family tradition says Justine Dyck Froese and her daughter, Justine, were living near the Chinese border with Gustav or to be near Gustav. Perhaps they were all living in a settlement on the Amur River when Gustav decided to go to Harbin. Why Gustav would have elected to stay in Manchuria when he could have gone to the United States where his half-brother Jacob now lived is puzzling, unless he was not a refugee and not eligible for assistance. He had married Margareta (last name unknown) about 1910, presumably at or near Barnaul. Their first child, Wilhelm, was born in 1911, followed by Justine in 1915 and Peter in 1919. It is not known whether there were other children.

For whatever reason, Gustav's mother and sister did not go with him to Manchuria. Young Justine had married a Penner whose given name is not known, neither is their marriage date recorded anywhere nor is there any oral tradition concerning him. That she was living with her mother indicates she may also have been a widow.

About 1920, Jacob's sister, Justine, wrote to her brother in Kansas asking that he send money for glasses for their mother. Gustav was not with them. Jacob sent the money for the glasses but no one remembers where it was sent.

During these years Johannes and Maria (Wall) Dyck were busy raising their family at Medemtal, Am Trakt. Maria "Mimi" (Jacob's precious niece), was born in November 1905; Johannes "Hans", the first son, was born in 1909, a second daughter, Anna, was born in 1911, followed by a second son, Gustav, born in 1913. A third daughter, Irma, was born in 1915, followed by Elsa who was born in 1918. Sadly, Elsa died in 1919.

Johannes was a farmer and supplemented his farming income by custom threshing. He owned several threshing machines

(as many as five) which he used for custom work across the Volga River near Engels, that is on the “meadow” (east) side where he was known as “Machine Dyck.” Custom threshing was a lucrative sideline. Am Trakt was prosperous due in no small part to the industriousness and ingenuity of these Mennonites whose ancestors from West Prussia had settled there in the 1850s. Everything was well cared for and Russians noted that German farms could be identified because of the trees they planted around their homesteads, especially acacias and elms. Many Mennonites took special pride in their fine horses, carriages and sleighs. Because of the large farm acreages and the various and many head of livestock and large flocks of chickens, ducks and geese, extra hands were necessary . At Am Trakt, there seems to have been a large number of Polish hired hands and shepherds rather than Russian. By 1913 motorcars were seen on the roads and farmers were experimenting with the use of motorized farm equipment.

Russia's entry into World War I in 1914 brought about drastic changes and life would never be the same for the vast majority of Russians, but most especially the German Russians. Although Mennonites were exempt from military conscription, they were required to go into alternative service. All men up to age 43 were required to go into service and in September 1914, more than sixty men left Am Trakt in one day for St. Petersburg (Petrograd). Many of them served on Russian troop trains arriving in Moscow transporting wounded to hospitals in various cities. Johannes “Krollyer” served with the Red Cross from 1914-1917. Most of these men were treated well, enjoyed good health and were allowed furloughs home on occasion. Small numbers of German Russians were allowed to serve in the People's Army. Some were arrested as enemies of the state while they were in service. This happened to other ethnic peoples as well in both World Wars. Soldiers taken as prisoners of war by Germany and subsequently released, returned to Russia only to be arrested as political enemies and sent to labor camps.

The Russian government also decreed that all young Germans who did not have Russian citizenship would be imprisoned. In August 1914 a number of such young men from Am Trakt were arrested and sent to Orenburg. By 1915 farming was becoming a very difficult operation. All the younger men were either in alternative service or had been arrested. It was expensive to run a farm with only hired help, if hired help could be found at all. Peter and Anna Dyck Tjahrt sold their farm in 1915 to another Mennonite. This was the farm they had bought soon after their marriage in 1891 from Cornelius Dyck who left Am Trakt and finally resettled in Woodland, Washington USA. Whether they bought another farm or rented another is not clear . They were still farming in 1917, however.



Cousin Gustav Dyck often “went over” to play with Bruno Tjahrt, Peter and Anna's only child. The Krollyer Dycks lived in Medental so it may be assumed the Tjahrts had relocated there. There were close ties with this family: Jacob had gone to live with Anna and Peter in the 1890s when his home situation with his stepfather became unbearable. Gustav's brother, Hans, also went to the Tjahrts; Bruno was the same age as Hans, both born in 1909. Gustav remembers many good times there and felt a very affectionate attachment to Bruno. Bruno was especially fond of the horses at the family farm, one of which was “his.” After the Russian Revolution, the Russians came to the Tjahrt farm (and all other farms) and either killed, took, or destroyed most of their livestock, equipment and whatever else they wanted. Bruno hated the Russians for their lawlessness and most especially, for the theft of his horse. In 1917 Bruno was only eight years old but he never forgot or forgave the Russians for what they did. This may have prompted the Tjahrts to leave Russia. A photograph showing Anna and Peter Tjahrt in front of a lovely stone house in Germany was sent to the J. J. Dycks in Kansas.

About 1920, the Tjahrts came to Kansas to visit the Jacob Dyck family. With them they brought the Seth Thomas clock which stood on a little corner shelf in the dining room of the Dyck home. Jacob faithfully wound it every Sunday morning. Eighty years later it continues to run, keeping good time.

The Tjahrts alternated their years-long sojourn between Kansas and Canada. An old snapshot shows Anna with her little nephews, Bruno Dyck (b. 1917) and Walter Dyck (b. 1922), at the Jacob Dyck home. Strangely, no one seems to have recorded the death of Peter Tjahrt but he died in Canada, perhaps about 1924. Anna and Bruno returned to Germany, alone. They probably lived in Errüngen, outside of Berlin. How they lived is unclear, perhaps they used the money from the sale of property in Russia. Bruno's dream had been to be a pilot and he joined the Germany military, date unclear, but probably between 1928-1930. In a letter to the J. J. Dycks dated March, 1935, from Errüngen, Anna says Bruno is in Berlin learning to do what he likes best (but she didn't say what that was - perhaps learning to be a pilot). Anna sent along a photograph of Bruno which shows him with two other men, seated on a lakeside deck. The photo is very unclear but Bruno is dressed in what appears to be a Luftwaffe uniform. Cousin Gustav had been under the impression that Bruno had died in the early 1930s in a plane crash but the 1935 letter disproves that. Some Dyck family members recall hearing that Bruno was brought to New York after WWII as a witness to testify in a court case. Efforts to trace Bruno's military career have so far proved unsuccessful. Anna Tjahrt died in 1945 during the last days of the war in a Berlin air raid.

Early in November 1921, in Am Trakt, Johannes “Krollyer” and Maria and their family welcomed the Franz Dycks to their home. They had traveled by train from West Prussia (probably Poppau or Hauskempe) to Engels where Johannes picked them up and took them to their home in Medemtal, a distance of more than 20 miles. The weather was wintry and very cold. The Franz Dycks were related to the Jakob Dyck family through the Jantzen family. That could have meant that a sister of one of Dietrich Dyck's first two wives, both named Agnete Jantzen, had married a Dyck and that Franz was a son and, therefore, a cousin of Johannes. The actual relationship is not recorded.

At the end of the visit, Johannes again took the guests to Engels to catch the train for their trip back to West Prussia. Not only was the weather snowy and cold, but it was also raining. Depending on the type of conveyance and horses, the 20-mile journey could have taken anywhere from five to eight hours. And then there was the five- to eight-hour return trip back to Medemtal. Johannes was soaked and shivering uncontrollably when he returned home. A cold and pneumonia ensued and he died either on 30 November or 1 December 1921. Maria “Mimi”, the eldest child, was 16 years old, Hans, 12, Anna, 10, Gustav almost 8, and Irma 4 1/2.

On his deathbed Johannes made his wife promise that she would see that Hans and Gustav received an education. Hans and Gustav had attended a Mennonite elementary school but did not complete it due to the changing times after the Revolution. Gustav, and perhaps Hans, too, attended two other schools for rather short times. While they may have completed only the equivalent of the 8th grade, their education had included vocational training in bookkeeping and accounting. This is really quite remarkable considering the terrible economic times in Russia. Many Russian farmers and peasants received no education at all. They were illiterate and completely ignorant of almost anything beyond their immediate surroundings. Without knowing it, Johannes saved the lives of his sons when he insisted they receive an education: it was their training and intelligence that were to benefit them so greatly in the coming years.

Jacob wrote very few letters to Russia, but he often received letters from his siblings. Many of the letters were “complaints” and pleas for help in their desperate situations. Jacob was very sympathetic and while he did have a farm, he also had many children and the family living came mostly from what the farm produced; there was very little hard cash. Often Jacob simply did not write back.

In 1969 Marie Dyck wrote:

...I have no old letters. I really didn't have room to store anything the first years and the kids got into some boxes and made a mess so I cleaned everything up. Dad [Jacob] didn't care to save them [letters], they wrote so much about hard times and we couldn't help much. We did send a big box of clothes to his brother's [Johannes'] family which got opened and some things taken but they did get the new corduroy suits for the boys [Hans and Gustav]. We were so glad of that. ...

More than 70 years later, in 1996, Gustav spoke of this gift and what a godsend it was. Afterwards he paused, remembering, then looked at us and smiled with sad eyes.

While no letters from Russia survive, a few letters that were written from West Prussia were kept by Emma Harder. Only those persons known to be related to the Claassens and Harders are identified here in order to give the reader a glimpse into the lives of those who had chosen to remain in West Prussia.

The following letter was written by Anna Claassen, fourth daughter of Abraham and Justine Harder Claassen, a sister of grandfather Jacob Harder. Justine was married in 1897 or early 1898, probably in Altendorf, West Prussia. Abraham and Justine's children (all girls) were:

Justine b. 28 December 1898

Grete b. 1900

Maria b. 1902

Anna b. 11 May 1903

Anna's portion of the letter was written to her cousin in Butler County, Kansas, Jacob Harder b. 17 Nov 1904, KS, only child of Justine's brother, Bernhard Harder and his wife, Marie Louise Berg Harder. Marie was a sister of John Berg who married Anna Harder, eldest daughter of Jacob and Anna Claassen Harder. Anna Claassen, the writer, is 10 years old.

8 June 1913

Dear Jacob,

Gustav married Helene Enss. We were at the wedding. Grete, Maria and I made a poem - Grete was a peasant girl and Maria a cloud and I the sun. Your cousin Anna

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

The children started this letter - so I'll continue: Brother Peter [Harder] was very sick during the spring. I went to visit him. They had a letter from sister and brother-in-law Abraham Dieck. We were informed of Uncle Wiens' death - he must have been very old.

At Gustav's wedding we met all the brothers and sisters. We haven't been in Schöneberg nor Münsterberg for a long, long time. We drove to Kahlberg with Friesens - that is a three hours drive by carriage. A brother of sister-in-law Jakob Claassen has an inn in Walldorf.

Brother Abraham and Helene of Schöneberg were here - they had a letter from brother Bernhard and little Jacob. (The wedding was of Gustav Harder and Helene Enss.)

(No signature but was written by Justine Harder Claassen)

Notes on the above letter: "Brother Peter" was Peter Harder, a brother of Jacob and Justine. Peter b. 24 August 1850, Neumünsterberg, West Prussia, d. 17 September 1928; m. Katrina Wiebe 28 Jan 1890. "Sister and brother-in-law Abraham Dieck" would be another sister of Jacob, Justine, Peter, Bernhard, John F. and Abraham: Catharine b. 13 September 1847, Neumünsterberg, d. 20 March 1925, Butler Co KS. She married Abraham Dieck 30 April 1883 in West Prussia. He was born 11 June 1844, West Prussia and died 3 August 1930, Butler Co KS.

December 1913

Dear Jakob

You probably received a lot from Santa Claus. Did you have a Christmas tree? We had one. I received a black apron, a jacket, a lead pencil, handkerchiefs and an eraser. I nearly forgot - I also received a plate of cookies. Please write again.

Your cousin Anna Claassen

17 December 1913

Dear Uncle, Aunt and Cousin Jacob!

We are all well - only grandmother is sick. We had a funeral today. At Trippner - old Mrs. Maage died. She was 99 years old. Father carried [pall bearer]. It is bad driving. It doesn't look like Christmas here. Yesterday it snowed - today it rains. No hopes for ice skating. Tuesday the 23rd mother and father drove to Marienburg for the Christmas tree. I received a pretty jacket, 3 handkerchiefs, a

lead pencil with eraser and a plate full [of cookies]. Tomorrow is Justine's birthday. Mother and father will go to Walldorf Sunday. Grandmother's birthday is January 1st.

Kindest regards,  
your niece Maria

The writer of the following letter was Justine Harder Claassen. It should be noted that a greeting to "Brothers and Sisters" was inclusive, not literal.

Altendorf, July 1, 1920

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

Dear Sister-in-law [Anna Claassen Harder], you asked a long time ago about your cousins addresses. David Regier still lives at the old place in Ladekop. Re address of Herr Reimer - I asked the brothers - but haven't heard. Frau Reimer is dead.

How is everyone? Brother Bernhard? [Justine's brother], Marie and Jacob? [Marie Harder Dyck, her niece, and Jacob J. Dyck] Where do Wienszen's children live and Enzens' children? [Uncertain as to the identity of these. Wienszen could be family of Minna Harder Wiens, daughter of Anna Claassen and Jacob Harder, Enzen could be Justine Harder Entz, sister of Anna Harder Claassen.]

Here it goes from bad to worse - robberies, murders - in the towns hunger - people too lazy to work and wanting everything for nothing - the prices rising - milk is 80 pfennigs, a pair of shoes 400 marks.

Sister Anna Friesen's eldest son was in France til autumn as a prisoner of war (English). As he couldn't get work here, he went to Vandsberg - now that is Polish - didn't hear a thing from him.

Justine Claassen Marienburg

October 29, 1923

Dear Cousins!

You'll be surprised at my quick answer - the reason - I exchanged your stamps, dear Anna, and received 60 million marks. I shall mail this letter right away, as after November 1st, postage will be raised again.

Your questions regarding your relatives will be answered by sister Helene. A sister of your husband married an Abraham Claassen, a paternal relative of ours, if I am not mistaken, and a brother-in-law of yours, Helene Peters, a stepdaughter of Marie Claassen formerly Nonnenhofer. [She refers to Justine Harder, sister of Jacob Harder, who married Abraham Claassen.]

In Freistadt (Danzig) they are figuring in dollars, that will probably start here also. We still have millions, or rather billions, the zeros increase more and more, soon we won't be able to write the figures.

This month I received five billion in wages - can't buy much for this. I used to save but it is useless now. Once I received 500 millions and all I could buy with it were five sheets of stationery and envelopes - small ones at that.

Are there still snakes and Indians?

Gas is also expensive - one cubic centimeter, three billion marks. A few months ago we used 46 cbcms.

Your cousin Marie and niece Elise

Marienburg, 30 October 1923

Dear Cousins Anna and Helene!

Things aren't well here - prices are rising to eternity. We figure now in billions not millions any more. It is so depressing. Everyone asks: how shall this end?? In the towns is unrest - you probably read about this in your papers. Last week we had a riot here - people stormed the grocery stores and other stores, the police had to intervene. There was one dead and a few wounded. Most of the rioters were women and teen-age boys. The men were at work - when they returned home all was quiet. We weren't in danger - the day before we sold out.

It is very exciting and sad. Now we are supposed to receive different money. In Freistadt (Danzig) they have new Geld money, but England vouched - with us it is different. We met friends who are quite satisfied with the new money - they felt they could breathe freer now. If only we could have that worry removed also - and live in healthier conditions. The dear Lord will know when it is time for us, in spite of all, we have so much to be thankful for .

Dear Anna, I remember Titchen Bergmann, also your sister-in-law - please remember me to them. I hardly ever see the Nonnenhofers, neither the Lichtenauers. They suffered much under these conditions. The estate which they rented belonged to the Kuhms Klassens, and as Kuhm is Polish they had to leave the farm. The barn he had built himself, he could tear that down. The youngest son took over the farm, he is married. The old ones lived in the sunroom. (The house is new) not as you used to know it. Now the old ones will move to a son in Klein-Lichtenau and their son Hans - I don't know what he will do. Perhaps move to his brother-in-law. You can't buy farms nor land. The Nonnenhofers lived well - it is hard to give up one's home when one is so old.

## Cousin Helene and your niece Elise

The years of famine in Russia began to claim lives on a large scale by 1920. Farmers and their families fared much better than people who lived in cities. Much farm equipment had been confiscated by the Russians with only the rudiments left. Incredibly, farmers were expected to produce as they had formerly. Farms were inspected to determine whether they had hidden grain or had an "excess". If this determination was made, the grain was taken away from the farmer but not always shipped to areas where it was needed. Instead, it might be piled somewhere outside a village and left there to rot. Inhabitants were not to touch it for any reason under threat of death.

After the death of their father in 1921, Gustav and Hans took their roles as family providers very seriously and set about to do whatever they had to do in order to make a living for the family. For example, they still had a plow but no horse, so Gustav and Hans took turns being the horse in order to plow a plot of ground for a vegetable garden or to plant a small wheat field. They were resourceful in many ways and when an offer was made to their mother to bring her family and come to Canada in the early 1920s, she declined saying they still had their farm and were not faring so badly. If, at times, Hans and Gustav engaged in questionable activities to make a little money or to get foodstuffs, they simply rationalized (rightly) that they were only taking back what had been taken from them.

When Hans and Gustav learned of Stalin's first Five Year Plan, they thought there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Under this plan most farmland would be controlled by independent farmers. They thought they would again be able to farm their land and would be provided with the necessary equipment to do so. Up to this time many Mennonites had successfully evaded collectivization. Instead, when the plan went into effect in 1928, it was decreed that the plan would be controlled by Russians and that all *kulaks* (well-to-do farmers) were to be expelled from their farms. The Mennonites were now forced into the new system. There were arrests, imprisonments, and exile to labor camps. Famine spread to even these distant rural regions. Religious liberty was curtailed and churches were destroyed including the lovely church at Orloff where Jakob and Justine Dyck had attended services and where their children had been baptized. Many farm homes, along with the outbuildings, were destroyed or turned over to others for occupation. Many people were hard pressed to find even a room to live in, having been forced out of their homes. Suddenly alone, many older women were especially desperate with no income and no way to make a living. They often were reduced to begging for

shelter. Everyone was constantly hungry, even in the communes where some lived as did Hans and Gustav's mother and sister, Irma.

In 1927 Jacob received word from his sister, Justine, that their mother had died. Where is a matter of conjecture. Semipalatinsk and Tashkent and "the Chinese border" have been suggested. Semipalatinsk is about 80-90 miles south of Barnaul in Siberia where Justine (mother) and her husband, Cornelius Froese, had homesteaded in 1904. "The Chinese border" could mean mother and daughter were there, perhaps in one of the Mennonite settlements on the Amur River with Gustav and his family if they had not yet gone to Manchuria. There were Mennonites in the city of Tashkent and, perhaps relatives, but none of the immediate family lived there. Justine's eldest daughter, Maria, was married to Heinrich Dyck, a Mennonite pastor, and lived in Omsk until 1926 when she and her family emigrated to Canada. Jacob's twin, Johanna, married to Jakob Cornelius Froese also lived in Omsk. The fate of Justine Dyck Penner is unknown - no one remembers hearing from her after 1927.

Johannes Dyck's Maria "Mimi" was married about 1924-1925. Her husband was Cornelius Engbrecht, a teacher. Also a Mennonite, he came from one of the villages of Am Trakt. Maria had grown into a beautiful, gentle young woman; Cornelius was blond and handsome. Their happiness continued with the birth of their daughter, Elvira, in 1926 but was to be short lived. Maria became ill with tuberculosis and died in 1927. Elvira was cared for by her grandmother, Maria Dyck, and young aunt Irma until Cornelius remarried. Today Elvira lives in northern Germany.

Thousands of Mennonites and other ethnic Germans fled to Moscow in the late 1920s in an attempt to obtain passports and leave the country to escape oppression and famine. For a time Russia granted passports to persons wishing to leave but soon after 1930 it was almost impossible to get out of the country. Jacob's oldest sister, Maria, her husband, Heinrich, and their children chose to emigrate to Canada in 1926 settling near Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. In 1930 Jacob's twin sister, Johanna, her husband and young adopted son, Cornelius, wanted to come to the United States. Their adopted daughter, Anna, had married and would remain in Russia. Nothing is known of Anna after Johanna and Jakob left Russia. They obtained their passports and went to Germany. Before they could leave Germany they had first to go to Hamburg where they remained for a time in a sort of temporary detention for all refugees. Only healthy persons were allowed to continue their journeys. Whether undetected by health officials in Hamburg or whether the problem came about after the ship had left port is unclear, but their ship was not allowed to dock in the United States because of "eye problems." Not wanting to return to Europe, the ship continued its way through the Caribbean Sea to South



America, finally docking at Sao Paulo, Brazil, where there were Mennonite settlements in the hinterland.

Hans Dyck married Helene Wiens in 1929 at Am Trakt. Anna Dyck married Albert Wiens about 1930. Gustav Dyck married Katharina Wiens in 1936. Helene and Albert were siblings and may have been somehow related to Katharina. Katharina's father, Julius, in addition to being a farmer, was also a doctor. It was at Ostfeld at a wedding at the Siebert farm many years earlier (probably 1906) that young Jacob Dyck got in a wrestling match with one of the Siebert sons. There were four sons: Julius, Cornelius, Peter and Johann but the anecdote doesn't name which son was in the wrestling match. Young Siebert had already won several other matches when Johannes Dyck told his brother, Jacob, he should take Siebert on, which Jacob did. Jacob was the surprise winner but he had broken two of Siebert's ribs. Dr. Wiens was present and was called on to tend the injured man. A little more than a quarter century later, Dr. Wiens was father-in-law to Johannes Dyck's as-yet unborn son, Gustav. Thirty-some years later Gustav Dyck was in the same labor camp with Hermann, son of Johann Siebert. Hermann died soon after arriving at the camp, however .

Meta Toews and her family left Am Trakt in 1932 for West Prussia. When they left, Hans and his wife, Helene, were in hiding in Engels. Helene's family had been designated as *kulaks* (wealthy farmers - German *kulaken*) and were, therefore, "criminals"; Hans was an enemy of the state because he had "kept a *kulak* daughter hidden", had been arrested but had escaped and fled to St. Petersburg with Helene and their infant son, Victor. While there, the baby died. Somehow they made their way back and were in hiding in Engels. Hans and Helene were the last persons to whom Meta said goodbye when she departed from Engels.

Meta's attachment to the Dycks had began when her Wiens cousins married the Dyck siblings, Hans and Anna. Cousin Gustav Dyck wrote that when he was a young child, about 1919-1920, his family had visited in the home of Gustav Toews, son of Catherine Penner Toews and her husband, Catherine being the step daughter of Jakob Dyck. At that time, cousin Gustav recalls, Tante Käte was a very large woman. Gustav Toews had three children: Gustav, Albert and Käti. After his wife died he had married Meta Esau. They had one son, Aron. It was after her husband died in 1932 that Meta relocated in West Prussia/Germany, taking Aron with her.

The Toews' went to the area of former West Prussia where family had also relocated from Russia including Meta's mother-in-law, Catherine Penner Toews. Anna Dyck Tjahrt visited her half-sister, Catherine, there in the 1930s. Anna was living outside of Berlin, Bruno was already in German military service. Meta and Aron remained until 1952 when they came to the United States and settled in Fresno, California, near Peter Penner. Peter Penner was

Catherine's brother who had aided Jacob in coming to Kansas where Peter was then living. He later moved to California and visited the Jacob Dycks in Kansas in the early 1950s. He died in 1957 in California as did Meta in 1995.

Albert and Anna Dyck Wiens (Albert, brother of Helene Wiens Dyck, Anna, sister of Gustav and Hans Dyck) had two children soon after their marriage: Melitta and Egon. Albert, a *kulak*, was arrested and “dragged off” in 1934. He had received a ten-year sentence and was sent to a slave labor camp. Anna died of tuberculosis in August 1934, soon after Albert left. She was only 23. Melitta and Egon went to live with their grandmother in Omsk, that is, Maria Dyck, who some years earlier had received little Elvira Engbrecht, “Mimi's” baby daughter. Albert survived twelve years in labor camps but was “banished” to Siberia where he was under village arrest for some years (often ten years). “Banished” meant that he could not return to his former home at Am Trakt. In fact, all ethnic Germans were forbidden to return to their original homes; therefore, after regaining their “freedom” most remained in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Albert reclaimed Egon after the twelve years but Melitta stayed on in Omsk with her grandmother, Maria Dyck, and eventually married. Maria remained with Melitta and died at her home in Omsk in 1974. Melitta died some years after. Egon married Emma Hoppe, had six children, and lives in Tadshikistan.

In the mid-1930s Irma Dyck (b. 1915 - Gustav's youngest sister) was engaged to a man named Gerhard Reimer. She became pregnant by him but they were not able to marry. One morning Gerhard simply did not appear at his work place. He had disappeared. Gerhard worked as a chauffeur for an official in the Lysanderhöh MTS who was the head of the police division as well as head of the GPU (state political authority, but the definition of “state” is not clear). The family was convinced Gerhard had either been arrested during the night or that the police division heads had given him orders to disappear. Later it became known that the latter was the case. Irma and Gerhard's daughter, Maria, was born 11 November 1935. Some time later, Irma received a package from him containing children's things but there was no return address on the parcel and she never heard from him again. In 1938 Irma married Alexander Heier and they subsequently had three children. Alexander served in the state political authority (GPU) but was taken into the work army in 1942 like all remaining Germans [Germans who had not been arrested]. His fate is unknown and he never returned.

At Am Trakt in the difficult times during the 1920s, people fortunate enough to have relatives in America often received food packages from them, which often were the difference between life and death. There was never enough nourishing food for the ill and

elderly and many died of malnutrition and starvation. Women left on their own went around begging for a room or even part of a room in which to live. They tried to make a living by sewing or knitting or caring for others, but in time, no one had any money and there was seldom enough food to share. Clothing was worn as long as at all possible, but in time, wore out with nothing to replace it. There were witnesses who reported seeing children without clothing in some Siberian Mennonite homes. Neither were there any blankets or even old coats under which they might have huddled. Instead, they lay on straw with more straw piled on top of them in an attempt to keep from freezing.

By the early 1930s it became too dangerous to receive parcels from America or anywhere outside Russia. For many families, this was the end of any contact with relatives outside of Russia and many were never heard of afterwards.

About 1935, Jacob Dyck received a letter from his half-brother, Gustav Froese, in Harbin, Manchuria, asking for seed corn. The cost of shipping sufficient corn was prohibitive so Jacob did not send the corn. He never heard from Gustav after that. In 1937 all foreigners were ordered out of Harbin. The German Russians had no choice but to return to Russia.

The Mennonites headed for the settlements along the Amur River, thinking they would perhaps find shelter and friendly faces. Instead, at the border they were met by armed Russian troops who shot all the men and many women and children. Gustav Froese may well have been one of these victims, perhaps his wife, children and their families as well. If Justine Dyck Penner had remained in a village on the Amur, she may have died there or been forced to flee elsewhere. These villages were all destroyed and there were no subsequent Mennonite settlements there. People who were not shot were dragged off and “resettled” in Siberia and Kazakhstan, usually into forced labor in camps and communes.

In the 1940s, due to a Russian decree that went out stating there were thousands and tens of thousands of diversionists and spies [ethnic Germans] who would carry out acts of sabotage and in order to prevent such incidents and bloodshed, it was necessary to resettle the entire population of the Volga (379,000 remaining). The people were rounded up with only the possessions they could carry, loaded into railroad cattle cars and shipped trainload after trainload to the areas of Novosibirsk and Omsk in Siberia and the Altai regions and Kazakhstan (“The Famine Steppe”) in Central Asia. In the preceding years, all the men had been “dragged off” to labor camps in the coldest and most forbidding areas of Siberia. Old men and women, boys and girls down to five years of age and mothers (unless they had a child less than eight months old) were put to work in camps and on farms. The children too young to be worked were separated from their mothers by barbed wire fences.

Seventy percent of the mothers died from hunger, freezing and terrible anxiety over their uncared-for children who ran around begging for food and clothing and who also died of hunger and cold. Orphaned children were placed in orphanages where some survived but where many died of neglect and starvation. There were bands of children all over Russia who lived by their wits, stealing and begging. Most were children whose fathers (and often, mothers), had been taken away during the night or while the children were away at school. Sometimes these bands or gangs, who came to be called "Wild Children", included children too small to care for themselves who were nurtured and provided for by the older children.

It is not clear how Irma and her children came to be in Kazakhstan. Likely they were among those who were "resettled" along with all Volga Germans when Germany invaded Russia in WWII. Irma could not provide for her children, there was no one to help and the three young children from her second husband died of starvation with only Maria, the daughter of Irma's fiancée, Gerhard Reimer, remaining to her mother. Irma never remarried after Alexander Heier disappeared and chose to remain in Kazakhstan to be near Maria and her family when Gustav and his family emigrated to Germany in 1994. She died there in July 1995.

Johanna Dyck Froese and her husband lived the rest of their lives in the Mennonite settlement near Curitiba, south of São Paulo, Brazil, where Jacob farmed. She was the last surviving child of Jakob and Justine Wall Dyck. Some years after their arrival there, Johanna became almost totally deaf as a result of an accident while knitting. She had paused to scratch her ear with her metal knitting needle when her husband accidentally bumped into her, driving the needle into her head. Both ears were affected and she lost most of her hearing. The date of Jacob's death is not known but he probably died in the mid-1950s. Even before her husband's death, Johanna had asked her brother, Jacob, about bringing them to Kansas. Economically, he could not consider it. Later, after her twin brother, Jacob, died in 1954, and after she was widowed, Johanna again suggested that she be brought to Kansas. In her infrequent letters to her nieces, Kaete and Louise Dyck, she wrote:

Curitiba, Dec. 1, 1957

...During the winter I knitted a lot for others but now during the summer I can't get work. ...Since one year I am living alone, pay for my own food. I have a small capital [pension] from the colony... We are living 15 kilometers from the town of Curitiba. In the evening when it is clear one can see the lights of the houses. Now in summer one can always get fruit - they ripen during Christmas - grapes, pears, oranges. Bananas one can have all the year round.

The airport is not far from here. ...Traveling missionaries arrive from Canada to visit us, also guests . ...Now I have a good home, three small rooms and a kitchen, live with good people.

Your loving aunt Johanna Froese

If the Lord wills it - to come to Kansas, perhaps Whitewater?

Nov. 3, 1958

...You are asking how my son is? He works in a factory . I have not seen him for one year, he is not very well, the town [Curitiba] is 15 km. from us. He has two children, the third one died. I live close to Peter Siemens in my own little house. I may live here 'til I die. ...Sometimes I feel deserted from people. ...Should you have pleasure from above, come to Brazil, then everything would be well.

Johanna's son, Cornelius, married a Portuguese woman who never learned any German. He and his family lived in Curitiba and visited Johanna only rarely. Cornelius was ill with tuberculosis and died probably in 1959 or 1960. After his death, Johanna never saw her daughter-in-law or grandsons again. Their given names were never mentioned. Johanna wrote her last letter to Kansas in 1967. By then, she was living in the Peter Siemens household. On learning of her plight and her loneliness, I wrote to her in early January 1970. Peter Siemens responded to the letter saying Johanna had died only a few days before my letter came. He said she had not heard from relatives for some years, and so, sent me her few papers and photographs.

Although both Hans and Gustav served their ten-year sentences (Hans an additional two years) and endured the subsequent ten years of village arrest (or "rehabilitation" as the Russian government called it), they were still suspect because of their German ethnicity. In 1958, at the end of these years, Hans and Gustav were reunited but it was not until 1960 that the Soviet government said, in effect, that the accusations made in 1941 (and earlier) against the German Russians were unfounded and blamed the tyrannies of Stalin. Later still, the government was to admit that anyone who had received a ten-year sentence was actually innocent of any and all charges which had been made against him (or her) and, almost parenthetically, it is added that the various authorities were aware of this. A pathetic, if not insulting, attempt was made to "reimburse" these persons. Gustav received a voucher for a certain amount of rubles. With it he purchased a leather jacket and bitterly laughs at what Russia paid him for those unspeakable years of slave labor.

## Johannes “Hans” Dyck

Although Cousin Johannes “Hans” Dyck died before we could ask him the many questions we would have liked, we do know something of his life. I first learned of him through Meta Toews but the bits of information she wrote were not very meaningful 35 years ago. Now, all these years later, I fully appreciate what she wrote. At the time, however, I assumed that Hans was not living. In fact, he was very much alive but no one knew that yet.

Cousin Johannes “Hans” Dyck was named for his father, Johannes, who was an older brother of our father, Jacob. Cousin Johannes was called Hans by his family, no doubt to differentiate him from his father. Cousin Gustav always refers to him as Hans. When Hans wrote to us, he signed himself as “John” although on his Russian address, I always wrote the Cyrillic Ivan which, of course, is Russian for John.

Hans was born 3 February 1909 at Medemtal, Am Trakt. He was the second child, first son, born to his parents, Johannes and Maria Wall Dyck. He was four years older than Gustav, the second son. So it was, when their father died in 1921, Hans was about 12 years old and Gustav not yet eight. Their oldest sister, Maria “Mimi” was 16 years old, Anna was 10 and Irma was six. The youngest sister, Elsa, born in 1918 had died in 1919. Both Hans and Gustav received their earliest education at Am Trakt in a Mennonite school and learned to read and write the old German script. German was spoken in the home and at worship services. Gustav attended the school four years so Hans would have attended probably three additional years, being that much older. Living where they did, they also spoke and read Russian; in fact, Gustav considers Russian to be his first language, so probably did Hans. Their additional schooling would have been in the Russian language. The early 1920s were years of famine in Russia so it is a tribute to their mother that she honored the deathbed wish of her husband and whenever possible saw to it that Hans and Gustav got schooling and training. Most Russian peasants received no education at all. When Hans first wrote to us in 1990, he said he had not written German for almost sixty years. At first there were obvious errors, but subsequent letters showed memory returning.

Hans and Gustav had an aptitude for working with figures. Gustav had several early jobs having to do with record keeping, accounting, and cashiering. Hans held legitimate jobs, when possible, but sometimes resorted to nefarious methods of making a living. For both, their training and ability to work with figures was to serve them well during their years of enslavement.

Hans and Helene Wiens (father: Cornelius Wiens) were married in 1929, the year Helene's family property was seized. Hans was 20 years old, Helene was 16. Helene's mother went into a commune but her parents were later condemned as *kulaken* (wealthy farmers) and her father was arrested. He died while under arrest. Likely he was shot soon after arrest but his fate is unknown. Helene, as a *kulak*, was a criminal, so Hans and Helene lived in hiding. Although German, Hans' family was not designated as *kulaken* and so, he was not then an "enemy of the state." But the system caught up with them and Hans was arrested the first time in 1930 because he "kept a *kulak* daughter hidden." He was arrested at noontime on a certain day and was brought before the village council; the next morning he was to be interrogated further. But, that didn't take place; during the night Hans jumped through the window, escaping from his guards and was gone.

Hans' and Helene's little son, Victor, born in 1931, died in Leningrad in 1932 while they were in hiding there. They returned to Am Trakt and were in hiding in Engels, across the Volga River from Am Trakt, in 1932. Meta Toews wrote that Hans and Helene were the last people to whom she said farewell when she embarked at Engels in 1932. She and her family had somehow gotten permission to go to West Prussia (Poland) where they stayed throughout WW II and beyond.

It is not clear how Hans escaped being tracked down and taken but he did. However, he was arrested a second time in 1933 for "speculation" and received a sentence of five years. Quoting from a letter from Gustav:

"What is speculation? I buy some food products in a village, bring them into a city and sell them at a higher price than I paid for them. Such a transaction was called speculation by the Communist government. It was forbidden by law... ...Now how Hans did business. He had connections with men who worked in the villages where staples were produced, such as cheese, butter, flour etc. He drove by night. The men helped him quickly to load the necessary items. He paid them for their help (for the products he didn't pay anything - they were taken at no cost). You would call it stealing. We, however, were retaking what was ours. Now it had to be brought without detection to the city. Hans would drive on various field paths [cow paths]. But in front of the city of Engels (formerly Pokrowsk) there was a large military camp through which the road led to the city. Hans knew a chief of police in Saratov. Now here's what happened. He came driving up with the wagon to which two horses were harnessed and on the wagon were 52 pud flour [that is, 52 bags weighing 36 pounds each]. The police chief with two policemen came to meet him and 'arrested' him. One policeman sat next to Hans on the wagon with his weapon pointed at Hans. The chief with the second policeman drove ahead and cleared the

way through the military camp and through the city up to the place where Hans sold the flour. Then the chief with his two policemen disappeared. After it was dark, the policemen came with their wives with huge suitcases and packed them full and at 12 o'clock they drove with the night ferry across the Volga [River] to Saratov.

“Another time Hans drove with one horse; he had loaded his wagon with butter and cheese. It was 60 km to the city; it was in the spring; the road was bad and he was late. It was already light when he drove through a village. [Hans conducted his business in the dark of night but, being late, dawn approached.] A party boss was looking out the window and noticed that the horse was pulling heavily. He sent someone to check out what the man had in such a load. They removed everything and locked it into a warehouse. They took Hans for interrogation. Hans related various fairy tales [to the interrogators] - that high party bosses had sent him to get supplies for children's orphanages, etc. The conclusion was that he was to be permitted to go but the supplies were to be retained until they could verify his story. Hans gave them his address where he could be located (a false address, of course). By the time this was all concluded, evening approached. He told the boss that he would sleep somewhere and not leave until morning. He explained that he didn't want to drive at night and also, his horse needed rest. He had unharnessed his horse in the yard which contained the warehouse with the supplies. The camp leader also lived there [military camp leader]. He asked Hans to come into the house to sleep. Hans, because of 'politeness', begged off, explaining that he would leave very early and did not wish to disturb the sleep of the wife and children: he would sleep in the wagon. After everyone in the village had gone to sleep, Hans picked the warehouse door lock with a nail, harnessed his horse, took his supplies and in addition, took a sack with approximately two pud [72 pounds] flour and a tin keg with 20 liters of sunflower oil, locked it [warehouse ] up again and drove off, never to see them again.”

Two months after his second arrest (for speculation), Hans escaped again. The location of the prison is unknown. In 1933 a daughter, Eleanora, was born to Hans and Helene. A second daughter, Ella, was born in November 1934.

Hans' third arrest occurred on 9 October 1935. During 1933-1935, refugees arrived from "the north" (per Gustav - no precise location stated). Among these were *kulaken* families without proper papers and/or passports. Hans was slightly acquainted with one of the authorities (Russian, one presumes). Somehow they formed a partnership and made considerable money forging papers for the refugees. A certain woman was caught and arrested. During her interrogation she was asked from whom she had gotten the forged pass. She named Hans. He was tried under Article 58.10 and Article 58.11 and received a sentence of eight years. Article



58.10 (anti-Soviet agitation) was almost always used. He took the entire blame himself and never mentioned his accomplice. He told the authorities the pass was legally received (by the woman) but that the papers were forged. Hans was imprisoned in a camp near Moscow. Hans' previous arrests seem not to have been a part of his record. His daughter, Eleanora, died not long before his arrest. Remaining to Helene and Hans was only Ella, 11 months old. Hans was 26 and Helene was 22 at this time.

While serving this eight-year sentence, Hans was arrested for the fourth time in 1937. He was charged with being an enemy of the Soviet Union and sentenced to be shot. He was taken from the work camp and placed in a death cell in Moscow. He was in this dungeon-like cell for over two months. There was no heat, clothing was taken away except for underwear; he was supposed to die of hunger, exposure and frostbite and thus save the state the trouble of shooting him. On an average, people lived no longer than one month in these cells. One day a supervisor was inspecting the prison. He noticed Hans and said, "What?! You've been here for over two months and you've not yet kicked the bucket?" Although charged with being an enemy of the state, he had not been formally sentenced because he was expected to die. After this encounter, instead of a death sentence, he was given an additional 10 years and was to be transported to the province of Magadan to Kolyma to work in the gold mines there.

One cannot imagine the horror of that death cell - no sanitary facilities of any kind, straw on the floor, the constant cold without clothing - nothing to provide warmth except the straw and always inadequate or no food. When Hans was taken from his cell he was terribly emaciated and suffered from constant diarrhea. Along with a trainload of other prisoners (most of them newly arrested), he traveled from Moscow to Vladivostok, a distance of 5000 miles.

Although provided with clothing now, his person and clothing became indescribably filthy and odiferous from the uncontrollable diarrhea. When they arrived in Vladivostok, the prisoners were marched in columns to the ship for the northward journey. Dogs (usually wolfhounds) accompanied the guards and were trained to attack anyone who collapsed. In his weakened condition, Hans collapsed. The dogs lunged toward him but stopped short even though sicked on by the guards. Hans said later that although commanded to attack, the dogs did not obey because of his ungodly odor. His comrades were then ordered to drag him along to the ship.

Hans said Kamchatka was on his right so they must have docked at the city of Magadan on the left. From there they went by truck to Kolyma in the province of Magadan where the gold mines were located. Later Hans was nicknamed "Kolymskoye" - old man

of Kolyma - because he was the oldest prisoner there. He was 28 years old when he arrived and was there 21 years.

The reader will note after consulting a map that these northern areas of Russia are not far from Alaska. I consulted an atlas to discover the temperatures of these very cold regions. I found figures for Yakutsk: in January the average high is -45 degrees F. and the average low is -53 degrees F. Constant cold, almost beyond human endurance. Spring comes in May when the high is in the 40s F. In July the temperature may reach 70 degrees F. for a high; the low temperature will be in the lower 50s. By September it is cold again and by November the high will only be -15 degrees F. with a low of -25 degrees F. In Magadan where Hans had been sent, it would be at least this cold, if not colder. Gustav said it was possible to work at a temperature of -40 degrees F. but below that it was simply too cold. The underground gold mines would have provided some protection from wind and perhaps were not as cold as open areas. Mining was also done, however, on the surface. Prisoners had to dig in the frozen boulders and through permafrost to pan for the gold. The northern regions of Magadan, near Alaska, are the coldest areas in the world inhabited by humans.

At Kolyma, Hans was in charge of a work brigade, that is, he was a brigadier. Apparently he had regained his health during the sea voyage as a doctor had told him he would. Because of their education, both Hans and Gustav were usually put in supervisory positions after a short time in a work brigade. Many of the prisoners were illiterate or had been charged with felonies of a physical nature. Hans' and Gustav's "crimes" were of a political nature; however, they were not considered counter-revolutionaries. In the hierarchy of prisoners in a camp, political prisoners were often at the bottom of the heap because they had no status - they were not "citizens", that is, Russians, whereas even Russian murderers and thieves were still "citizens."

Hans' basic good health, when added to the strength and stamina gained from his youthful years as a farmer, provided him with a physical endurance most political prisoners lacked. Many such men had grown up in cities and worked as professionals. In Kolyma many died within a few weeks and over one-third died within the first year. No one cared; there were thousands more to replace them. As a general rule, prisoners working in the mines, per se, did not survive. To survive, one had to be a brigadier or higher. Brigadiers received more food, more adequate clothing and had better barracks. After working for some time as a brigadier, Hans was made a record keeper/bookkeeper.

How long Hans actually worked in the mines is not known but it probably wasn't very long. In Kolyma, more than one-third of prisoners died within the first year. Quotas were set for the amount of gold to be produced each day. If an amount over the quota was

produced, the quota went up. Food rations were based on production, so producing the quota was necessary if one was to receive full rations. Hans learned to rebury/hide any extra gold so the quota didn't go up and when a quota was not reached, he could make it up with the stashed gold.

It has been estimated that a grand total of 3,500,000 prisoners were transported to Kolyma and that only 500,000 survived. There were over 100 camps in Kolyma, 80 of them being mining camps with an average population of 5,000 each. There were also fishing, agricultural and lumber camps containing 1,000 prisoners each. Keep in mind that the end of WWII did not mean an end of the enslavement of innocent people. In fact, it had nothing to do with Stalin's reign of terror. Arrests, transport to slave labor camps and murders were still being done after Josef Stalin's death in 1953, although 1953 is considered to be the end of the terror.

As with the Holocaust in Germany, the western world turned a blind eye to the even greater holocaust which took place in Russia between 1933-1953, despite the accounts of eye witnesses, some of whom recounted their experiences even before World War II. Some of these eyewitnesses had escaped the camps, including Kolyma. Others were Polish citizens who had been freed in 1941 under the Soviet-Polish Treaty. Kolyma was actually visited in the early 1940s by then Vice President Henry Wallace and Owen Lattimore, a professor and employee of the State Department. They saw only a cosmetically false Kolyma: no guard towers, no dogs, no starving prisoners, no signs of brutality. All visible prisoners were healthy and adequately clothed, including American made rubber boots for which Wallace and Lattimore credited the Lend Lease program. A note on the actual boots [*burks*]. After 1937, vindictive regulations practically forbade clothing adequate to the climate. Boots which had formerly been made of fur felt were replaced by sacking and canvas used for bagging salt with soles made from worn-out rubber tires which twisted and turned and were extremely heavy when wet and clogged with mud. Sometimes boots were made from canvas trousers with soles made of several thicknesses of the same material. Sometimes strips of flannel were provided which were used to wrap the feet. In later years, Owen Lattimore was accused by Senator Joseph McCarthy of being a leading Soviet spy. He was not a spy but he was always outwardly an apologist for the Soviet regime. Henry Wallace, however, did later speak of his deep regret at having misunderstood Stalin's system.

A further estimate is that, in the labor camps as a whole, 12 million died. Add to this the millions who starved to death, who died from illnesses, and who were killed in the ravages of the war and the estimates soar as high as 70 million.

At the gold mines, the production of gold became paramount to Russia's economy after World War II due to the end of the US Lend Lease program which had begun in 1941 because Great Britain could not finance her war effort. Although Great Britain received 60% of the \$50 billion in Lend Lease ships, armaments, planes and supplies, Russia received many billions also.

Meantime, in 1941, as was true of all Volga Germans who were "resettled" in Siberia and the far eastern regions of Russia, Helene was "dragged off" and was sent to Kirghiz to work. Whether she worked in a factory or on a farm is not known but she worked around machinery. She had been there several years when one day was caught in a piece of machinery and was crushed to death. She died 20 May 1945, only 32 years old. Ella had gone to Kirghiz with her mother. She was 10 years old when her mother died and was taken in by a family. Perhaps they thought she might be an extra workhand or maybe they were simply compassionate people. In any case, after a time, they could no longer keep Ella and she was placed in an orphanage. She may have been suffering from malnutrition (often called "weakness") for a long time because she was never put out to work.

In 1953 Gustav and Katharina somehow discovered where Ella was and convinced the authorities they could care for her. She was released to them in a most pitiable condition. She was incredibly thin and her legs so swollen she could hardly walk, a sign of severe, prolonged malnutrition. Ella told Gustav and Katharina her dearest wish was to have a pair of soft leather boots. Although living frugally themselves, they were able to procure the boots and a new dress as well. Ella was barely able to get the boots on because of her swollen legs and feet. Although in pain, she preened and strutted about in her new clothes, smiling and happy. She died the next day; she was only 17.

Hans was in Kolyma ten years and was "freed" but was not to leave Magadan for ten more years, living now in a kind of village arrest. He was hired as a cashier at the mines. Many local residents were employed at work camps as well as persons of Hans' status. He remarried, a Russian woman whose given name was Anna. (Hans told Gustav later there were no German women there). Two children were born to them: a daughter named Helene and a son, Alexander. Perhaps the Russian wife did not know Hans' first wife was named Helene or even that he had been married before.

Unbelievably, Hans was arrested a fifth time in 1955 or 1956! Along with the head bookkeeper, he was accused of embezzling a large sum of money from the *kasse* (treasury). For that, according to the law, he should have gotten 25 years. For some unknown reason, the original indictment was disqualified and redefined as "carelessness" rather than "thievery." For carelessness he got two years. This redefinition and lesser sentence, years

earlier, would have been leveled only at a Party Member. That a former criminal received such a light sentence shows the beginnings of a change in the system after Stalin's death. Gustav said Hans never told him whether he was guilty as charged or not.

In 1958 Hans was finally free to leave Kolyma and was reunited with Gustav who was now living in a village near Novosibirsk. They had not seen each other for 21 years. Hans went to live in Omsk with his wife. Hans "retired" at 50 and received a pension - time served in work camps qualified as employment. He was not "rehabilitated", that is, cleared of all charges, until February 1960. After retiring, he worked for 28 more years. His second family of children was very young. A number of these years Hans worked as a waiter in an elegant restaurant in Omsk. Everyone who came to the restaurant knew Hans by name, including local mafia figures. Hans' wife, Anna, died in 1972.

Hans' feet suffered frostbite either in the Moscow prison or later in Kolyma. Possibly both. Frostbite means tiny blood vessels, the main source of blood to living cells, freeze and are destroyed, leaving a foot (or toes or hands or fingers) with deficient circulation. In severe cases, amputation is necessary. These affected extremities are very sensitive to cold (even mild cold) and are painful; sometimes the hands or feet may swell causing even more discomfort. Although Hans never lost his toes to amputation, he suffered the rest of his life and often wore open shoes and heavy socks.

For posterity and the sheer incredulity of it, I must insert a relevant anecdote here. In the fall of 1991, Herb and I went to Topeka to attend the annual statewide meeting of the League of Municipalities. Herb was mayor of Washington at the time. On an elevator in our motel, Herb guessed the additional passengers to be Russian. He attempted to communicate with them but they were not very friendly. Finally, he showed them his Russian Army wristwatch and they immediately became interested in him. Their English was very broken and Herb knows no Russian at all. However, they invited us to come up to their rooms later that evening. They were members of the Russian Air Force and were in Topeka for an air show. They had a performance scheduled; we had a dinner to attend so the timing was perfect for a later meeting.

As soon as possible after our dinner, we went upstairs and after much gesturing and repeating of our new friend's name (Evgeny), we were directed to the right room. Evgeny and three comrades were partying. Evgeny was the only one who could communicate in English; another fellow spoke some German, having been stationed for a time in East Berlin; the other two spoke only Russian.

Our hosts served vodka in bathroom tumblers and I cut a huge block of cheese with a switchblade knife one of the men

produced. One fellow repeatedly toasted me with the words, "Luffiy Lady, Luffiy Lady." Somehow we managed to communicate and had a wonderful time. We exchanged impromptu gifts. They gave me pins from their uniforms and I gave them a couple of Kennedy half dollars and a key chain. We told them the story of Herb's cousin "Ivan" in Omsk; that he had foot problems as a result of his many years in Kolyma in the mines and the miracle of finding him after 70 years. They became very sober when they heard the story of Hans. From the recesses of my mind, I was able to write my name and Herb's and Hans' in Russian (Cyrillic alphabet) because they kept calling Herb "Ivan." They thought he had been named for his cousin. Their hilarity at Herb's name was catching - they had never heard such a name as Herbert! Alice is a name used and pronounced essentially the same in German, Russian, French and even Greek and was no problem for them.

Evgeny was a Russian Air Force officer, stationed in Moscow. When we told him of our dream of going to Russia to visit Ivan/Hans via the Trans-Siberian Railroad, he became very excited and said he would help us but that we should fly to St. Petersburg where he would meet us and show us the city, then take us to Moscow for a tour before making our way to Siberia. Our farewell to Evgeny was as though we had known him for a long time. He walked us to our car because we were returning home that night. When I said "goodbye" in Russian, he became very emotional.

Not long after, we received a letter from Hans. He said he had had a very strange visitor - a representative from the Russian Air Force who said he had been sent to inquire whether he, Hans, was receiving proper and adequate care of his feet. If not, he would take him to Moscow for medical treatment. Hans told the man he was being well taken care of. The representative then said he was instructed to ask Hans whether he wished to travel to Kansas in America to visit his cousins. The representative explained he had been sent by a certain Air Force colonel who would assist him in his travel plans if he wished to go to America; he would also provide any or all financial assistance. Hans was overwhelmed, thanked the man (and the colonel) saying that finding his American cousins was the answer to a lifelong dream but that, at his age (81), he did not care to make the long journey.

Upon reading this, we were as astounded as Hans must have been when he answered his door that day. From our one evening with Evgeny and his friends had come this incredible offer! I could hardly find enough words to thank Evgeny when I wrote to him.

Our correspondence with Hans continued, at a snail's pace because of the Russian postal system, for another year or so. We had not heard from him for some time when we received a letter from a Gustav Dyck, explaining he was Hans' younger brother. He was amazed to find our correspondence: Hans had never told

Gustav about us! And we did not know Gustav existed. Meta Toews had written only about Hans. Gustav further explained that Hans had died suddenly that spring (16 April 1992) while on a train returning to Omsk after visiting friends somewhere. He said Hans' children had kept all the photographs we had sent of our family, but they gave Gustav our letters because they knew no German. Hans' son, Alexander, lives with his wife and children in Omsk. Helene's home is in Vladivostok, 4300 miles from Omsk. She is married to a Russian Army Officer. Gustav told us that no one has heard from her since she left Omsk after her father's funeral to return to Vladivostok. Helene, too, has several children. Gustav does not seem to be very close to this nephew and niece although there is some correspondence with the nephew, Alexander.

The deep love and affection shared by Hans and Gustav was made greater by their incredible experiences and that they survived! Their relationship was not unlike that of a generation earlier shared by their father, Johannes, and his brother, Jacob. The gift of these men to our family is immeasurable and invaluable. I even go so far as to say the world owes such men and women a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid. ASD.



From *Sketch Book No. 4*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

## 2

# The Memoirs of Gustav Dyck

## Part I: My Life's Course, 1913 - 1947

### Gustav Dyck des Johannes

I appeared in this world on 16 December 1913. I was not yet a year old when World War I began. My father was immediately mobilized. [Gustav's father, Johannes, served with the Red Cross from 1914-1917.] He came back to us at the end of 1917. Slightly more than three years later (February 1921) he was dead of typhus. [Gustav is in error regarding the death date of his father which was 30 November 1921. Meta Toews said he died of pneumonia. I do not know which version is correct.] As long as he



lived, we endured no suffering from hunger. When he died I was seven years old. [Gustav would observe his eighth birthday on 16 December.]

Our father, already on his sickbed, left behind instructions to our mother that she should have us boys educated. “What they have in their heads cannot be taken from them,” he said. He had no idea that one could take the body with the head and what was therein. So it happened to us later and to many millions of people in the Soviet Union.

I began my education in 1923. Up until that time the schools were closed [because of the Russian Revolution]. There were no teachers really. The teachers who taught us up to that time were forbidden to teach religion and of those who were supposed to inoculate us with the Communist ideology, there were none. Not until 1923, at the request of the village inhabitants [ Am Trakt ] to teach the children reading, writing and arithmetic, did two teachers volunteer. A father with his son (Oskar Horn and Friedrich Horn) taught the first four grades; Oskar taught first and second grades and son Friedrich taught third and fourth grades. Oskar Horn also taught us how we had to conduct ourselves in our living. What did that consist of? If we did something during the day that was not allowed, woe to him who named the instigator; he was harshly punished by the teacher. But when we all had to suffer and the doer admitted blame, he received no punishment. He taught us that whoever pointed the finger at someone else was a traitor. If his cohorts had to suffer because of it, and he did not admit blame, he was a coward.

I would like to relate an incident. In our area it was difficult to get a fir tree for the New Year’s festival (the Christmas festival was forbidden in our school). In order to use the fir tree the next year, it was stuck in the snow in the winter and preserved in the summer in a basement. Thus it was also this certain year. One of our comrades dared to break off a small branch for himself. Afterwards one after the other did the same thing until only the trunk of the tree remained. I came too late for the plundering so only the trunk remained for me. I took it between my legs and rode back and forth in the school yard. The teacher saw this through the window. He came out, motioned to me to ride over to him. I did so. Then everyone who had a small branch in his hand had to come forward. He lined us all up in a row. He took the trunk from me.

“Who broke off the first branch?” he asked. No one owned up to it. Most of them knew it was Peter Sinner. Since we wouldn’t betray Peter (someone had told him he should not admit it), we were all punished. For one week during the noon recess which lasted two hours, we had to stand in a row in the classroom. That was, for us, the greatest punishment. In order to shorten the time, we played with straight pens. You snap with a pen on the end

of another, if it falls down it's mine, if not, I have to contribute one. In order not to get caught by the teacher, we posted a sentry . Our teacher always played with his students during the long recess in the school yard so one could observe him from the window. If he was not to be seen, the sentry was to warn us so we could get back in our row. On the second day [of the punishment] our teacher surprised us. He came from the garden side through the summer door and startled us literally in the full zeal of our game. He also noticed that we had posted a sentry. He turned to the sentry and asked, "Why didn't you stand your watch honorably and avoid allowing your comrades to be caught? For that you will now come to my house and stand in the corner during the noon recesses until the end of the week. The rest are free to go play."

This school ended for me in May 1927. In that same year a Farmer's Youth school was opened 25 km distant. I studied here for one year . Then the school was transferred to another village 60 km away. My mother would not let me go that far. There was already talk of collectivization. My mother was afraid that she would be dragged off and I would be left alone. After this "company" was at an end, thank God we were not dragged off.

I studied in the city of Saratov in 1930-31. After that I studied in the city of Engels [across the Volga River from Am Trakt] in 1931-32. My brother [Johannes] was living there at this time. I was promoted to the 8th grade, but there my education ended. My brother, Johannes, was arrested so no one could support me and, on top of that, these were the world-renowned hunger years, 1932-33.

I returned to the village where my mother was a member of Kollchoses [commune]. I got work in an accounting office as a bookkeeper. I was 19 years old. Now I could help my mother somewhat. But it didn't last long. I was transferred to the MTS to work; whether I wanted to or not, no one asked. It was 10 km distant. It was worse for my mother but I could help her more with money. I worked in this MTS until 16 December 1937.

During this time I had married Katharine Wiens. On 6 September 1936 our first daughter, Eugenie, was born. On 14 December 1937 a son, Edgardt was born. On 15 December I visited Katharina in the hospital which was 12 km from us. We were satisfied with our life - we had a daughter and a son. But already on the next day, the 16 December, I was arrested. My wife had a difficult time after my arrest [and then] our daughter Eugenie died 10 April 1938. On 14 July 1938 her mother died after an operation. Then 20 January 1939 her father died while under arrest and on 12 October 1940, her youngest sister, 11 years old, died. After surviving all this she was dragged off with our three-year old son [Edgardt] in September 1941 to Siberia. There we would meet again 4 December 1947.

## Arrest

On 16 December 1937 at 5:30 in the afternoon, the leader (chairman) of the village soviet telephoned us in the Kontor (counting house - archaic term) of the MTS [mechanized tractor station] where I was working at the time. He asked that I and the chief accountant, Julius Froese, should come to the village soviet for a moment after work.

I told Julius, "They are going to arrest us.

He didn't want to believe it. At 6 p.m. we went. As we neared, I saw in the yard an automobile and a hauling truck.

"You see, they are already waiting for us." And that's the way it was.

We entered the building and immediately the chief of the GPU, Novochilov, said, "You are under arrest." I was quiet.

Fröse asked, "What for?"

Novochilov answered, "You know that better than I."

Each of us received a chaperone. They led us to search/investigate our dwellings. My chaperone, Weiss, was an acquaintance of mine. We walked side by side. We had to walk 2 km (1 1/4 mi.). When we arrived I remembered that I had a knife in my belt (a *finka*). Such a knife was, at that time, very strongly forbidden to carry; it was illegal. I unbuckled it, unnoticed, and flung it over his head into the bushes in the garden.

He seized my arm - "What did you throw away!?"

"Go look," I said. He didn't dare. He held me fast and we entered my home.

My wife was not at home. As previously said, she was in the hospital. She had given birth to our son, Edgardt, on 14 December. During the house search he found bullets/cartridges and cartridge cases and laid them on the table. After that he opened my *feldtasche* (knapsack). In it there was a cardboard practice target on which there was the head of a fascist with five holes in his head, shot through by a small caliber gun. Near it there was a photo of Eschov, minister of the interior. Weiss held the photo and the target against the lamp; all five holes hit Eschov's head. He placed both items on the table, looked at me and said, "Did you see that?" I knew what that implied. For that I would get Article 58.8. It was called Terrorism. The highest measure of punishment - a firing squad. Then he asked me "Where is the gun?" I pointed with my hand to the ceiling. When he looked up and reached for the gun, I, at the same time, quickly reached for the target and the photo, tore both up into little pieces and threw them on the floor. He quickly turned around and asked, "What are you doing?" "What you see," I replied. I was convinced that he would say nothing about it. To

possess that kind of evidence and lose it, he would have received a great punishment. After that he stopped searching.

On the way back we did not speak a word to each other. Each had his own thoughts. During this time they had arrested 12 more men. Toward the next day it was close to 30 [men arrested]. Before it grew light, we left the village. No one was to see what had happened during the night. It was already becoming light when we arrived in the Rayonzenter Besynjannaja. We were searched by a militiaman, Lehmann. We were placed in a cell to temporarily conclude the day's activities.

## Interrogation

After three days someone came from the MTS wanting the key for the safety box (safe). Lehmann was again on duty. He looked in the drawer of the table where the prisoner's items were kept. The key was not there. He came to the cell [where I was].

“Dyck, where is the key to the safe?”

“In my pocket.”

“Give it to me quickly. An accounting house worker has come from the MTS looking for the key to the safe. If they learn you still have it, I will be punished. I searched you - it was my duty day.”

Lehmann was one who did a lot of things for us. Our group knew when his duty days were. What we wanted to send out, his wife took care of. She brought food three times a day and at the same time our deliveries (items someone had brought for a person). He also organized a meeting. In the yard was a toilet - it was the meeting place for us and outsiders and wives. There on 23 December 1937 I met my wife there and after 3633 days on 4 December 1947, again but, in Siberia, where she had been dragged.

Lehmann risked much. The first time someone led me to an interrogation on 26 December. In the room behind a table sat Interrogation Officer Kovolenko. My chaperone, Weiss, placed me near the stove. One calls that “standing by the GPU.” Kovolenko took a document cover (file) and paper out of the table drawer and laid a revolver beside the paper on the table top. Thus one could say he played on my nerves. He asked for my family name, etc. He wrote it on a record form, then he asked questions which I was required to answer.

The first question was, “Why did you leave the Kolchos [commune] and go over to the MTS to work?”

I replied that I was never a member [that is, not a member of the Communist Party]. I was transferred by the chief of the political division, Niknonov.

Kowolenko said, "I have other information. You didn't like the Kolchos system and often expressed yourself about it in the presence of Kolchos members."

"That's a lie," I replied. He asked me more questions with accusations which I invariably denied.

"Why do you deny all responsibility?"

"Because they are all concocted accusations." Three hours passed.

"Come here and sign."

"I'm not signing anything."

"Why?"

"Because everything is concocted."

"I wrote that you do not agree to the accusations."

"Now, write in addition that I have refused to sign."

"I can write that but it will be worse for you."

"It can be worse but I'm not signing anything."

My guard led me back. Why didn't I sign? I knew how they did things. They would take three sheets of paper, after the first sheet was a carbon and after the second also but reversed so that the middle sheet was printed on two sides. One was required to sign three times. The result: the third sheet remained clean with a signature, then one could write on it whatever one wanted.

On 29 December I was interrogated a second time. This time there were two sitting behind the table: Kowolenko and another man I did not know. Each one had his revolver laying in front of him on the table. Kowolenko stuck his gun in his holster and walked out. The second interrogator repeated the same questions that Kowolenko had asked me three days ago. Politely, in a calm voice, I gave the same answers as before.

Suddenly he raised his voice: "How long have you been a member of the German National Organization?"

"I'm hearing for the first time that such an organization exists."

"Very interesting. Johannes Dyck, is he known to you?"

"Yes, he's my brother."

"Albert Wiens?"

"My brother-in-law."

"Heinrich, Peter, Jakob Wiens?"

"Yes they are Albert's brothers."

"Do you also know Julius Wiens?"

"My father-in-law."

"And about the organization, you know nothing?"

"I can't know anything about it since it doesn't exist."

"Yes, it doesn't exist now because we terminated it in 1935. So you deny this also?"

"I can't deny because it never existed."

"But for what did you need the revolver?" I remained silent.

“Why won’t you answer?”

“For such a contrived question I have no answer.”

“There are people who indicate that. They ought to attest to it in my presence.”

“He who attests to that ought to have their homes searched.”

He [appeared to write] each of my answers in his folder. What he wrote, I do not know. He poured water in a glass and drank it empty. I stood at the stove sopping wet from sweat. He looked at me and asked, “You want a drink, too?”

“No, I’m not thirsty,” I said. I knew that he wouldn’t give me the glass in his hand. He would knock my teeth out with the glass. In this manner approximately four hours passed.

“It’s time we put an end to this,” my interrogator said. “One more question though: Who, in your opinion, is smarter, Stalin or Hitler?”

“I never met either one of them so I can’t answer the question.” Again he wrote something.

“One more question in addition to this: Whom do you favor, Stalin or Hitler?”

I replied, “This I can answer. Whomever you favor, I’m for the same one.”

He reached for his gun. “You...you...compare me to you?!”

At this moment I didn’t feel too well but I said, “Thirteen days ago I was a free man as you are today. What tomorrow will be neither of us know.”

He stuck the weapon back in his holster and rang a small bell. Kowolenko entered and my interrogator went out. Kowolenko sat down behind the table/desk, took papers out of the drawer and laid his revolver in front of him.

“With what did we end the other day?”

“I wouldn’t sign.”

“To those questions you have nothing to add?”

“What I said is the purest truth.”

He asked no more questions. He wrote as far as I could tell, in another folder. He wrote and wrote and I sweated at the stove. After awhile I noticed that his head was nodding. Was he asleep or was he drunk? Finally he let his head sink on his arm. Is he asleep or does he want to test me? I waited for a time and was about ready to go ask the guard to lead me back [to my cell]. But even leaving the room could result in them accusing me of flight. I called his name several times. I went to the table and poked him. He jumped up, grabbed for his gun and looked at me questioningly, to which I said, “Everything is in order. Nobody has seen that you slept and that I awakened you.” He called the sentry who led me away. This night I had stood for seven hours next to the blazing fire. Thus ended this interrogation.

On 31 December 1937 at noon we drove out of the Rayon Besymjannaja to our capital city of the German Republic - the city of Engels. There we were turned over to the central prison. That was my farewell to my homeland forever.

## Central Prison

The prison buildings were overfilled. We were driven to a smithy (blacksmith shop) where compact plank beds were already being prepared. It was cold. There was no stove. The walls were frozen through. We were the first in this place.

We requested the chief. He came in a short time. He asked, "What's the matter?"

"We're freezing."

"Have some patience - it will soon be warm."

In the course of two hours there were in the smithy close to 400 men. The chief was right - it wasn't only warm, it was hot. We were here for a week and then we were transferred to a so-called special bloc. I was put in Room 38. The room was 3 meters by 4 meters; one square meter was a stove so there remained yet 11 square meters. I was the 58th inmate. So we divided 11 square meters by 58 which was 5.3 men per square meter.

In the smithy was a situation I will never forget. For everyone we received [a total of] six buckets of boiling water twice a day. Among us there were six men out of one village. One of these came forward and grasped one bucket for himself. In the evening he did likewise. Someone said, "Men, let's put an end to this fun." The greedy one was a sailor still from the Czarist military. The family surname was "Boob." In their turn two inmates came for water and also, Boob came. They again took a bucket and also Boob reached for one. One of the inmates said to the other, "Here, take another bucket and pour it on the culprit's head." As the second inmate poured the water on Boob's head, he said, "Excuse me, that was an accident." The victim screamed with pain. The prison doctor came; they carried Boob away. After this discipline prevailed.

In the room I secured a place on a single bed. Five were already sitting on it; I was the sixth. Over our bed was a window so high that one could reach it only by the head of it. I asked my neighbor why they didn't knock the pane to pieces since it was impossible to breathe in this air. "For that they would put us in the lockup." We couldn't stand it. I climbed up on the bed gable, one pressed me against the wall so I couldn't fall down. I smashed the pane.

In the evening during *balande* distribution, the guard noticed the window glass was shattered. We had to appear before him. We said that somebody from the street had thrown a rock; then we asked him to replace the pane.

He replied, "Who among you is going to cut and fit in a pane of glass in that second floor window?"

We were successful in directing the suspicion away from ourselves. We now had fresh air but what were we to do with our second torture?

We were so full of lice we had no peace. It was determined each one of us had to deliver alive 50-100 lice daily. They were placed in a container; for their crimes, they were condemned to freeze to death - they were dumped through the window into the snow.

Every night people were led out of rooms with their things, also from our room. Where they ended up we learned later. They were taken to the Station Anisowka to a cliff and shot.

We only rarely got newcomers. On 21 January 1938 they brought a Red Army person out of the cellar of the GPU. He was accused of having served in the White Russian Army during the civil war with the rank of an officer. He admitted it, then they demanded of him who else had served with him. He indicated several others who were also his age. These were also arrested. It was a group that the Troika could not judge. The material pertinent to this group was given over to the State Authority and People's Court. After the State Authority was familiar with the material, he spit out a joke: a White Officer born in 1917? Such a mistake! He was brought for interrogation. The interrogator saw he was still a young man.

"When were you born?"

"1917."

"And you claim to be an officer? Why do you answer so stupidly?"

"To such a stupid accusation I gave a stupid answer."

"Your accusation was stupid but your joke, more stupid. The five men you turned in have also been arrested and will be given the same punishment as you."

So this *Rotarmist* [Red Army soldier] brought into our room a straight razor. He was a barber and also a *Fokusnig*, he worked quickly with his fingers. Otherwise he wouldn't have had the ability to do what he did. Already a couple of days before he had shaved a couple of people. The guard noticed it and they drove us all outdoors, searched us and also, our things. Two days later the situation repeated itself; again, they didn't find any knife. We said we had shaved ourselves with glass from the broken window. The beds were made of pipes. We had stuck the knife from underneath in the foot of the replugged pipe. On the 30 January most of us were called out with our things. The knife [razor] remained in the



room. They billeted us in a cellar. From here an *etapp* was assembled.

## *Etapp*

In this cellar we found ourselves for over 30 hours. During this time there was nothing to eat and also, no water. On the 31 January in the afternoon, the names of a list of 40 men were called out (40 men for one railroad car). My turn came with the third list [of 40]. In a big room behind tables sat GPU bosses. Everyone was lined up and had to go past the tables to answer their questions. According to this procedure the *Etapp* escorts took us over. The main boss commanded Makarow: "Take over."

My belongings were in a suitcase and a sack. He yelled [to me]: "Open up the suitcase!" He tore the iron handle from the suitcase and threw it in a sack. Quietly he said, "You will refasten it [when you get where you're going]."

That's what he did with everything. Out of the suitcase, into the sack and out of the sack into the suitcase. Then he motioned with his hand and said, "Over there on your knees and don't say a word."

Actually, he screamed and was louder and rougher than his colleagues. Later I learned why he acted that way: in order to throw suspicion away from himself. After all, 40 men had been searched and investigated. We had to wait until the documents had been prepared and turned over to Makarow. During this time he kept watch over us; he paced back and forth.

My neighbor who knelt closer to the edge, said to me, "He just said something to you."

Then Makarow screamed, "Stop talking!"

After he had taken over the documents, he shouted, "Whoever steps out of line I'll shoot without warning!"

We were driven like cattle to the place where the railroad cars stood. It was already dark. Somebody yelled, "Over here in the third car!"

Makarow answered, "This group goes in the fifth one."

As I was about to climb in, he held me back until I was the last one.

Makarow: "You don't know me?"

"Makarow."

"*Aloseha Saratow*, the school."

"That's you?"

"Yes, I'll accompany you to the place [where we're going]. I brought coals into this car; they will last until the destination [is reached]. If you fire it up you won't have to freeze."

Finally, the train departed. The first stop was Saratov. There we got food for the first time in 48 hours. Our route: Saratov - Pensa - Atkarsk - Gorki - Suchobeswodnaja. En route, Makarow brought us something to eat at every stop. He procured whatever was left over in the kitchen for us in the fifth car. We couldn't talk to him because there was always someone [other official] present.

## Camp #9

We arrived at Lagereskorte, 9th encampment, on 9 February 1938, at 4 p.m. The camp guard took us over. In the camp, late in the evening, Makarow came to the barracks and looked me up. He said simply, "Give me the address of your wife. I'll write her to tell her where you are. Other than that I can't do anything for you."

We took our leave of one another. He gave me his hand; tears stood in his eyes. He knew what I faced; I, of course, did not yet know. He kept his promise. On the 23 March I received a packet of produce from my wife. This packet of food saved me from death by starvation. I was able to share some of the food with Makarow for there was not enough food for such as him either. [Years later Gustav retold this story saying the packet of food had saved both of them from starving to death.]

Early on the 10 February they drove us [like cattle] into the baths. The temperature in the bathhouse was under freezing. On the walls thick layers of ice were frozen. The water was only lukewarm. We were shorn.

After the bath they drove us to the *Urtsche* and made our sentences official. My sentence: For agitation against the Collectivization Article 58, ten years and isolation ten years; permitted to write two letters per year. The official indicated where I was to sign. I did not acknowledge the judgment and refused to sign. And to the end of my internment, I [had] signed no document of any kind.

After this they drove us to our medical examinations. I was put in the first group, that is to say, I could be utilized for heavy work. With 25 men a brigade of tree fellers was established. The brigadier was Michel. I and a man named Klein both had to fell trees with the first group. Felling trees is the heaviest work in logging. With such a work method they wanted to educate us into the Communist ideology!

In such a manner we earned for ourselves the first kettle. That is to say, twice daily a dipper of *balande*, two spoons of oatmeal and 500 grams of bread per day. Already in the course of

one week we were so weak that we could fulfill only 20-25% of our daily norm. When, after work, we returned to the gate, we were not allowed into the camp. After a short while the boss came. He asked Michel who it was who had not fulfilled his norm. Michel mentioned my name and was about to name others.

The boss interrupted him: "Dyck into isolation; the others into camp." With that he intended to drive the brigade into fear.

Why Michel named me first, I do not know. We always had felled trees in reserve, that is, ahead of schedule. I was led into isolation. In the room were two men. They were eating their supper. One of them asked me for what I was being punished. I explained.

One said, "Your brigadier is a stupid pig." The one who spoke to me was the boss of those in isolation. He pointed to a chair behind the table, gave me a spoon and said, "Eat, we've already eaten."

I had on new diagonal trousers.

The boss asked, "With these pants you go to work?" I answered that I had no others.

Then he said, "I'll give you new warm quilted pants for your pants. And, in addition to that, when you return from work, come to us. You can always eat your fill."

He didn't put me in isolation; he gave me a place to sleep in his small room. In the morning he woke me and said, "Eat with us and go with your brigade." This boss was the leader of the production granary. I went to eat with them three more times; for me it was shameful.

After a week the boss again met me. He asked me "Why don't you come any more?"

I replied, "I am ashamed of myself."

To which the boss replied, "Here there is no shame, shaming you can leave for when you are free." I went with him to the isolation building to eat supper.

In the middle of March, Schewjew, a representative of the chief of *Produktion Erzeugung* came from headquarters. He held a conference with our brigade. He wanted to know why this method of tree cutting had resulted in such low production. Michel explained how the work was divided among the members of the brigade.

Schewjew asked, "Who is felling the trees?"

Michel mentioned our names.

Schewjew turned to me with a question: "Dyck, what is your opinion about such a work method?"

I replied, "Such a manner of work cannot bring good results. To stand bent over at one's work the entire day is impossible and

one cannot become accustomed to it. It is much easier to fulfill various tasks during the course of the day.”

At the end of the conference all were dismissed except for me.

“Dyck, you stay.” Schewjew pointed to a chair. I sat down. “Dyck, do you have a brother serving in the army?”

“No, but relatives. We are so scattered that I do not know anything about many of them.”

He related that he had served with a Dyck in the army; they had been good friends. “Dyck, a very difficult time is coming for you, make yourself stronger than you are. You have to survive. From tomorrow, each one of you can work for himself. I’ll give the order.”

He gave me his hand and said goodbye. I could not understand his behavior toward me. A week passed. Michel was transferred to another camp. We got a brigadier named Ihl. He could only sign his name. In the evening he asked me to write his report for him. It was difficult to work the entire day in the forest and then, to sit at night until midnight or longer in the office.

The third evening the head controller asked why Ihl didn’t write his own reports. I said, “He can’t write, he can only sign his name.”

Controller Kalashnikov: “Does Ihl give you anything for this work?”

“No.”

Kalashnikov: “Give me the report.” He wrote next to my name, 110%. On the receipt for the report he wrote: 3M<sub>3</sub>. He wrote this for me every day. Now I received a third kettle and 950 grams of bread daily.

Ihl could not write but for other things his intelligence sufficed.

Ihl: “Kalashnikov adds for you, you get credit for 3. Why can’t we do that ourselves? But the receipt? The teamsters take lumber from us during the day. The controller Smirnov asks every evening how much the teamsters have received from us in the course of each day. Whatever I tell him, he believes.”

We sawed 20-25 M<sub>3</sub> daily. In the record a greater amount was given. In this manner we attained first place in the competition. For first place the brigade received a red *tasche* (bag) with two loaves of bread and four packages of tobacco for each worker. Smirnov, for that which he credited to Ihl, gave him a 1/2 loaf of bread and a package of tobacco.

Our production reached a height of 90M<sub>3</sub>.

I told Ihl, “That’s enough - we can’t go any higher.” He didn’t agree so we attained the high point of 104M<sub>3</sub>.

One day what I was afraid of happened. Someone started an argument with Ihl. “Why does Smirnov get more [production]

than everyone else?” Men from another brigade heard the quarrel and spread the information to reach the ears of authority. The next day we were forbidden to transport any wood. The result was that instead of 104M<sub>3</sub> like yesterday, it was 27M<sub>3</sub>. They put Ihl in isolation.

The next brigadier was Kusmenko. He could write only he was lazy so I wrote his reports for him also. In the evening we delivered our saws and axes to be sharpened at the tool shop. Ihl called to us: “Men, over here! I’m going to work here now.” So, for a *tufta* (padded record) of over 1000M, Ihl had to spend only one night in isolation.

I parted company with tree felling in order to transport trees. In our camp there was a brigade which took lumber out of the forest to the *sklad* with hand carts on wooden tracks. The transporters always received merit food. The brigadier was Svanski. *Urka* (thugs) and the members of this brigade were criminals: murderers, thieves etc.

I said to Svanski: “I would like very much to transfer to this brigade.”

Svanski asked, “Can you steal?”

“Haven’t learned how yet.”

“Keep silent?”

“Yes.”

“Good, fetch your things.”

“I’m going to but first, let me sign over [register].”

“That’s not your job, I’ll do that.”

After one day I was already getting merit food. How did we work? Svanski had a bower [clearing in the woods]. In it he played cards with his comrades. We worked three or four hours and then we placed some of the carts on the tracks loaded. Some of the carts were empty. One of us stood guard in case the camp authorities appeared. Our man gave a signal. We jumped up and everyone would grab a cart and as one would say, the work fairly boiled. As soon as the authorities were gone, we went back to peace. The main job was to receive (get) a receipt from the lumber receivers for the necessary volume. We had to do that in order, one after the other. For some days I observed how they did it. On the gable of the *stabels* [stacks of wood] on a piece of wood I wrote the date and volume. This board we would pullout and stick it someplace several *stabels* back. If it wasn’t sufficient, we would do it with a threat.

On the day when I had to get the receipt, I had stuck the board two *stabels* back. At the end of the work period, Svanski said, “Dyck, go after the receipt for 95M<sub>3</sub>.”

I took an axe and held it with one hand behind my back and as I came up to the man, he was already holding the receipt toward me, for 68M<sub>3</sub>. I gave it back to him and I said, “95M<sub>3</sub>.” He

hesitated, I showed the axe: "Faster, I don't have any time." What could he do? He wrote another for 95M<sub>3</sub>. I thanked him.

Such a life was not for me! At the end of May I transferred [by request] to a horse brigade. Svanski let me go. He asked, "Haven't you forgotten something?"

"No," I replied and covered my mouth with my hand.

The brigadier of the horse brigade was Krutogolov, a Jew. In this brigade I worked until 15 June 1939. It was necessary that there be a master who assumed the responsibility for the quality of the production. Kalashnikov recommended me. I worked in this place until the 1st of September 1939.

An order was received to send someone to a course (for 20 days) on safety techniques. They sent me. I worked in this place until April 1940 and then as chief forester until October 1941. Why I was employed as chief forester was for me, a riddle. Later someone told me: It was a command from the forestry authority, ordered 1 October 1940. All chief foresters were subordinate only to the forestry authority. The boss of the encampment did not have the right to engage us in other work. Later, I also learned that the command to employ me as a chief had been signed by Schewjew. In August 1940 the forest in the vicinity of this camp had been completely felled. They moved us 7 km further into the forest from Camp #9 in order to build a new camp (#24) and at the same time fulfill the quota of logs.

## Camp #24

The place where Camp #24 was to be built was a rise without tree growth. Construction brigades were formed. Simultaneously the quota had to be fulfilled. Construction followed this pattern: (1) the towers for the guards, (2) isolation units, (3) wire fences, (4) housing for guards, (5) office, (6) kitchen, (7) warehouse and (8) barracks for us.

Our interim housing was a *Karkasse*. The walls were surrounded with fir tree bark, likewise the roof, all without heat. It was already late autumn and going toward winter. [It might be well to know about temperatures in this area of Russia. In November, for example, the high for the day would probably be about -15 degrees F. and the low -25 degrees F. By January the high might be -45 degrees F. and the low -53 degrees F. The reader might remember that Centigrade and Fahrenheit coincide at -40 degrees. I have converted temperatures above that into Fahrenheit. With temperatures this low, even the authorities agreed it was too cold to work, but not much above that temperature people could survive if they were active and properly fed and dressed. It was a rare thing

for a person to experience all three and many died in a short time. ASD]

In order to keep from freezing to death we had a fire burning in the middle of the night. In the morning we were as black as Africans from the smoke. Water for washing was non-existent. Under such conditions we endured the winter. Until the end of the construction, the authorities and the office workers and head of production stayed at Camp #9. The communication between #9 and #24 was very bad. The road between the camps led through a bog and after a rain it was impossible to distribute bread and other supplies on time. Thus it happened that we were at times without bread. The man who delivered the supplies told me one day "A package has arrived for you." It had arrived a month earlier but was only now getting to me.

The area of the logging site was called *Suchobeswodnoe* - dry water proceeds. Although to be sure, it was a swampy area, wells were not dug: the water lay too deep. So, water was hauled out of the river Unscha. We were often without water: the river was 3 km from us.

In life there are also coincidences. I received an order to prepare tree trunks for bridge construction. I went searching on a hill where spruce grew. I noticed on one of the spruces a cover over the branches and a ladder up to it. I pondered the situation. Here, I decided, an old orthodox believer had lived a long time ago; he couldn't have lived without water! I investigated the surrounding area. I found a hole 60 - 70 centimeters deep [less than two yards]. There was water in it! I fetched a spade and dug another hole that same depth and continued on my way looking for spruce trees. After two hours I returned to my well and found water had collected in it - five or six liters. The taste was good. I told my workers about it and had them dig more holes. Thus we were supplied with water until winter. It was, of course, no spring or fountain but neither was it swamp water. Rather it was surface water on a rise which filtered through the earth after a rain.

The forest plain/plateau which was kept under guard was 400 hectares. This plain was divided: in one part of 200 hectares [about 500 acres], I was master; in the other the master was also a German named Schneider. There weren't enough workers to fulfill the quotas (*etapp*). The boss was waiting for an *etapp* - he didn't have to wait long when there came more workers than we needed. And, in addition to that, still some others. They didn't go to work. They said, "We haven't come to work but to fulfill our sentence."

After a week Naratschik said, "Dyck, I have enrolled the Urki [criminals] into your division."

I responded: "What am I supposed to do with them; they won't go to work."

But what could I do? The boss has ordered it - what could I do? I thought, Tomorrow the boss will demand fulfillment of the quota from them. I decided to go see them that evening. That was risky - they could undress me, beat me up and throw me out of the barracks. They had done this several times to others during this week. I knocked and entered. I had some padding on my head. They searched my pockets.

Then I said, "I am Master Dyck and want to talk with Alexandrow."

I heard his voice saying, "Let him go."

They pulled the pad from my head and I said, "You are impertinent fellows but you are making mistakes."

I went to Alexandrow, greeted him and said, "From tomorrow on you are to be in my work force and will have to go to work."

He wanted to interrupt me but I said, "I haven't finished talking. I have been thinking - I need four or five men who can produce 110-120% every day. The others under our influence have to work so" [to fulfill the quota].

He asked what kind of work.

I said, "Transport lumber out of the forest with horses."

He considered for a moment. He said, "Six persons, no, five more I can't promise and can't fulfill but to something like this I can't go along [with the kind of loss you are enduring]."

I gave him my hand, he clapped it: agreed. "Tomorrow you have to be the first ones in front of the gate - the horse brigades are the first ones led out. I'll go with you and show you our horses. A bargain?"

"Yes, and good night."

I wasn't at all certain he would keep his word. In the morning, though, there they stood as agreed, in front of the gate. There weren't enough horses for all of them! To the remaining ones I gave work rolling logs onto a platform to be bundled. I was convinced that these Urki could not or would not fulfill their quota without my assistance. Something had to be figured out. I went to Alexandrow. They were sitting in the forest playing cards. I took the cards out of his hand, laid them on the ground and said, "Come, we have to talk about something."

Alexandrow followed me. I told him the boss of the camp was a Jew, family name was Kukus. I told Alexandrow, "We're dependent on him. We have to arrange it so that he is dependent on us. Today we will both go to him after the receipt [of the lumber tally]. I will ask that he add the difference [that is, what is lacking of the quota]. You support me. We'll say that the drovers are working their first day, tomorrow it will go better." He agreed to this idea.

The second day I sent Alexandrow a note to ask him once again to talk. What I had in mind I didn't tell him. I had three men



who were also working on horses without being watched. Their work was that after the division had transferred to a new place, they had to roll out the leftover wood. To one of them, family name Lapin, I gave a special assignment: "Tomorrow you tie your horse up out in the forest, go to the village of Kukus and bring out a live hen. Whether you buy or steal it makes no difference to me. I must have the hen before the day's work is done."

I said to Alexandrow that today we were both going for the third time to Kukus.

Alexandrow: "He won't go along with the idea that the drovers will do better anymore."

I replied, I think differently."

I took Alexandrow to a thicket where Lapin had hidden the hen. I gave her to Alexandrow; he tucked her under his jacket. We went to Kukus and thanked him for the assistance he had given us up to now and asked him to accept a present from us.

Alexandrow handed him the hen.

"Oh," Kukus exclaimed, "a little chicken."

He took it and said he hadn't eaten any poultry for a long time. We asked him once again to add the missing quota amount to the receipt. He wrote what we told him, we thanked him and left. When we were far enough away that he couldn't hear, we laughed aloud. That was a stroke of luck - now we had the Jew in our hands. After this success I made so bold as to ask him for what he had been arrested. The answer was short: "For robbery and murder."

After a short time I said, "A politician and a robber can also work well together if they have one and the same goal."

He laid his hand on my shoulder and said, "I was no murderer and you, no politician. For what happened, we can thank the revolution." We promised one another that from today on only he would take the receipt [for the lumber quota].

The Jew could report us to the boss but Alexandrow wasn't afraid of him.

I said, "Now you have your cards in your hand again that I took away from you three days ago."

Alexandrow said that on the fourth day when he handed over the receipt he greeted Kukus and said, "From today on you write what I tell you."

Kukus asked "Why?" and Alexandrow had asked, "You still ask why? Three days ago you wrote "tufta" and you ate the chicken. If you don't write what I say or go complaining [turn in a complaint], I'll strike you dead. I'm being held for murder. *Auf wiedersehen*. I also told him that you [Gustav] know nothing of this and bear none of the responsibility." Thus we worked until the end of October 1941.

One more incident in this camp. Our controllers and also Master Schneider lived in a special room. One day when they were

returning from work, they found they had been robbed. They came to me about the problem. "Were any of your Urki released by the doctor today?" I was asked.

"Yes, three men," I replied.

One of them said, "They robbed us."

I answered, "How can I help that? At work they are subordinate to me and they didn't ask permission to steal. Go to the overseer."

When they were gone, I did, however, go to my Urkin and told them, "Today the controllers were robbed. On this job a mistake was made. This mistake must be corrected. The things that belong to Arbusow must be returned - every day he confirms with his signature our daily work. When he returns from work tomorrow his things must be in their proper place. Good night." And I left.

The next day after work Arbusow came to me and said, "My things were all returned; the others' things also. Where did the overseer find them? No, just my things." He slapped me on the shoulder and said, "Thank you."

I advised him that he go to the barracks, offer his thanks and leave. "But before you get to the door," I cautioned him, "cross your arms above your head and then cover your mouth with three fingers." This he did and the incident was resolved.

Roumanian prisoners arrived from the front. We were separated into various camps. New lists were prepared. Our Pridurki (thus one calls those who do not perform general labor) asked Naratschik to enroll them on the roster of Camp #7.

Naratschik came to me and asked, "Why didn't you come to me, why didn't you come? Should I enroll you on the roster of #7 also? I left a place open for you."

I replied, "Where else can one go?"

Naratschik: "Only to Camp #8."

I answered, "Enroll me in that one."

My road building brigadier Okunew heard this and said, "Put me in that roster also."

So it happened that Okunew, I, and 78 more men out of mine and Schneider's division who had not yet been enrolled on a roster (the so-called overflow) went to Camp #8.

[Most of my other] colleagues went to Camp #7 according to their wishes. There the warm places had all been occupied. They had all gone there to be employed in general labor. [They had no special skills and could not command adequate housing.] The majority of them had to leave their bones at the prized Camp #7.

## Camp #8

We arrived toward evening and secured room in a half - empty barrack. Okunew and I had gone to look around the camp then and after a short time, Naratschik summoned us and asked were we the seniors on the truck?

One of us said, "We had no senior ones. With us there is the forest master and road building brigadier, where are they?" (They had also gone into the camp to look around.)

"As soon as they come, send them into the office."

The chief of the logging operation, Wasilijew, asked, "Which one of you is in charge?"

"I am," I answered.

Again Wasilijew, "And you, Okunew (pointing at brigadier Okunew)." He wrote our names and family information into his notebook. "Divide your people into two groups and lead them to work tomorrow. I will be there and give you your orders."

Someone called out, "Dyck, stay yet awhile - I want to talk with you." The man pointed to a chair near to him. "I am brigadier of the horse brigade. I need a helper. Are you agreeable?"

I said I was but asked, "What will the chief think of that?"

"That's my business," he said and I knew tomorrow I would do what he said. We met again that evening. Already on the second day I was his helper. But not for long. This man was a Finn, Rokka Heinrich. He was transferred to another job and I took his place. Then I again also took Okunew to my side to build roads.

On 12 December 1941 the chief gave us an advisory. The chief was a gypsy named Nitschwoloda. He informed us the quotas had not been met. But the food was insufficient and the workers became weaker and weaker. The chief promised that starting the next day he would improve the food but would demand the fulfillment of the quota. Of the first promise we didn't believe. Of the second (fulfilling the quota) we had no doubt. [But] this time he had spoken the truth. The next morning we received meat soup, mush with butter and bread baked from white flour. At noon there was also mush. For supper the same as in the morning and, in addition, for everyone a fried chicken. The food was improved several times over and we also fulfilled the quota with *tufia*.

Thus they fed us until 20 August 1942, except without the fried chicken. From whence did these supplies come? They were definitely destined for the army. At this time the Russian Army had to retreat but the supplies didn't and so, were shipped to us rather than have them fall into the hands of the Germans. This was the time the German Army bombarded the auto works in Gorky, 190

km from us. Then came the order to turn over the supplies to the camp authority.

Also at this time [12 December 1941 to 20 August 1942] bonuses were distributed from lists prepared by us. These bonuses were not money but sweets: chocolate, sweet baked goods, candy, rolls etc. There were three different portions for fulfilling the quota: 100%, 110% and 120% and more. We put next to each name the percent of quota. This bonus only workers received. The controllers, masters, brigadiers and so-called *pridurki* received nothing. In order to correct this situation, I assigned brigadiers and controllers falsified family names as workers. For myself I entered several names of dead persons with a quota of 120% filled.

When the quick advance of the German Army was slowed/hindered at the end of 1942, the leftover supplies were commandeered back to the front. Our food from then on was now dumplings, soup, meal and bread - no meat.

[It was here] in Camp #8 I had met one of our Mennonites, Kornee Fransen. He was so unkempt and emaciated, I did not recognize him. Through him I learned that they had arrived at Camp #6 in 1938. Also, Julius Froese, two Ungers - father and son - Jakob Janzen and Hermann Riesen. Riesen was transferred to another camp as an invalid. The others died in 1938. They simply could not adapt to these harsh circumstances. That's the way it also was with Hermann Siebert. He also died - in March 1938. I witnessed Fransen as a weakling [who was] transferred to another camp. When in 1947 I came to the penitentiary [penal colony], I learned that Riesen had hanged himself in the toilet. In 1947 on the day I was freed in the central camp I met a man who asserted that Franzen had been at the camp where he was and had died from weakness. So I was now the only Mennonite who came here in 1938 who once again experienced freedom. If one could call it that.

The production chief was no longer Wasilijew. In his place was a Jew named Xaykin, a refugee from White Russia. He was near sighted. When he checked the lists and signed them he almost touched the list with his nose. When at the end he came to the dead souls, he muttered to himself, "splendid fellows" and put next to each one the number 3. These lists we gave to the teller in Kiosk.

I explained to him, "Up to this point you give the workers, up to the second point the brigadiers and controllers. The names given are not correct. Continuing two for me, two for you and after the others comes Konwouir." He related well to us and had a family with two children. So every day I put down the points but explanation was no longer necessary.

At the end of February 1942, after 12 noon, I was summoned [to the office of the director of the KUM - operational authority]. He pointed to a chair and I sat down. On the table lay

several portfolios. He asked various questions to which I answered “Yes” or “No.”

Then he pointed to the portfolios and said, “There are various complaints at hand. If I forward them on you will get 20-25 years; perhaps also...” He said nothing further. There was a slight pause as he observed me. “If you help me I will not forward these complaints,” he said. He talked about various things including the [military ] front and asked questions. I remained quiet. Finally he asked me, “Why do you say nothing and give no answers?”

“I have a question,” I answered, “are you a Russian?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Then”, I continued, “you are also familiar with Russian proverbs?”

“Yes,” he answered, “but perhaps not all of them.”

I said, “But this one: The Tsar loves the testimonies but not the witnesses. From me you will get no testimony. If in that portfolio there are such complaints at hand that one can shoot me, then I will be shot in any case - just later rather than now. To you it only matters how long you can use me. So I would win nothing by testifying.”

At this he spoke no further about this. We talked on various subjects until morning. He gave me nothing to sign and said that I should remain quiet about our meeting. After this whenever we met by chance, he greeted me in a friendly manner.

In December 1942 a commission from the authority came in order to disband this camp. The highest authority was Schejew. We were again disbursed into various camps. I was to be sent to Camp #13. After three days a train arrived with supply cars and a sanitary car [pharmaceutical car]. The supply cars had no heat. Schejew cursed but couldn't do anything. We were divided into groups of 40 men each. When the group I was in came to the fore, Shejew said, “This group goes in the medical car.” In this car it was warm. We were under way for 24 hours. When we arrived at Camp #13, it became apparent that many had suffered because of the frost; there were dead among them. Our group owed it to Shwejew that we had been able to ride in a heated car. But this time I was separated from Okunew.

## Camp #13

We arrived at Camp # 13 toward evening. We received living space in an empty barrack. The next morning, as always, we were subjected to the usual health measures and medical exam.

After several days Shwejew came. When I returned from work, someone called me into the office to see the chief. I

knocked, entered and saluted. Shewjew looked at me and then turned to the chief and said, "Write to the camp leader; he's supposed to change Dyck's clothing." He took the slip of paper from the chief and handed it to me saying, "Go change your clothes and come back."

I returned completely in new clothes, even felt boots. Schewjew smirked. The chief said, "Tomorrow you are going to different work - as controller. The orders have already been given." I extended thanks and went back to my barracks to sleep.

I again owed that to Shewjew and my family name.

Camp #8 hadn't received any new clothing the last time because it was to exist only until autumn [1942]. That's why I had been in old clothing. I only worked as controller, though, for a short time.

There came an order from headquarters that I was to be employed as a master again. A short time passed; our chief was transferred. Another chief by the name of Kowolenko came. In order not to end up on his black list, we filled a higher quota than in the preceding days. Kowolenko compared the day's quota with the previous ones and came to the conclusion that in two days there was a *tufta*. We had already lain down to rest when unexpectedly Naratschik called all participants in this *tufta* to the chief. We were [in total] nine persons: two masters, two helpers, four controllers and the receiver of our production. In his office against the wall benches stood so that we all had room to sit. He pointed to the bench. We sat down. I was the first on his left side. He began to interrogate [me].

"Family?"

"Dyck."

"Office - job?"

"Master."

"A German?"

"Yes, from the Volga."

After he had acquainted himself with all the rest it was my turn again. "How long have you been working as a master in which camps?"

I answered and he asked, "Why is the fulfillment today in your section higher than on previous days? How many *tufta* are in these days' production?"

I answered, "Not one cm." I explained that for several days four horses were taken for use from my section. Today I had gotten them back again.

Thus the others were interrogated. Each one answered in his manner after which he said, "The State doesn't need *tufta* and neither do I. I don't believe a single word you've told me." He rang a bell and Naratschik came. "All of them to isolation. There they can consider further how they will fulfill their quota without *tufta*."

Furthermore, the 58 cream cheeses can only work in general labor and are not going to be leaders.”

In isolation we were all in a single room. We agreed among ourselves to admit nothing. In two hours Naratschik returned and said, “The chief expects you.”

We left and he began to speak, “Have you considered your situation?” I said, “I have nothing to consider; I don’t want to lie to you and have already told you the truth.”

Thus he went to everyone in turn. The substance of their answers was the same. We were again led to isolation. [His parting remark was] “I don’t want to talk with you again in such a manner.”

It didn’t take long before Naratschik returned.

He said, “The chief asks that you should come to him again.”

[Our group] had talked it over that if the chief sent for us again, we wouldn’t go.

So we said, “Go and send him as far as you can. After that go to the workshop and request that they are to sharpen our saws and axes. You can do this yourselves and I won’t go to the work site.”

He went. After ten minutes he came again. “The chiefs asked that you [all] come,” he said.

“Who is asking, you or he?” I asked.

“He,” was the reply.

I said, “Then we’ll go for the third and last time.”

We went and there was the chief cook and head of the production camp. In the room tables had been set up and breakfast prepared for us. The chief sat behind his table, on his breast the Order of Lenin was displayed. He said, “Sit down, eat and rest yourselves awhile.”

We didn’t wait to be told twice. The meal consisted of potatoes, meat, bread and tea. During the time we were occupied with eating, he said, “This Order [of Lenin] I haven’t earned; men like yourselves have earned it. That’s why I conducted this experiment. I wanted to see with whom I was dealing.”

Then he turned to Naratschik and said, “If somebody comes with a complaint about these men, inform me of it immediately.” Then to the chief cook: “If one of these men...” here the chief cook interrupted him, “I understand what you want to say.” “That’s good,” the chief said.

I thought one could work easily with him. He wasn’t interested in the number of cubic meters, only for the numbers on the paper. After a year Kowolenko [the chief] was transferred to a different authority. He received a higher office [promotion]. He was a medal collector even if it was earned with *tufra*.

Our next chief was Nedoresow, a former state attorney from the Crimea who had been in prison for five years but was now free.

With him we didn't have it so bad either. As one is prone to say, He was our brother [because] he also had five years behind him. An order was issued: in each camp there was to be set up a preparatory division. The leader had necessarily to be a master. Thus I became chief of this division. I received 25 workers, a part of them women and two constant guards. My assignment was to find new level forest areas before the divisions were transferred to build roads. The entire area was to be divided into sectors for the members of the wood felling teams and to put markers and shields into place. I received another duty: to build a road to the potato field which was five km. away.

How did we build the roads? Ties were laid and on them wooden rails were fastened. In between the tracks wood was laid then covered with earth. That was the horses' path. The wheels of the wagons were two-sided iron rims which fit the rails. We called them Alberto Wagons. Alberto was the name of the manufacturer. These "cars" consisted of two parts, each part had two pairs of wheels which were connected underneath with chains. The tracks were made of round poles - wooden rails.

At first our road building went quickly. We had to fell only a few trees: we hit upon an old village road and so quickly distanced ourselves from the camp. Further on, though, the construction was more difficult. We had to fell many trees and also there was a large ditch, almost a ravine. The main thing for us was that with a straight path through the ravine we weren't far from the potato field - a little more than one km. So I suggested that two women and one guard go for potatoes. The guards were difficult to convince. Finally they agreed because they were also always hungry. We were receiving daily 25 grams [1/2 cup] of mush and three grams of oil per man. What kind of food was that for workers? But now, three or four buckets of potatoes added to this meant mashed potatoes instead of watery gruel. The guards' food was the same as that of the workers so we lived agreeably and in peace with our guards.

One day, at the eleventh hour, the head of the guard detail appeared. He asked the guard if everything was in order. The guard didn't have time to answer because at that moment two women came out of the forest with four buckets of potatoes and a guard with them. This activity on the part of the guard was a violation of the statutes. First of all, he didn't have the right to desert his post and second, he was not allowed to approach the prisoners within 15 meters.

The head of the guards shouted, "What does this mean!?"

Now I had to interject myself quickly. "Comrade chief," I said, "those are fresh potatoes for our noon meal. We've been eating fresh potatoes for 14 days and nothing will happen in the future." I asked him to stay and eat fresh potatoes with us. He didn't say yes or no but he didn't ride away. When the mashed



potatoes with grits on them had been prepared, the woman cook brought a full pan for us. She had added extra oil to them. She handed each one a spoon, including the chief guard. He pitched in - it didn't taste bad to him! I asked him not to tell the camp chief of our activities. I invited him, when he had time, to visit us again. He warned me that I would have to be responsible if something were to happen. But he did come repeatedly at noon to see how things were going. However, he had made the camp chief aware of our activities.

Three days after our meeting with the chief of guards a sign appeared in the camp. On it was drawn a huge kettle, two cooks with big spoons, myself with arms akimbo and around us the workers, each one with a pan in his hand waiting for food. Under it was written: *scharat, parat, kipotjat, rabotjat ne chotjat* (fried, steamed, cooked but they don't want to work). After work that day I had to go to Nedoresow.

He asked, "Did you see the sign?"

I said I had.

"What do you have to say about it?"

I answered, "Everything is true except for the last part. The road will be completed on time without *tufra*. You and also the chief guard know that the field is five km away, therefore, I can't make 10 km out of it." Naturally, I didn't tell him that in place of grubbing out one stump, one could have cheated and said five.

He said, "I didn't send for you in order to curse but to tell you that from tomorrow on your cook is to sign for the supplies but not receive them. In that way I can supply an entire brigade. *Birger Chef* potatoes without oil is only the half of it."

"Good, I'll tell Reschettnikow to give us just oil." (Who was Reschettnikow? He and Nedoresow had become friends in the camp. After Nedoresow was freed he always took Reschettnikow along. He still had four years ahead of him.)

The next day the chief had the sign removed. I said to the cook, "Take a half liter bottle. If he doesn't fill it, give it back to him. Ask him when he became such a tightwad and what are you to tell your master?" He and I had already become good friends. In that manner we received instead of 80 grams [oil], 400- 500 grams each day. We completed the road earlier than had been expected. After the completion of this work, I again took over my division.

Toward spring I often felt a pain in my stomach. I went to the doctor, a German named Wiljams. He prescribed food for a sick person and white bread. To the chief he said I had to be assigned temporarily to work where I had less activity. I became in charge of a business/manufacturing operation. We made shoes of bark and fibre (birch and fir shingles and flax). There were about 15-20 workers, sometimes more or less. There was a Jew among them. He had been a regimental colonel in the army. His name

was Polkownik and he was not popular among the workers. He was an innocent one. He was convinced that we were criminals. He had a new uniform which he always carried with him so it could not be stolen from him. By this time we already had another chief (Semonowich). He gave Naratschik the assignment to buy the uniform from the Jew. Naratschik Iwanow gave me the assignment of asking the Jew if the uniform was for sale.

Polkownik laughed at me mockingly when I asked him and said, "What am I going to wear when I go home? I am going to wear the uniform and the bark shoes!" They had already taken away his boots at the headquarters (*etapp*).

I relayed to Naratschik Iwanow what the Jew had answered.

"Then we'll see to it that he remains without that uniform," Naratschik said and then asked, "Do you have those among you who can accomplish this?"

I said I thought so. In the brigade there were three younger fellows who weren't yet professional thieves. I spoke with them about the task. They responded enthusiastically but accomplished nothing.

In our workplace I had arranged a space for myself where I lived and also where I kept the bark shoes. To eat we went to the dining hall. There they allowed no one to come in carrying anything. During this time Polkownik laid the uniform in my room; he considered it to be safe there under lock and key. He had earlier noticed that someone was always on his trail and asked to have the uniform hidden with me. I hesitated and made it clear to him that the walls were only boards. He refused to be dissuaded. He said, "But nobody would know and besides, no one would rob you." Finally I agreed and he himself put the uniform under my bed so that it was against the outer wall. I didn't get involved. Polkownik didn't trust anyone.

After two days when it was dark, I took the uniform to Iwanow and then tore two boards loose down below and then went to the *Komptor* (office). I didn't return until midnight and then with a man who had been in the office. We both commented that the boards had been pried apart. I went to the Jew, then to the officer of the day and also to Iwanow. What could we do? The Jew blamed me. I became angry saying, "I told you the wall was only boards but you hardheaded Jews always know better than others. Now go look for yourself" And I also sent him to \_\_\_\_\_ as one expresses oneself in those circumstances in a camp.

Iwanow and I decided not to give the uniform to the chief. We wouldn't gain anything by it and secondly, we would tip our hand. Iwanow was not guarded. He was allowed to go to the neighboring villages. There he traded the uniform for supplies. Iwanow reported to the chief what had happened. The chief sent for me.

Iwanow said to me, "I'm going to back up the chief so we don't make him suspicious of us. I'll explain how it happened."

In front of the chief Iwanow asked, "You perhaps have someone you suspect?" I felt the chief suspected me but I answered negatively. The short of it was the chief and the Jew were without a uniform. I, along with Iwanow, was for a time eating honey, eggs, milk and cornmeal rolls (*kalabuscki*).

A period of time went by and the [shoe making] business was closed. I got a new job, chief of the BUR (strict supervision of the barracks). The BUR was a small house in the camp with a fence around it. In it were convicts being punished. They were kept under the same conditions as in a prison. Twice a day they received *balanda*, some gruel and 600 grams of bread. There was no free movement; the toilet [a large pot] was in the house. They were not put on a work detail. Food was passed to them through a small opening in the door. The free supervisor in the BUR had warned me a short while previously that two chiefs had been murdered with sharpened iron rods thrust through the window. I was not to stand in front of the window nor to open the door unless he was also present.

There were 11 persons, among them two officers who were prisoners. They had come from the front. Prior to this they had already been arrested for murder. From the camp they came to the *Rogosawskiarmee*, for what they had been arrested this time, I did not know.

After the supervisor had left, I unlocked the door, entered and greeted them and turned to them with a question. "How do you live under such circumstances? From today on we are going to change the situation." I also opened the house door and said, "First off, carry out the *parascha* [chamber pot] and leave it outside. As long as I'm with you, we don't need it. In the fenced-in courtyard there is a toilet; you will go there."

I put them to work dusting the bedclothes, washing the plank floor and airing out the barracks. After we had put things in order, I said, "You can also go into the courtyard for fresh air. If you don't object, I am going to sleep with you awhile. If I don't awaken in an hour, wake me; it will be time to go eat."

Someone said, "We don't go, they bring it to us."

I said, "With me that won't go; I want to see for myself what the cook gives you."

I with two men went to the kitchen; I said to the head cook that we had come for the food. He gave us the containers. The cook was about to ladle clear water from the top as he had always done.

I said, "Stop - stir it up and then ladle it out." He ladled 11 times. "Once again," I said, "I'm the 12th one."

We brought the food and all of us sat at the table. One of the [prisoner] officers, Morgunow (the other was Loginow), was the oldest among us. He had to, at my direction, divide (serve?) the food.

After two weeks I went to the chief with a suggestion. "Why do the residents of the BUR eat bread in vain? They could work and earn it. The drovers who work without guards could bring us building materials. We will chop out the tree stumps and built foot paths from barracks to barracks and to the office and guardhouse."

The chief didn't want to allow that saying that they would not work and would steal from the forest workers. I assured him that nothing like that would happen. Finally, he gave permission and the necessary orders. I told my people what I had discussed with the chief and what kind of responsibility I had assumed.

Loginow interrupted me saying, "This responsibility Morgunow and I will take upon ourselves."

They brought us everything we needed. In addition to this I had a discussion with the chief cook and chief baker telling them that the wood they needed daily my workers from the BUR would saw for them. With that I learned that those who worked in the kitchen received no food and those in the bakery, no bread. The others received theirs in the pecking order. We now also ate in the mess hall. The food improved; my workers now did not get the first pot but the second and never less than 750 grams of bread.

One day the chief sent for me. "We have to build a little bridge not far from camp," he said. "There are tree stumps in the way - can you take care of this?"

"Why not?" I replied.

The chief asked, "Won't your men run away?" I answered, "We have only one guard; the others have been spoken for. If I tell them that I am responsible for this work, then no one will run away [escape]."

The next day they let us out of camp for the first time. Among these stumps [we were to remove] there was one with a diameter of over one meter. We tackled that one first with fresh strength. We dug the roots out, sawed through them and prepared rods with which to pry the stump loose. We got no further; it began to rain. We crawled under the old bridge for cover. It rained until the end of the work time. In the BUR they talked among themselves saying that for today's work they would again get the first kettle and another fellow sullenly added "and 300 grams of bread as prophesied earlier." [Note: the first kettle of soup was poured from the larger container and so, was more watery than subsequent kettles.] I calculated:  $125\% \times 11 = 1375$ . How many and with what diameter did the stumps have to be? I wrote in the report what had to be, signed it and handed it in to the head accountant. I told no one about my report. So, for that day's work we received the food

for one day. When instead of the expected [reduced] rations, they received 950 grams of bread and the usual meal, they looked at me but said nothing.

In the BUR Loginow turned to me and said, "Chief, is that a mistake?"

I answered, "No, it was no error, I just kept quiet about it. I wasn't sure whether they would check it out. Now, they can check it out but they won't get the food out of your bellies. As far as I'm concerned they wouldn't give me more than one night in isolation but you would have to go without food for one day."

After this day Morgunow and Loginow admitted to me that on that first day when I slept with them in the BUR, they intended to choke me. But then they talked it over and decided to wait awhile. First they would find out what kind of fellow I was. Not long after this the BUR was closed. Where these prisoners were transferred to I do not know. Morgunow and Loginow felt it difficult to part from me and wished me the best; I them, likewise. I know nothing further of their fate.

Now I again took over my division as master. During this time there was established a camp of minors. A brigade of them was formed. The chief ordered that they not be mixed with adults. Their norm [production standard] was 25% less than that for adults. After a time an adult came to me and explained that he had come from the Central Hospital and that Naratschik had entered him temporarily into this young brigade. It entered my head that it was a duck (Utka).

Approximately three weeks later he reported that after three days he had been released from work because of a high temperature. Also, one of the minors was released from work. I had *burki*. When I came from work I would take off my felt boots to dry them and put on the *burki*. On this day they weren't there. I asked the day guard who had stayed home aside from my worker and the boy. The answer: No one.

I sent for the boy and asked him "Did you take my *burki*?" I noticed how he threw a glance at the man. I said, "Come with me."

He again looked around at the man. I led him into the drying room. On the way, Naratschik came toward us; I motioned to him and he followed us.

I asked the boy, "Who put you up to taking the *burki*?"

He replied, "Nobody, I didn't take them."

I picked up a birchwood stick. "Now tell me, who put you up to it or did you do it without him," I demanded.

He again insisted he knew nothing. I hit him with the three-cornered stick across his ribs and knocked the wind out of him. "If

you don't admit what happened, it will go harshly with you (as with Palicha Shura)," I said.

Now he confessed, "I'm afraid of him." He told where the *burki* were. I instructed him to go back and tell him that I had struck him but that he had confessed to nothing.

On the next day after work the KUM [personnel commandant] sent for me. He asked several questions like How was I doing and How do the boys work.

I replied "They don't work badly."

KUM then asked me "If they work well why do you beat them?"

I knew why he had sent for me but now I could no longer hold back. "If this bitch-whore is of no use and only hinders why do you keep him?"

"Who are you talking about?" he asked.

"You know that better than I," I replied, "and if you don't get rid of him there will be some unpleasantness. You know it as well as I. Such soul-sellers will never get their freedom. If I don't do it someone else will. Why did I beat the boy? I wanted to convince myself that my first day's suspicion was right. Such people never bode any good, not to themselves and not to others. As far as our little conversation is concerned, no one will hear of it. Can I go?"

"Yes."

When I awoke in the morning I asked the night guard where the man was.

"They called him out of camp with all his belongings about an hour ago," he replied.

"Why did the boy react so quickly when I said it was like with Palicha Schura?"

He told me, "It was a young girl. One day she came from work completely wet and frozen. In order to warm herself she went into the drying room where it was warm. A woman was working there but allowed the girl to come in. She directed her to a bench so she could lie down. After she was warmed through she fell asleep. The woman took advantage of the moment and murdered the girl. She cut her flesh from her bones. The head and bones she stuffed in the stove to burn them. I and Iwanow were walking from the office to our barracks. Suddenly we stopped. It smelled as though hair were burning, or felt boots. We quickly went to the drying room and tore the door open. The same smell overpowered us. Iwanow opened the stove door. There stood a kettle in which meat cooked; the head and bones had not yet burned up. Then everything happened quickly. The woman jumped to the stove and was about to remove the kettle with the flesh. I grabbed her right arm and twisted it behind her back and jammed her face against the wall. She screamed that I could do whatever I wanted to her but just

leave her the meat. I must admit that she was not treated politely by us, [and], after a short time her appetite for meat disappeared. Later it became known to me that this woman was a cannibal. She had gotten 15 years for this crime.”

In 1944 there came wave after wave of women of the gangs. The 13th camp became a women’s camp. We men went to another camp, Belly Luk. Earlier the residents of this camp busied themselves with railroad construction. Forests were not felled. So, also, I came to this camp. It was seven km from Camp 13.

## Belly Luk

The chief of Belly Luk, Ogurzow, had been drafted into the army and after only three weeks his wife received notice that he had died. The new chief was a gypsy, Lagoda. Our chief of operations [at Camp 13], Iwanow, and Anton Rosemirowitch came with us to Belly Luk. Iwanowski, when he was free, had been a regimental colonel. His article [crime for which he had been arrested] was 54.10.8 (Ukrainian Article 54 is the Russian 58). He was strict but just. If any of his subordinates made a mistake or didn’t carry out his orders, he scolded harshly. He would say, however, “Don’t think I will chase you away. If you crumble it, you’ll have to eat it.” He scolded often. If, however, the chief, Lagoda, scolded someone, he [Iwanow] would take us under his protection saying, “They are my subordinates and I will take care of them myself.”

In this camp, for the first time, machines (*tjegatschi*) instead of horses were used. They were renovated by arrested tradesmen. I received four of these machines for trial in my division. I turned them over to a mechanic named Baranow and four drivers. The wheels were dual rimmed as were also the wheels of the trucks (*lore Alberto*) that went with them. Now we had to build roads for these machines. The tracks were made of wooden poles with a diameter of 12-15 cm. The tractors worked well; the quota was fulfilled.

Now came the time of change in my fate. Iwanowski was freed; his eight years were completed. We, his assistants, went to him to say farewell. He showed us what he was going to put on. We demanded that he should change his clothing immediately; we wanted to see what our chief would look like as a free man. He had had boots sewn of Polish wallet leather (very soft). While he was putting one of them on, it split. What to do?

“What size do you wear - 41 or 42? Perhaps I can help,” I said. I had a new pair of officer’s boots and also a striped sailor shirt. I brought them to him. His happiness was great.

He said, “How can I make things right with you or pay you back?”

I replied, "Among comrades there will be no reckoning." Thus, we took leave of one another, forever, we were convinced.

The new operations chief, Frolov, was half Jewish. (His mother was a Jewess.) The camp chief, Lagoda, was also hateful toward the Germans. They had wounded him in the head on the front. Thus, I had two enemies. Frolov allowed no padding (*tufta*). He often crossed out what I reported and entered other numbers. Because of that the workers suffered; instead of 900 grams of bread they received only 500 grams. Frolov and I were always quarreling.

I said to him, "You're digging a hole into which you will fall yourself."

Also Lagoda brought me to the point that I sent him on [told him where to go]. He said, "I'll ruin you. Nothing will come of your plans. I'm under orders."

He turned me over to Frolov. He determined I was the oldest one and sent me out to fell trees. [Gustav was in his late 20s]. My co-workers were newcomers. I told them that I would teach them how to fell trees; I, myself, would not work and told them, "I'll see to it that you are not without bread." The camp leader wrote in the receipt whatever I told him [because] he was indebted to me: I had helped him to get into this workplace.

Barely a week passed. It was already after noon when I noticed that a whole gang of people was approaching on the main road. I recognized them. Iwanow, operations chief from the main office, his wife [Iwanowa], chief of operations Lagoda, Frolov and Antonow the master who had replaced me came forward. The woman led the group. In front of a sign where I (group leader) stood, she stopped. She said something and then came over to us. She and her husband greeted us.

She turned to me and said, "Master Dyck, what happened? Why are you working here and not as a master?"

I replied, "Put this question to our chief."

In order to avoid unpleasantness she again spoke to me, "I sent you to a three-month course to raise your qualifications. You were promoted at Camp 13. Do you agree?"

I replied, "Yes, thank you."

She continued, "Then wait for a special order which will arrive in two days." She said goodbye; they left, but now she was at the end of the group. She turned once and waved to me. I waved back to her.

Later the camp leader told me what she had said at the sign. Iwanowa had asked, "Where is Dyck? Isn't he the master? Why isn't he working as a master?"

Someone had said, "He systematically doesn't fulfill the quota. Also, he doesn't contribute to the order of the inner camp."

Iwanowa answered to that, "I want to talk with him personally about that."



After two days the controller Linkewitch was sent away. I went to the chief and asked, "Why didn't you send me with Linkewitch?"

He answered, "There was no order received for you."

I had requested of Linkewitch that he should ask the director of the course to make Iwanowa aware of this. Simultaneously I asked the charwoman of the chief's room to check whether there was an order with my name on it on the table or desk. If one was found, she was to write down the date and number. Already that same evening she brought the information to me. In order to avoid suspicion, I went to work the next day. The second day I stayed in camp.

The chief sent for me and said, "Why are you in camp and not at work?"

I replied, "I have learned from the director of the course that you received a special order." I then named date and number. I continued, "I request that you send me immediately."

The chief insisted, "I have no order."

I countered, "If you don't send me, tomorrow you will be talking with Iwanowa."

At 11 p.m. Naratschik awakened me and said, "Dyck, get ready. In one hour a guard will be free and will accompany you."

I said, "Go and tell the chief the night is for sleeping, I'll be ready in the morning."

Naratschik said, "During the day all the convoys will be busy. He who has to walk 14 km in the night is not going to provide any escort tomorrow." I suspected what the chief had in mind: to have me shot at night and say I had attempted to escape. The night passed. In the morning there was a guard so I again came to Camp 13 and with the three-month course, raised my qualifications.

## **Camp 13**

### **Course for Improving Quality**

There were 25 of us taking the course. During the first part of the course none of what was presented stayed with me. We got a double portion of sugar. After only two weeks my brain commenced working. Of these 25 men, 22 completed the course. Of these 22 only half passed the exam. Shortly before the end of the course, the chief of the camp, Michjew, sent for me. He said Iwanowa had telephoned him and discussed that I should work with him as master and would I be agreeable? He also said he knew of my circumstances with Lagoda because Iwanowa had told him. I agreed.

The next day Michjew again sent for me. He mentioned a family name and asked if I were familiar with it.

I said, "Yes, he is studying here in this course. He has been with me and has told me he prefers to stay here in this camp."

Michejew asked, "You weren't acquainted with him before you came here or did you visit with him before coming here?"

"No, why?" I answered. I knew what he wanted to hear from me but I also knew if I told him what I knew that he would regard me no higher than the man in question. And I didn't trust him.

Then Michjew said, "I just wanted to hear that from you."

Michjew sent for Naratschik and said, "This man (named his name) you send after the end of the course from whence he came. I don't need any soul-sellers. Our people are sufficient to me." [The man referred to here is the thief who stole Gustav's *burki*; Gustav chose not to put his name in writing.]

I took over a division. The master and controller were the only men; it was a women's camp as previously noted. All beginnings are difficult. The quota was never fulfilled. The basic reason was that there weren't enough horses. I went to the chief with a proposal. I proposed we hitch up women to the Wagons Alberto. I thought six women would fit in one harness/hookup. The way I saw it, that was the only solution to filling the quota. There was no chance of getting horses. He agreed. In this manner, after a short time, we daily fulfilled the quota. Also, the women were satisfied. It was easier than felling trees. They daily made their average (naturally not without *tufta*). For their work they received the third kettle and 950 grams bread [excellent rations, comparatively speaking]. Thus we worked for two months without being disturbed. During this time, that is, the five months I had been away from Belly Luk, the quota attainment there had gotten lower and lower.

Frolow put the blame on the bad work of the tractors and demanded horses from headquarters. Headquarters did not agree. Instead, in order to improve the camp Frolow would have to be replaced. Iwanowski, after being freed, was forbidden to leave the camp system [a kind of village arrest]. The war was not yet ended so he worked again in a camp as operations chief. The control headquarters chief, Puschkarow, asked him to again take over Belly Luk. He agreed but on condition that Master Dyck and Klimow (who was working with Iwanowski as a master) would also be sent to Belly Luk. Puschkarow promised he would do this.

Michjew received an order to transfer me to Belly Luk for availability to Iwanowski. But he [Michjew] didn't tell me. He didn't want to transfer me. Iwanowski gave the headquarters no peace. Michjew had already received a third reminder. Still Michjew kept silent about it to me. He turned to Iwanowa but she

told him, "Puschkarow promised Iwanowski and I cannot change it." Puschkarow did not want to punish Michjew but he couldn't change his promise. He turned the matter over to KUM [personnel commandant].

In the morning the KUM was at the gate. As I came closer, he came toward me. "Dyck, come. The chief requires you," he said.

I had no idea what this meant. Now at the chief's office the matter became clear to me. I only asked how Iwanowski was getting to Belly Luk. He had, of course, been given his freedom at the beginning of 1945. Michjew told me what had happened during this time. I, of course, had no right to decide my own fate. Thus, I arrived at Belly Luk toward evening of that same day.

## **Belly Luk**

### **Second Time**

Twilight was near when I arrived. The first person I met was Iwanowski. He was coming out of his barracks and going to the office. We greeted one another.

He said shortly, "Throw your things down and come into the office; we're having a meeting."

When I arrived, they had already begun. But Iwanowski had the floor. He pointed to a chair where I was to sit. Down the row each person had to give an accounting of his work. Antonow, the master of my former division, had only fulfilled one half of his quota.

In response to the question of where the blame lay, he placed blame on the tractor (*tjegatschy*). "They're worn out," he said, "and spare parts are not available."

After everyone had reported, Iwanowski again took the floor. He soon ended the meeting. He turned to Antonow and said, "I am relieving you of your job." Then he turned to me and said, "From tomorrow on you again take over your division. Tomorrow I expect 75%, the day after that, 100%." I wanted to say something but he would not allow me to speak.

He said curtly, "You know me?"

I replied, "Yes, Iwanowski."

Then he said, "You see none of your helpers present here; if you regard it as necessary, I give you authority to place your former helpers in their old positions."

The council was over.

I thought to myself, Where do I start? First, I looked up my former helpers. Bremaelis (Lithuanian) representative [of division], Donnskau (Don Cossack), road construction brigadier,

Rossochewski (Polish), brigadier dispatcher, Pawlow (Russian), wood camp leader and Danilowa (Tatar), cook. After I had given all of them their instructions, I went to the mechanic, Baranow, and the four tractor drivers. My appearance was a joyous occasion for them. They had not yet heard of my arrival. I explained the situation: Iwanowski expected 75% of the quota tomorrow.

I asked, "How many tractors will work tomorrow - one or two?"

Baranow, the mechanic, looked at me with a smile, "Immediately tomorrow three and in two hours the fourth one."

"After one or two trips to the *stellplatz*?" I asked. That is how the tractors worked [erratically]. Antonow fed us. With him we got more than 500 grams of bread and didn't get the first kettle of soup. "For tomorrow I can't promise anything," he said, "but day after tomorrow 950 grams of bread and a record kettle."

The next day I asked Iwanowski, "From where and who is Klimow?"

Iwanowski replied, "A bum like you. We worked together in a camp after I was freed. Antonow received 20 people at his disposal. They built roads where forest was to be felled later; they didn't belong to my division."

Antonow's workers came to me and complained that they never earned more than 500 grams of bread with him. I sent them to Iwanowski who said, "Who sent you to me?"

They said, "Master Dyck. He said that we didn't belong to his division."

Iwanowski replied, "Go back to him."

I went to Iwanowski and hadn't even opened my mouth when he said, "I know what you're going to say - that they aren't your workers. Well, from today they are your workers. If they come complaining once more, then you'll get 500 grams."

I nodded and said, "Thanks."

"If Antonow doesn't understand then tell him to go to the devil," Iwanowski said.

After two days I employed another brigadier and sent Antonow to Iwanowski.

Iwanowski sent for me. "Why are you sending Antonow to me?"

"I don't know where the devil is to be found," I said. As serious and strict as he was, Iwanowski couldn't refrain from laughing. Antonow was transferred to another camp.

After a short time Belly Luk again took over first place [in production]. After three months there came an *etapp* out of White Russia - only women. I received them in my division. Some of the old women received helpers' work in the camp. The rest felled

trees in the forest. I and Bremaelis led them to their workplace. I explained to them how they had to work safely.

“Bremaelis,” I said, “you stay with them the entire day so that no accident occurs.”

At the end of the workday I again went to them. Bremaelis pointed to one girl and said, “She is so weak she can’t even carry the branches to the pile.”

Women also came to me with the plea that, if it were possible, give her lighter work for the time being.

I asked, “What is her name?”

Someone replied, “Ludmila Smoljak, she has completed the 10th school year.”

I promised to come up with an answer the next day. After work I spoke with Pawlow. “Do you need help marking [tree] trunks?” I asked.

Pawlow responded, “Yes, I’m always behind with the marking.”

I said, “Tomorrow I’ll give you help.”

The next day I went to the women and said, “Ludmila, come; I have light work for you.”

Her first question was, “How much bread will I get?”

I replied, “Not less than the others.”

We went slowly and yet she often had to stop; she couldn’t even follow me at my slow pace. When Pawlow saw her he said, “She is only a shadow.”

I said, “It is your assignment to make a young lady out of this shadow.”

He had some bread for his noon meal. He fetched it and gave it to her .

The first days after marking three or four trunks, she would rest. I had many members who constantly got 950 grams of bread and record food. In a detachment of five men, I entered her as the sixth. Thus she received 950 grams of bread and record food every day. Already after one week the girl could not be recognized. Pawlow was satisfied and said, “She marks faster than I.” Thus a short time passed. She asked Bremaelis, “Can I help you write the reports in the evening? With two of us doing it we’ll finish faster.” Now Bremaelis also had help.

Somewhat more than six months passed. Ludmila was summoned by the court. [Gustav does not say where this was.] After three weeks we received a letter. She wrote that she had met her two sisters. All three were sentenced to three years resettlement to Siberia, where exactly, she did not know. They were being punished because during the occupation [by the Germans] they had worked for the Germans.

In September 1946, the chief Lagoda, Iwanowski, Klimow and I were transferred to Camp # 17. Thus I left my division with all my helpers in Belly Luk for the second time and forever.

## 17<sup>th</sup> Experimental Camp

Here everything had to be organized from the beginning. The contingent was made up of new arrivals from freedom [new prisoners]. The experiment consisted of this: the division leadership now consisted of two men - master and one helper - no brigadier and no controllers. The workers were divided into detachments of five to seven men. The detachment leader had to work himself and also, write the report in the evening.

I sought out a helper who was not under guard. He was 11 years old with much common sense. He had earned four years for himself for thievery. Nobody could eat without the other; that is, we all depended on each other. If someone could get something additionally [to eat], we shared it like brothers. After all, we lived with each other, each one with his helper in a room. I, however, lived with wood camp leader, Kotschanow. He was 20 years old, from Saratow; my helper lived outside the camp. We four men had the right to have a watchman-servant to keep. Ours was Iwanitski, a Ukranian. His duty was to clean the room, clothing and footwear, bring food and watch our room during the day.

At work, we, with Klimow, handled the workers together. One the horse detachment, the other the tree fellers. We exchanged duties daily. The work proceeded normally, the quotas were fulfilled. It was the lull before the storm.

At the end of June, in the brightness of a new day, six workers came to me - three from my division, the others from Klimow, all in a happy mood. One of them, Malavuschin, had a little bottle of cologne water in his hand.

Malavuschin said, "We have come to have a little farewell drink with you."

I asked, "What kind of a farewell?"

Malavuschin replied, "We want to hold a Stachhanow Watch. We want to go with the drovers. We want to have a head start when the others come."

Walodin (he was the one from Saratow - my helper), took a glass from the table and Malavuschin poured; Walodin handed me the glass.

I asked, "How does one drink it, with or without water?"

Walodin responded, "However you wish."

I said, "Add some water to it." Then I drank the stuff. The others each drank a swallow out of the bottle. Each one squeezed my hand.

Walodin said, "Stay well, landsman, many thanks for everything."

After he had gone I thought the situation over: what did it mean? There really wasn't time to consider it thoroughly; I had to get ready to go to work. On this day Klimow accompanied the drovers; I was felling trees. We had not gotten halfway [through the day] when we heard a shot and after a short time, three more, one after the other. That meant flight. They [guards] immediately had us kneel. Then, in a short time we heard four more shots. We couldn't imagine what it meant. Thus we remained, kneeling more than two hours.

Suddenly, from a long way off, we noticed someone was leading a horse. On the horse sat a man; he was a watchman. His head was bandaged. After him came the chief of the watch. He said to me, "Yours have fled."

Now everything was clear to me, principally that they didn't say farewell to Klimow and why they had determined to flee today. They didn't want to flee when I was accompanying the drovers. They didn't want to do it to me [that is, they didn't want Gustav blamed for their flight]. I was not supposed to suffer any unpleasantness on account of them. Now we were driven further. When we got to the place where it had happened, we saw this picture: Headlong on the path lay one, 30 meters further across the path a second. I knew him: it was Walodin [the 11-year-old thief]. To the left of the path lay another and his horse - this one was not an escapee. He had come out of his line and in front of the watchman. Besides these, four had fled.

Klimow was arrested immediately; I, after work. We were together again, but now, in isolation. He had already been through interrogation. He was accused of being a participant in the flight. The next day I was interrogated. There were seven men [interrogators]. It was a cross examination which lasted over four hours. It resulted in the same accusation. Both of us were accused under an article on conviction of which we could expect 10 to 15 years.

A month passed; they should have transported us to central isolation. Why were we still here? We couldn't understand. We were taken care of with food: the chief cook took care of it. One day, early in the morning, a minor [young man] came from outside to the window. He wanted to be the first to bring us happy news. The camp chief had issued an order. The escapees had been captured and the hearing had determined that Master Dyck and Klimow knew nothing of the flight. The charges were dropped but

“for negligence Dyck and Klimow got six months of penal camp.” We were released from isolation and allowed to move freely in the camp.

In short everything [had happened] as follows: Malavuschin was the ringleader. In the barn they were in such a big hurry that they were the first: Malavuschin rode ahead. Halfway to the work place there was a bend in the road. Malavuschin took advantage of this; he rode quickly to the watchman and wanted to stab him in the head with a knife from horseback, but missed and only wounded him. After this failure they ran away quickly, only one jumped the watchman intending to take his weapon from him. He was unsuccessful; he also ran but not far. The watchman got up and shot him. Walodin had erred. Four were running to the right but Walodin to the left. He turned around, wanted to join his comrades but was shot. Then the watchman aimed at Malavuschin but the shot missed him. A drover rode sideways somewhat ahead; the guard thought he wanted to flee also, so shot both him and his horse. This was related by the drovers who saw the whole thing.

This had happened during Iwanowski's furlough. After being freed in 1945, Iwanowski was married to a Maria Scharowa. They already had a child, a girl. They spent their furlough in the Ukraine with her mother. On the return trip to the central authority [headquarters], they wanted to transfer Iwanowski to the penal camp. He refused the transfer. When he got home he heard what had happened and came to us. He related that Puschkarow had begged him to take over the penal camp. He had refused because, of course, he did not know what had happened.

Iwanowski said, “My Maria asks that I should drive to Puschkarow and agree to take over the camp. She's afraid that you two could both go to ruin [be killed] at the end of your imprisonment.”

We could not dissuade him or advise him. He had a wife and child; he had to decide for himself. Klimow was convinced that he would allow himself to be transferred. [He said], “Maria won't let him alone. She was with you at Belly Luk and knows what you did for Iwanowski. She told it to me herself, how when he was freed that you gave him new boots and other things; where you were convinced you would never meet each other again.”

Iwanowski agreed to take over the penal camp under one condition: to utilize Klimow and me as Masters in the penal camp. Puschkarow gave him written permission. We took only the necessities of our belongings. We went on foot the nine km to Belly Luk. On the way, a nurse gave me a heated thermometer. She was one of those who had come with the White Russians in 1946 and had worked for a time in my division. We rode all night on the train. Toward morning we came to the station. The penal camp was five km further on.



## Penal Camp

With me, from Belly Luk, there were an additional 21 men transferred to the penal camp. Most of them were young men, some even minors. They formerly worked in my division in Belly Luk. In the *tepluschka* [group] there had been already a man from another camp. As soon as the doors [on the train] had been closed behind us, he sat down next to me and was about to investigate my pockets. I grabbed his hand tightly and asked him what he wanted. "You have made a mistake," I said, "investigate your own pockets, not mine." My colleague heard the commotion but could not see as it was as dark as in a sack. Someone called out, "What's the matter?" I said, "Not a thing - all is in order."

We were en route all night. At 8 a.m. we arrived at the penal camp station. We were unloaded; no escorts from the camp had arrived - only one person to fetch the mail. He had no rifle, only a revolver.

The chief of the *tepulschka* handed him our roster and said, "Take over these 23 men."

He refused, saying, "I have no authority to do it and I have no rifle."

The chief shoved the packet into the mail bag and drove off. What could he do? There he stood with 23 criminals. He took his revolver in his right hand, the mail bag in his left hand and said, "If anybody is thinking of fleeing, I'll shoot without warning."

We had to walk five km to the camp. The stranger [from the train] walked next to me, in the second row from the front. When we had walked a km he asked me whether I had anything to eat. "I am an escapee. They captured me and I'm hungry." I gave him 500 grams of bread. He held it tightly against his breast, thanked me, said farewell and was gone. The right side of the path was overgrown with bushes; he took advantage of these. Before our "guard" had drawn his revolver, the fellow was in full flight. The "guard" shot and missed his mark. Only his mail sack suffered - it had a hole in it. We all had to kneel down. He warned us that whoever stood up or turned around or spoke, he would shoot. He stood behind us with his revolver in his outstretched hand. After a time he asked who that was anyway? I related how we had met.

Quite a period of time passed. I finally dared to speak to him. "How long are we going to kneel yet? We are all from Belly Luk, not one of us will flee. I, as their previous master, will guarantee it," I said. He allowed himself to be convinced.

We continued on our way. Suddenly he screamed, "Sit down!"

He fired three times into the air. It didn't take long before three riders appeared. One of them dismounted and took charge of

us. Our “guard” rode with the other two to show where the escapee had gone. After their return, they drove us to the camp.

In the camp we lined up in the order that we were entered on the roster. I had barely stepped through the door when someone tore my things out of my hand. Four men lifted me up and carried me from the gate further into the camp. I was somewhat frightened and asked, “What do you want with me?”

“Master,” one of them replied, “haven’t you recognized me? I am Kazanzew.”

“But why are you carrying me?” I asked.

“To honor you,” he replied.

So they carried me another 15 meters, then they put me down. I shook hands with each one of them and thanked them. We talked awhile and did not notice when a free, employed watchman came; he took me by the arm and led me to isolation. My belongings stayed with my friends.

In isolation the fellow opened a door and shoved me in. It was a room 60 x 40 cm where one could only stand. Luckily, after three hours a guard took me for a health inspection. When I came out of the clinic, a man was standing behind the door. He said, “Follow me” but I was to follow some meters distant from him. I looked around and noticed that Kazanzew with his comrades was standing guard at various places. I followed my jailer; he led me to one barrack, then to another. In the third one lived Master Ruppert and another Dyck. There he hid me. He was the overseer/warden of the masters. He had already fetched food for me; also, Kazanzew had brought my belongings. He said, “The masters commanded that I be held in hiding until they returned from work.” He locked the door from the outside and said, “If anyone knocks, don’t answer.”

After the end of the work period, the masters came and assured themselves everything was in order. They went on to the office. The warden, Dima, procured supper for us. The door was always locked. During the meal they placed me behind the table; on one side Ruppert and on the other, the second Dyck. Dima with his back to the door, stood watch. We had a good beginning.

But the warden was there, looking around the entire time and finally found me. “Come,” he said, “this is no place for you - [you belong in] the BUR (barracks for maximum security).”

Ruppert entered into the conversation: “He”s not going to the BUR.”

Dima asserted, “Yes, he is going. He is high risk.”

Ruppert said, “After the meal we’re going to the chief.”

Dima insisted, “No, I’m taking him right away.”

At this moment the door opened. There stood Thiessen. Thiessen asked, “What”s the matter here?” He greeted me with an embrace and immediately became involved. “Dyck?” he said,

“Dyck is not going to the BUR. After the meal we’re going to the chief, Dyck in the lead, then myself and behind me Ruppert and Dirna and then the overseer.” I was under guard so he [Dima] could not grab me.

When we arrived at headquarters, Ruppert said, “I’ll go and report to the chief.” He came back quickly and said to us, “Come to the chief.”

I greeted the chief who said, “When did you arrive?”

I replied, “Today at 9 o’clock.” I didn’t get any further; he said he knew everything. Iwanowski had telephoned ahead.

The chief then said, “He’s coming to me in three or four days to work as operations chief.” He turned to the overseer and said, “Free Klimow immediately from the BUR. You are in charge of the security operations but here I’m in charge. Go and send me Naratschik.”

Naratschik came quickly and the chief said to him, “It’s your responsibility that Dyck and Klimow have food and housing until Iwanowski arrives. Understood?” Naratschik replied that he did.

Three days later Iwanowski arrived. He had received from Central Chief Puschkarow written permission to utilize Klimow and me as masters. And one further order: to free (release) Ruppert and [the other] Dyck from being under guard. He took Ruppert as his representative; [the other] Dyck was placed in charge of the horses. I took over the division from [the other] Dyck and Klimow took over from Ruppert.

Who was Thiessen? He was a Mennonite from Orenburg. We met one another in February 1938 in Camp #9. He worked as a brigadier in charge of loading railroad cars. At the end of 1941 he was accused of being an enemy of the state and a “Hitler helper.” He was sentenced to be shot; I knew nothing further until we met here at the penal camp. The reason for such punishment was that during night work a fire was lit. In order to get it going faster, workers took bearing grease out of the axle mechanisms of the railroad cars. From one such box the workers, without knowing it, had removed all the oil packings and the axle was left without any lubricant. On the way to Gorki the railroad car caught on fire. Later his sentence was overturned and he received three years and penal camp. On 20 November 1947 Thiessen and I walked out of the penal camp together to our freedom.

Who was Kazanzew? He and his comrade (I’ve forgotten his name) counted themselves as part of my division back in 1941 in Camp 24. At that time an order came out of Moscow that all arrestees who refused to participate in work were to be shot without warning. So, I learned, two men from GPU (State Political Authority) were to be sent to the camp. If Kazanzew and his comrade didn’t work, they were to be shot. I managed to warn

them through a messenger and directed them to which branch they should work until I arrived with the two from the GPU. In this way I saved their lives. (Something like that “criminals” never forget.)

Sometime later I passed the BUR (maximum security barracks). I heard someone call my name. I stopped and from within the BUR, someone called, “Master, are you here on account of us?” It was my escapees from Camp 17.

After work I went to the chief and said, “My escapees are in the BUR. Why are they eating bread for nothing? They can earn it for themselves. They were record breakers [more than fulfilled their daily quotas]. Give them to me for my division.”

The chief responded, “Won’t they flee again?”

“No,” I replied.

He pushed a sheet of paper and pen to me saying, “Write that it is being done on your responsibility.”

I wrote and when I finished I asked him, “Should I also write “until the end of May”?”

He laughed and said, “I know that without your reminding me.” He sent for the overseer and commanded that the escapees be freed from the BUR and transferred to me. We went with him to the BUR. He told them of the change and said, “Pick up your belongings and follow me.”

When they saw me they were overjoyed. I asked them whether they would agree to work with me. In unison they replied, “Yes.” I said, “Then come.” I led them to the barracks. I told them that I had to give my solemn pledge for them.

One asked, “When is your time up?” I said in December.

One said, “By May you will be long gone.” I understood what he was trying to say. I gave each one my hand and wished them a good trip in May.

They told me what had happened to Malavuschin during their flight/escape. The shot that the guard had fired at him had wounded him. Because of that he fell behind. They looked back at him; he held his right hand to his head and with his left motioned them to run on. After they had been recaptured they went back to the place but there was no trace of him. Had he gone another way or been eaten by a bear? No one knows. When I took these three out of the BUR there still remained 11 men.

The BUR chief was named Pawlow. He also had ten years. I knew him from Belly Luk. Back in that camp he was a *diensthabender* [duty official]. He was very rough with the prisoners. It was said of him that he followed everything with the sentence, “It is a threat.” In German it reads he will never get to see freedom [he will be killed before the end of his sentence]. This judgment condemnation was carried out in this BUR. He received 11 knife stabs. From each person/prisoner, one stab. If I had not gotten those three from the BUR and also, if Klimow and I had not

been pardoned from the BUR, there would have been five more stabs. Whether we would have wanted to do it or not, someone would have forced us to. This was what Maria Iwanowska was afraid of; that's why she left her husband no peace.

## Freedom and the Road to Siberia

On 21 November 1947 at 10 a.m. our group came out of the penal camp to the central camp. We received billeting in the barracks for those who were being freed. Here we had to remain until the end of our sentences. My termination was at midnight 26 November 1947. Because of exceeding the quota of my division in the penal camp, 20 days were subtracted from my sentence. Of the 3632 days of my arrest the last five days were the only days when I was not under guard. I must admit that it wasn't comfortable for me - that there was no guard walking behind me with a rifle. These five days were a little eternity for me. I was accustomed to working without rest every day from early to late.

There was a Latvian in the penal camp working in my division. Several days before I was freed, he came to me and asked, "Master, do you have money to get home?"

I responded, "No, where would I have gotten any money? We got only food and clothing for our work."

He said, "I can help you. At the time of my arrest I had a great deal of money on me. It was taken from me and a receipt was issued. Come, we'll go to the bookkeeper and have him issue you 800 rubles from my account."

In order to shorten the time I went to the barber shop and lounged around the market without buying anything. I had no money; I didn't think any more about the 800 rubles. I had no faith that they would give them to me. But, because I had nothing else to do, I went to the headquarters in order to check. To my astonishment I soon had 800 rubles in my pocket!

On the 4th day I was called to the central authority by Puschkarow who said, "Now, Dyck, do you expect your freedom?"

For fun I said, "No, not yet - not for 36 hours."

Puschkarow asked, "And where do you want to go?"

I responded, "To Siberia to where my wife and son were dragged."

Puschkarow said, "But I want to keep you here."

The blood rose in my head. He noticed my reaction and said, "I have no right to keep you here. I've discussed this with the head of a *kolchoses* (collective farm); he would take you as a member. After two or three months at your request he would

release you. After that I would have the full right to take you on for work.”

I answered, “I am going [to Siberia] and if it doesn’t suit me I will return with my wife and son.”

Puschkarow: “I can order your family to come here. I would drive myself [to get them].”

Refusing this offer was the biggest mistake I ever made in my entire life.

On 16 November 1947 at midnight a low window was opened. We were called out alphabetically. Just before me a man said his name; immediately a side door opened and two men appeared, took him under the arms and led him away. That was a scare for all of us. Whom could fate yet strike? When it was my turn I called my name. [The clerk] looked at me and asked, “Why are you still here?”

I said, “Where am I supposed to be?”

She said, “Back in May 1941 Article 58.10.10 was recognized as false and no other sentence was tacked on for you. I don’t know what kind of a document I can give you. Wait until I’ve finished with the others.”

During this time one other man was shunted aside. Now only I remained, was not shunted aside and also had no documents. I looked through the window. The woman was not to be seen. It didn’t take long, however, until she returned with a high official. He asked me the same question, didn’t say anything and went back to his office.

I asked the woman, “What now?”

She shrugged her shoulders. Lucky for me, though, the official returned and said to her, “Write that from today on he is free and his right to vote is not withdrawn.” With such a piece of paper I went to my freedom.

When I had been transferred from Camp 17, I only took the most necessary of my clothing along. Now I had to return once more to fetch my belongings - 110 km. I went to the supply camp. There I met the expeditor of Camp 17 and I rode with him to the camp in a railroad supply car. At the camp gate the watchman came toward me and asked, “Are you coming back?” I responded, “No, I only want to pick up my belongings.” And I showed him my paper. He wished me much luck in the future, opened the gate and allowed me to go into the camp (for which he had no right without permission). I took my clothing, went to the kitchen to say goodbye to the cooks, expressed my thanks for the good food that they had furnished Klimow and me in isolation. They gave me some food to take along. Thus I left the camp forever.

But I still had to go to Belly Luk. It was nine km. I had gone no further than two km when a locomotive came up on me. The locomotive engineer braked and asked me where I was going. I said, "To Belly Luk to the *tepluschka* station." The engineer said for me to get in as he was going there. I hesitated; after all, he might hit me up the side of the head with the key as I climbed aboard and take everything and be on his way. He noticed my hesitation and said, "You don't recognize me?"

"No," I replied.

"Think back to June 1943 when at Camp 13 an *etapp* arrived. They came to the barracks looking for a locomotive engineer. I volunteered. We went to the chief. You recommended me. Since that time I've been working on this locomotive. You saved my life. I would never have survived in the forest."

I told him that I wanted to go from Belly Luk with the *tepluschka* that night and up to the Kukui 2. There my comrade lived. I had promised him I would visit him when I was freed. As we approached Belly Luk I prepared to disembark.

The engineer asked, "Do you have to go into the camp?"

"No," I said.

The engineer said, "Stay on board then and I'll take you to Kukui; it's only 40 km. More than that I can't do for you but I will do what I can."

Through this arrangement I saved a great amount of time. Still, this very same evening I had ridden on to the railroad station Suchobeswodnaja. At the railroad station I met a man who, after his being freed, also wished to go to Semipalatinsk. We bought tickets all the way to the end but stopped at every big city: Kirow, Swerdlowsk, Omsk. Why did we do that? We wanted to get reacquainted with the outside world after ten years and, also, my comrade had *Bastschuhe* on his feet. We wanted to buy him some boots or shoes but things didn't work out as we had planned.

As we checked in with the cashier to give notice of our stopover, a military policeman came over, pointed to a place where we were to sit for a time and forbade us a single step out of the railroad station. Thus it also was in Swerdlowsk. In Omsk it was somewhat easier. We were not allowed to go into the city but we were permitted to walk on the *perron* (platform). The railroad platform was fenced off from the city by an iron-railed fence. Behind the fence toward the city was a market place. We noticed that there was a man selling boots. We observed him and were convinced that he was a scoundrel. We promised ourselves to buy these boots without money. I took money from my comrade; he went over to the fence and called to the salesman. He handed my comrade a boot through the railing to try on. By the time he had untied his *Bastschuhe*, I came to the other side (about two meters from him) and asked about the size and price. I held the money in

my hand so he could see it. He gave me the second boot to try on. I dallied long enough so that my comrade had disappeared. "I'll buy them - give me the other one," I said. He turned away from me but couldn't see his first buyer. At this I cried out, "There he goes, I'll run him down." And I ran with the boot and my money after my comrade. Thus we had bought a pair of boots.

After the purchase, we went to the railroad restaurant in order to celebrate our purchase. We had ordered a soup of mashed potatoes and 100 grams schnapps; there was no bread. We paid with 80 rubles. We continued our journey on the next train.

On 4 December 1947 at 4 p.m. I arrived at Tschany station. My comrade continued on. On this date Siberia greeted me at -40 degrees Celsius [temperature this low is the same in Fahrenheit].

Later on I was often in the city of Omsk. Each time that I passed by the place I thought about how many years ago I had purchased boots there.

I found my family in the greatest poverty. Why had I refused the proposal of Puschkarow? But it was too late.

I was called to the police station and had to sign that I was cognizant of the fact that should I leave my assigned living quarters without permission, I would be punished with 20 years imprisonment. Also, I was required to check in twice a month. This was my long-awaited freedom, out of the rain and into the downpour. Not until 29 December 1955 was I freed from police supervision but not from being held in contempt for being a German until 1994 when I left Russia and came to Germany as a Russian-German.

From 14 December 1947 until 26 December 1947 I lived in a village (Semsainka) where my family had been living. Then I was sent by the state police to a commune in the 3rd division where there was a common labor pool which bred and grazed cattle; also, the feed for them was raised here. Thus I worked at various jobs until June 1955. Then I was assigned from time to time as an administrator but without authority. Not until 10 May 1956 after being freed from *Kommandatur* [police supervision] was the order written [so that I had the authority from an administrator]. On 10 July 1958 I was transferred to the 7th division as a superintendent. In this place was a large political organization. The Communists did not want to tolerate that a German (and one who had been in prison ten years) would be their superintendent. The district party organization suggested that I should write an application of my own free will asking to be relieved of this command [position]. This time I looked for work myself on a livestock commune, also, as administrator. I worked in this business from 28 May 1960 until 18 September 1961.



Even in the latter days of this period the district party secretary gave me no peace. He wanted to send me to another commune as a division superintendent. I hesitated; I told him that I was not a party member but he insisted, "With us you are regarded as a leader." Thus I again worked as a division superintendent from 19 September 1961 until 18 March 1964, and then again until 23 June 1968 in a different division. After a quarrel with the director, I wrote a resignation and was dismissed. I found work with the Rayon Machinery-Tractor Station as building supervisor/master builder. In this capacity with the MTS I worked until 19 April 1988. Then 23 January 1994 I emigrated with my wife to Germany where we arrived 24 January 1994 at 11 a.m.

From all this one can understand that under the Communist government we had no rights and possessed no property. Everything was "ours" not "mine."

Gustav Dyck



From *Sketch Book No. 2*, 1836, by Abraham Claassen (1825-1910)

### 3

## The Memoirs of Gustav Dyck Part II: My Life's Course, 1947 - 1994

### Arrival in Siberia

On 4 December 1947 I arrived at the railroad depot at Tchany Station in the district of Novosibirsk. I went to the waiting room in order to inquire how I might get to the village of Sem-saimka where my wife was living. At a table two men were sitting with a bottle of vodka in front of them, already nearly empty. I turned to them and spoke. When I named the village, one of them asked whom I wished to contact.

I replied, "Cornee [Cornelius] Wiens."

One said, "We are from that village; Cornee is here with the MTS (tractor station). I'll take you to him. We missed our train while sleeping and it will be three hours before the next one comes. Leave your luggage here. It's not far."

Twenty minutes later Cornee and I met. I recognized him right away but he didn't know me. He looked at me and asked, "Who are you?"

"I? I am Gustav."

He said not a word but ran away. After a short time he returned, put his inventory papers aside, turned to me, grabbed my arm and said, "Come. I've gotten the rest of the day off." And we left.

We took my things, left them with an acquaintance and proceeded on foot along the way. It was already growing dark. He asked, "Will you make it? It's already -40 degrees and the village is 20 km away."

I answered, "Where I was it's already been -60 degrees this year and I'm accustomed to walking."

We walked a stretch along the railroad tracks, then we had to turn off to the left along the road that led into the village. There Cornee noticed that someone was already driving down the road. "You walk slowly, I will cut off his path," he said and he ran off. I, of course, also ran. When the driver saw that two men were running toward him, he cried out in fear and struck his horses to make them run. I overtook Cornee and grabbed the reins of the horse. Cornee came up and recognized the driver. It was a woman from the village.

"Natascha!", Cornee exclaimed, "from where are you coming alone in the dark of the night?"

She replied, "I'm not alone. My husband got as drunk as a pig. I have covered him with hay so he doesn't freeze to death."

So we drove with her into the village. She had to turn so we got off the wagon. The moon was shining brightly. I pointed to the right with my hands and said, "Over there in that mud hut is where you live."

Astonished, Cornee exclaimed, "How do you know that?"

I replied, "I saw it in a dream in 1938 in the month of June; also, the road is familiar to me. I couldn't remember from where. Now I know it. I saw the trees next to the road in the same dream. Also, the door in the house is so low that I must stoop. Edgardt was so big." (I showed my hand against my breast to indicate the height of my son.)

Cornee went into the house. I remained standing outside. When his wife saw him she was frightened and she asked, "What happened, are you sick?"

Cornee replied, "No, I am not alone; another man is with me. Can we keep him overnight?"

His wife answered, "Where do we put him?"

Then my wife entered the conversation saying, "In such cold he certainly cannot stay under the open heavens, let him come in."

Cornee opened the door and motioned me to come in. I entered. My wife knew me immediately. Without any words she hugged my neck. Edgardt, who had been standing behind his mother, disappeared.

Katharina called to him, "Edgardt, where are you? Your papa has come home."

Edgardt came out of a room with a photo of me in his hand. He looked at me and softly said, "Yes, that's my papa." He wanted to be sure because he had often been told that when a strange man arrives and his mama says, "It is your papa" then he must believe it because he, of course, wouldn't recognize him.

Thus I met my family in the greatest poverty: after nine years, 11 months and 20 days - not on the Volga but rather 3000 km into Siberia. Cornee said, "I'll take a horse tomorrow and we'll drive to Tchany to the Kommendantura. You must report within 24 hours, otherwise, they will arrest you again. I'll stay at the MTS and you drive back."

The next day he drove me to the Kommendantura and returned to his workplace as he had said. A Kommendant led me to the boss. He requested my pass.

I said, "I have no pass" and handed him the papers I had. He read them through several times, looked at me and asked, "That's all they gave you?"

"Yes."

The boss: "According to the rules they were required to give you a pass good for three months."

In the papers it was stated that I had been released and that my right to vote had not been withdrawn.

He had me sign a register and warned me not to leave the village without permission. He said he would tell the village council I had the right to vote.

Cornee and I had unhitched the horse in a livery stable. When I entered the building, several men had recently arrived. They were sitting at a table drinking tea. They knew by my clothing that I was not a local resident. They were interested in whence I had come. I told them in a few words from where. Then they introduced themselves: the director (leader) of a Soviet agricultural operation with three divisions, the leader of the 3rd division, a veterinarian from the central division, and the fourth was a policeman of the agricultural division.

The leader of the 3rd division turned to me and said, "Come to my department. With us you will get money for your work."

I replied, "I'm forbidden to leave the village."

The policeman spoke up: "That's no concern of yours. I'll secure the permission even yet today."

I agreed. We said goodbye.

In December we had to vote for Stalin again. After that I left. On 27 December a man came with two sleds and we drove to the Soviet Agricultural Department (Otretschensky). It was 65 km distant from the railway station.

## Third Division

At the 3rd Division [site] we received a dwelling, a little house with four rooms of 12 square meters each with ceilings so low that one could hardly stand up straight. It was, of course, better with four square meters for each of us rather than five men in one square meter as in a prison cell. I received some money in advance so that we could buy ourselves bread, potatoes, etc. This figured out to be 400 grams [of bread] per person. It was very little but better than being without bread as Katharina and Edgardt had been living before.

At the command of the director, I was employed as a laborer on 27 December 1947. At my disposal I received an ox (for pulling), a sled, a hayfork, a rope and a snow shovel. The brigadier of the field brigade, named Mursin, sent me out into the field to dig the haystacks out of the snow, load them onto the sled and bring them to the dairy. I had no idea why he gave me this work. After a short while I knew. He wanted to shoot two rabbits with one shot: he had a great hatred for the Germans. Secondly, the men who were supposed to bring the hay to the dairy farm each had one cow. They purposely left the rest lying and later in the dark of night they fetched it for their own cows. The director knew that if he had sent one of them, they would have come back empty. That I earned very little for this work was OK with him.

I did this a second day, but, on the third day I said to him, "I'm not going to pick up any more hay leftovers. I have a family and I must earn money [to support them]." I demanded another ox so I could work together with the others. They backed me up. Thus, I received a second draft ox and became a drover.

So I worked for four years at various jobs - a short while with oxen and then with horses.

In February 1953 I became the brigadier of a construction brigade. In April 1954 I took over additionally, a small brick kiln.

After that there followed an order by the director that I should be named simultaneously as the representative of the leaders of the 3rd Division. At this time the 1st leader of the division was transferred to another place and another director was sent to us. His name was Saratschakow. Also, the brigadier of the field brigade (Mursin) was also exchanged; his family name was Wasilenko.

As brigadier of the construction brigade, I worked until May 1955. The leader, Saratschakow, was a sickly man and I asked that he be dismissed. He was dismissed and I, his representative, took over the 3rd Division. Thus I worked as representative until 10 May 1956. From then until 10 July 1958, I worked as leader and was transferred to the 7th Division.

Katharina worked as a calf caretaker. After July 1948 she was furloughed.

In June 1948 we had built ourselves a little clay house with one room and kitchen. After four years I exchanged our little house for a house of wood with two rooms and a kitchen. [Gustav, Katharina and five children lived in this wood house.] In 1956 when I became leader of the division, I sold the house and we moved into a government-owned house.

In the division there was a [Communist] party cell of seven members. The cell secretary was Mursin who had formerly been the field brigadier. Each of the Communists could not believe, that I, a German non-party member, and in addition to that, a prisoner for 10 years, was in charge of them. Thus, most of them became my enemies. A short explanation: The Communist ideology embodied the concept of unmasking their subordinate enemies and vile persons. The workers knew that and they lived in constant fear. For example, the workers didn't dare drink a little milk - it was that way in everything.

I, as a leader, had a horse at my disposal. Those leaders who preceded me drove out to the brigades in order to check on how the work was going and to give direction. I rode. One day I rode out to a milking brigade early in the morning. When I appeared at the edge of the forest I noticed that the chief milkmaid was hiding something behind a wagon wheel. I dismounted, went over to the wagon and took from the hiding place a small bottle of milk. When I saw the fear in the eyes of the women, I was sorry that I had done it.

I turned to the chief milkmaid, made a very serious face and said, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? That old man herds your cows for 24 hours without rest and you give him only 150 grams of milk? He has a large family and no cow. From now on at each milking, you give him as much as he can drink and don't act as you have today - as though you had stolen it. If the farm leader (he was a Communist) sees it, then send him to me."

This case is an example of one in many. In a short time I had all the workers on my side. One day the secretary of the party Buro of the Central Division came. He showed me a letter:

“Here is a complaint against you which has come to me from cell secretary Mursin.”

He gave it to me to read. Mursin wrote that I had turned away from the party cell and was making all business decisions without the party members. The party cell was assembled, the letter was read to them and I was asked what I had to say about it.

My answer was: I was responsible for carrying out and fulfilling the orders and directions of the director. That gave me the right to determine all business questions myself. I added to that that I had not requested this work and if Comrade Mursin wanted to be the leader, I was ready to give the division to him immediately.

The secretary said, “I will give everything to the director for his decision.”

Two days later Mursin was transferred to another division.

The first of January 1957 there came a directive from Moscow that the collective operations that were in the vicinity of Sowchose were to be attached to the Sowchose collective. Our Utretschenski Sowchos took over seven collective operations and founded five more divisions.

## **7<sup>th</sup> Division at Tschany**

As previously mentioned, there were seven Kolchose (communes) attached to the Utretschenski Sowchos. The instruction/direction established four commissions which had the obligation of taking over the Kolchose. In one commune, I was appointed chairman. I took over three Kolchose out of three villages not far from the 3rd Division. The villages were: Wasilewka, Tagan and Suchaputny. Wasilewka was attached to the 3rd Division. Suchaputny, with Tagan, comprised the 7th Division. The leader of this division was an outsider (that is, was sent there). His name was Bilezky from the Kreis Party Buro.

After one year our director was replaced and the leader of the 7th Division was named leader. Now the question arose, whom to appoint as leader? Somebody from this village just wouldn't do because in this village half the residents were related. Therefore, a foreigner (someone from the outside) had to be appointed. Fate chose me. Thus, I became leader of the 7th Division on 10 July 1958. The director came driving up to me in order to report that the party secretary of the “Rayon Committee”, at his proposal, had appointed me to take over the 7th Division.

I, in short, declined, saying, "I'd rather start at the beginning hauling hay with oxen than take over the 7th."

"Why?" was his question.

"There is a party cell with over 20 members. They will not tolerate that I, a non-party member, be their leader."

The director said, "We talked it over in the Rayon Committee and we will support you."

What could I do? If I worked against the decision of the party committee it would be my downfall. So, I agreed.

We drove with him, allegedly, to acquaint me with the business operations. In this village there were two streets. As we drove on one, he said, "I want to show you how the seven chairman of this Kolchose live."

As we drove by a big house, he pointed to it and said, "There lives one of the seven, now going on further I'll show you where they all live." The last one had a big house in the process of being built. The director said, "With this one you will have your first unpleasantness. He is the party cell secretary and he'll soon need this and that to complete his house."

For a while everything went normally, the fieldwork and the cattle raising. Even the party secretary at the party meetings referred to the progress of my leadership in his reports.

In November he came to my office and talked of the business operation and also about the construction of his house. In order to complete it he needed four cubic meters of boards. We didn't have a sawmill in our division, sawing was done only in the Central Division. I handed him a sheet of paper and told him to write a request to the director so that when I met him I'd ask him to sign it.

At this moment the mechanic (also a party member) came in and said, "That's unnecessary trouble. I just came from Central and was there when the director instructed the bookkeeper that he was not to authorize a single cubic meter (of wood) except for renovation of the cattle barns. I propose that you authorize the boards. We're now starting to repair the tractors. I can only get spare parts from Kazakhstan for cash money. Give me the money and I'll give you my party word that our division will be the first to complete the repairs."

The secretary said, "I can give you 200 rubles immediately and the rest several days later." He gave the mechanic the 200 rubles.

I didn't involve myself in their business. Thus one deal was concluded: one got the boards but the other, however, got no more money. Several days, even weeks went by; my mechanic didn't drive to Kazakhstan. I asked him why not and why he hadn't paid the money. He didn't respond immediately but after a time he said,



“You certainly heard how, in his last report at the party meeting he accused me of non-existing things which the party organization could no longer tolerate and that the whole business was falling apart right before their eyes. He also said that I had not been at the last meeting. He is trying to ruin us both but he will not succeed. I’ll take the money out of the treasury and go and bring everything that’s necessary. And how will the money be returned to the treasury? That’s my problem.”

An explanation: In Kazakhstan they gave no receipts that money had been paid. The spare parts were stolen and therefore no trace could be left. The mechanic brought back everything he needed and the tractors were repaired on time.

Now there was the assignment for us to oust the secretary from his house. Lucky for us he helped us do it. In May 1959 the secretary of the Central Party Buro came and handed me a letter, saying in effect “Be Notified. This evening there will be a party meeting which you must attend.”

He read it loudly and then turned to me saying, “What do you say to that?”

I replied, “The biggest part of what is written contains the truth: 1) Yes, I am, I was, and I remain a German, 2) I am not a party member and 3) I was arrested and held for 10 years.” (It should be said to state that I had been innocently isolated for 10 years.) Central Secretary Kruschev admitted that. Why is that still counted against me as a crime? 4) That one calls me Hitler - I’m not agreeable to that. Yes, my ancestors came from Germany, but they had no connection to Hitler. Hitler was an Austrian and the Communist Ratz who signed that document, his ancestors were Austrian, so he doesn’t have to hang Hitler on me, he can keep him for himself. 5) Can I work as leader of this division? I didn’t decide that, it was decided at the direction of the party bureau and endorsed by the Rayon Committee.”

The end result was that Ratz was transferred to the 3rd Division and another cell secretary was elected. I continued to work as before. The workers were on my side. Only some of the Communists from time to time made unpleasantness for me.

The workers, former members of the collective commune (Kolchos ), worked the entire year without payment for their work. First of all, all the State plans had to be fulfilled; then, if anything remained of the harvests, it was divided. The projected plans were so high that only a small amount was left over. Also, there were years when nothing was divided. Thus, they lived from their own little share. Each family was allowed to have its own small allotment: one cow, three sheep, one hog, with an increase up to 20 head of poultry and a small plot of land. The cow and the sheep could graze on the pasture in the summer and in the winter, they were allowed hay. But one could not feed hogs and poultry

hay, so they were compelled to steal [to provide for them]. If one was caught stealing, one was punished with a 10-year sentence. But what would a father not risk in order not to allow his children to starve? Thus it remained, when they became Soviet workers. When they received money, there was no food to be purchased. They had to be especially careful that they were not caught by the brigadiers, the leaders of the granaries where the feed was kept, the directors of the Kolchoses or village council leaders of the division. In these warm little seats everyone was a Party member. The latter took as much as they wanted, without cost; they didn't have to worry about the law: it was not written for them. They were punished by the party for one and the same crime but they were simply said to have made a mistake and received a Party reprimand. The non-Party member, however, received a 10-year sentence for such a theft. On the order of Stalin in August, 1933, one was to receive 10 years in prison for petty thievery.

In regard to this, I would like to describe a small episode. On a winter day I was driving with my wife to her brother's home where we were to be guests. He lived in the Second Division, 12 km. away. One km. from our division, not far from the road, the Kolchos had built several granaries. Here the feed was cleaned and the chaff was stored in the granaries as fodder for the hog operation. When we drove by I noticed a horse [but] I couldn't see the sled in the darkness. I went to investigate. In the glow of my flashlight, stood a man by the name of Iljaschenko. In his left hand he held a sack, and with his right, he shoveled fodder into the sack. Out of fear, he said not a word and let the sack and scoop fall [to the ground].

I took the sack, held it open to him and said, "You should shovel with both hands so it will go faster."

When the sack was full, I told him to tie it up and asked him if he had only one sack.

"Two," was the only word he said. We filled the second sack and I helped him load it up.

"Now, drive ahead or us and, at our house, stop," I instructed him. I went up to him. He very softly squeezed the words out, "Where shall I unload?" I whispered softly in his ear, "At home for your cattle. Be careful that no one sees you."

I could describe many additional episodes but there is no point in it. I simply wanted to show with this example why the workers where I worked entrusted me with their fate. In contrast with the leaders of the Party Members, they lived in constant fear that something would be charged against them.

In May 1960, the director came driving up to me; he greeted me as always, but I noticed that he was agitated. We went into the office.

He closed the door and said, "I'm bringing you no good news. Today at 9:00 o'clock, the secretary of the Rayon Party Committee telephoned me and told me that you should write a statement of resignation because he [the secretary] is no longer in a position to protect you. The committee in the higher party circles are writing him that the Central Committee in Moscow could even put me behind bars."

Thus, I was dismissed at my "own" request on 28 May 1960.

In the Rayon Center of Tschany, I bought myself a little house and sought employment where no workers would be placed under my jurisdiction. I found such work quickly in the Handelszentrale [trade center] of Tschany. I worked as a warehouse clerk quietly beginning the 14 June 1960. Nobody requested a work quota. Unfortunately, the job didn't last long. By the end of June I was summoned to the Rayon Committee before the Party Secretary.

He greeted me in a friendly manner and began: "I've heard that you're working as a warehouse clerk; that's not work for you. We have decided to offer you other work where you can earn more. Not far from here is a fur-bearing animal farm. There we need a leader who has business experience."

I argued with him that I was not a Party member and could not be at the disposal of the Party Committee, and also, I liked my present work. From my point of view, it was not decent of me to ask to be released from my job after only 14 days. He indicated I didn't have to do that [give notice]; he had already given notice that I was being released, per the decision of the Party Committee. So I quit on 4 July 1960.

Now I was leader of a fur animal farm from the 1 July 1960. (I became farm leader four days before I left the warehouse central.) Yes, that's the way it was in Communist Russia. One didn't have to worry about one's fate: the Party Committee took care of it.

We continued to live in Tschany. The animal farm was three km. away but I had a horse at my disposal for going to work in the mornings and returning in the evenings.

The farm bred silver black and polar white foxes and domestic rabbits. In order to feed the animals, we kept 15 cows, a small field brigade and meat for the animals. I got the waste [meat products] from a meat processing plant. The workers lived on the farm, so, we built houses [for them]. Life and work proceeded normally. There was no Party cell on the farm, so, I had no enemies. In the Tschany Rayon, there also existed a hunting group. The animal farm and the hunting group were under the jurisdiction of a director. His office, with bookkeeping department, was located in Tschany.

In September, 1961, when I returned home after the work day, Katharina told me someone had been there and relayed that I should go to the Secretary of the Party Committee at 9:00 p.m. The first question was: "Isn't the work on the animal farm too easy for you? Why? You were the leader in the large Sowchosen divisions and, hence, you have experience in big business. Since the Kolchos have been attached to the Sowchosen, we are short of leaders with experience."

This time I could not accept the offer because my children needed a 10-year school.

He replied, "In this division I'm offering you there is a 10-year school. That is in the village of Feklina, the 3rd division of Sowchos "Bljutschansky." Director Kobylak will discuss it with you on Monday. I have already discussed the matter with him. You have four days' time. That should be sufficient to transfer the farm [to a new leader]. The director will let you go after the transfer." Thus, I took over the 3rd division of this Bljutschansky Sowchos on the 19 September 1961.

This division consisted of four milking brigades, one veal brigade, one calf brigade and one large field brigade and in addition to this, one chicken farm. After this former Kolchos was changed into Sowchos, the leaders were often changed, sometimes after only several months. As a result of this, the morale of the working people had fallen. The brigadiers and, also, some individual workers came to work so drunk that they couldn't even pronounce words properly. The leader from whom I took over was a mechanic. In the compartments of his desk drawers in his office, I discovered more than 100 corks from brandy bottles. Now, it became clear to me that the fish had begun to rot in his head.

When I took over the beef cattle, there were 18 fewer than were supposed to be. If they had been calves, I could have understood it because they might have died of bloating [and were not documented], but they were mature cattle. I asked the farm leaders how something like that was possible. They shrugged their shoulders and the question remained unanswered. I didn't need one because it was clear to me: they had sold them and drunk up the money. It was also clear to me that if I reported this loss both leaders would end up behind bars for long years.

In the old Siberian villages a large portion of the inhabitants are united through family relationships. Being aware of that, I would have had half of the inhabitants as enemies [if I reported the loss]. I indicated that I was taking over the head count that was tallied in the books. In that way, I signed the document [tally]. With that, I had the majority of the residents on my side. I was not in favor of calling the residents together to a general gathering in order to discuss general questions, as was the

practice of the authorities. I had an important question I had to ask the workers. That was, how to control the drunkenness in the workplace. I went to them at their workplaces and discussed this with them. I required their word of honor. In a short time, the drunkenness at the workplace came to an end.

We also worked out a problem with the workers at the chicken farm. The farm was not large and always resulted in a loss. In October, the electrification of the 3rd Division was to end; also, the chicken farm was added on. It was 2 km. from the village. Up to now, they sold 1000 chickens annually from the hatchery. I asked their opinion about this: if I would send carpenters to repair the brooder houses and enlarge them, in January we would take 3000 chickens from the hatchery. What would they think of that? I suggested that the rooster chicks, we'd sell and the hen count we'd increase from 3000 to 10,000. Their answer: it would be good if this were possible. In the course of one year the chicken farm made an enormous gain.

Every Soviet business and collective received yearly plans indicating what and how much they had to furnish the State: grain, milk, meat, eggs, etc. In the summer of 1961 there was very little hay mowed which was the chief feed for the cattle. Every manager was compelled to fulfill his assignment for the year. The meat combine was not prepared to butcher and process that many beef cattle [that is, what was required by the State]. From the department head, the business managers received the directive to slaughter and process the beef themselves. In order to transport more easily, the hindquarters were separated from the front quarters. The first time we delivered the meat of 20 head (40 quarters - 20 front and 20 hind quarters). I, myself, drove the truck. The meat was unloaded and weighed again. The receiver wrote down the weight. Then, I went with him into his office where he wrote out a delivery receipt for me.

"How many head did you have?" he asked.

"Forty," I answered without hesitation.

I took the delivery receipt and drove off.

When I arrived home, I first went to the farm director, handed him the receipt which he read, looked at me and asked, "Forty head?"

"Yes," I answered, "twenty plus 18 and two more. Now, put the papers in order so that the reality matches the entries in the ledger."

Thus, I had gotten rid of the 18 [missing] head that had hung around my neck since taking over the operation.

Through a certain person I got into a conflict with the [creamery] director. In every division there was a so-called creamery station. Here, the milk was delivered, the butterfat content determined, separated, and the skimmed milk was given to

the calves. The cream was taken to the department cheese factory and converted to butter. The wife of the director worked in the creamery division and was the aunt of our director. The brigadiers of the milk brigade were always quarreling with him. They also came to me and complained that he consistently lowered the percent of fat content. (The fat percent had to be  $3/5$  and was computed liter by liter for the milkmaids: when lower, then less, when higher, then more. Therefore, the fat content played a great role for them.) One evening the brigadier (family name Alexandrov) came to me.

“Come with me,” he said, “see for yourself”

We arrived and I asked, “What’s the matter?”

Everybody asserted he was right. I turned to Alexandrov, [told him to] make a test and to Gaganowsky (family name) I said, “You observe that he’s doing it correctly.” Another test was made which Alexandrov observed. We put the two test samples into the separator. Both tests showed a slightly higher [fat content] than 3.6. I handed him one test sample that was 3.6 and the second one also with 3.6. He stayed with his 3.5. My nerves could not take such impudence.

“Alexandrov, load up the milk and drive. Give it to the central division,” I told him.

He didn’t have to be told twice.

Gaganowsky, however, said, “We’ll see once what Walodja says.” (Walodja, that is, Vladimir was the name of the director).

My answer to that was “Shit on your Walodja.” and I walked off.

The brigadier, Alexandrov, returned after midnight, woke me and reported that he had delivered the milk with the fat content of 3.7%. Gaganowsky turned everything over to the director who sent for me. He was in a bad mood.

His first question was, “What kind of a dispute do you have with Gaganowsky and why did Alexandrov deliver the milk to the central division?”

I replied, “You know why or has Gaganowsky not reported that he has systematically lowered the fat content? It got to be such an issue that it had to be proved that he stated it as 3.5% here but at the central station as 3.7%.”

Thereupon the director said, “I’ll have it retested. But why did you use such curse words in the presence of several people?”

I answered, “1? In no case! Gaganowsky mentioned a certain Walodja and asked what he would say to all this. I don’t know any Walodja. I know a director, Vladimir Michaelovitch. Gaganowsky would have to know how one expresses oneself in the presence of other people.”

Thus, this conflict seemed to be resolved.

Before the beginning of the hay harvest, the director gave an order by which the residents who were not participating in the hay harvest should lend a hand. The retirees received the assignment to mow the grass between the bushes on the edge of the forest with a scythe where one could not mow with the mowing machines. And they were required to deliver a certain number of hundredweight (50 kilos). The various organizations, trade co-ops, schools, creamery division, etc. received the assignment to deliver a certain hundredweight. After they had fulfilled their assignment and the soviet division had fulfilled 70% of theirs, they received permission to mow hay for their cows. It was a stupid order but it was that way every year. I had all the retirees at my office. I read them the order and turned to them but hadn't started talking when one came to me (a party member) and said, "We understand that it has an important meaning that State cattle be fed enough for the long winter and we will participate in doing this."

I replied, "I am of a different opinion. That of which you just spoke are empty words that are of no value to anyone. The greatest help you can furnish is what I'm going to tell you now. The 26 of June the hay harvest will begin so you will begin to mow such places where the tractor mower cannot mow. If somebody is interested in knowing for whom there is only one answer: that is, to fulfill the plan. Put the hay in bunches, where possible behind the bushes. You are mowing for your cows. Someone can ask the questions for what purpose is my direction. My answer is from my experience. I know that already in August, one after the other will ask and you have the right to ask tractor mowers to mow for your cows. And at this time, grain harvest will be in full swing. You're just peasants and you know in harvest time, there aren't enough workers - some will come but fewer."

After the mown grass had dried and had been raked together, it had to be put in piles. For this work the field brigadier needed horses. The stable manager brought the list in which the horses had been entered. We checked off which ones were constantly used in various brigades. Those that were left over, the brigadier entered in his notebook while loudly calling their names. Thus, all the horses were distributed without any being left over. After two days the brigadier came to me, all excited, with the complaint that the stable boy had given him one less horse.

"I have need of it," he said.

"Which one is missing?" I asked

"Serucha."

We went into the barn.

"Wolkow," I addressed the chief stable manager, "where is Serucha? To whom did you give her?"

Wolkow answered, "Gaganowsky - he has only one horse and every year gets one from us - by order of the director."

"You are aware of the fact that nobody has the right to mow grass until 70% of the plan has been fulfilled," I reminded him.

Wolkow said to a stable manager, "Get the horse immediately and turn it over to the brigadier."

The stable manager replied, "I can't do that. I came into the world in this village and until now have never left it. If I do what you ask, I can't stay here any longer."

I could understand him. "Saddle my horse," I said and continued, "Where is he mowing?"

Stable manager: "Over yonder behind that little grove of trees."

I spotted him very quickly, rode at a full gallop, and stopped in front of his team. "Unhitch Serucha," I said.

He looked at me, astounded and perplexed. During this time I took out my pocketknife. "This means if you don't unhitch the horse, I cut the tugs in two."

He unhitched Serucha. I took her by the reins and rode away, again at a full gallop.

Gaganowsky, naturally, reported the matter to his Walodja [Vladimir]. The next morning the director telephoned [me]. He was curious as to how the hay harvest was going. Then came the main question: "You apparently have a shortage of horses? I can give you a couple from the central stable."

"Yes," I answered, "we had a shortage of horses. The hunters from the hunting club, who live here, gave us their horses and they helped, so now, the supply is sufficient."

But the director sent two horses anyway, so I told Wolkow to go to Gaganowsky and relate to him that the director had sent horses and that he could come and take one of them.

"You can't use those horses from the hunting club in front of a mowing machine - they're light-duty horses," Wolkow replied. "I know that," I told him, "but send it anyway; that way, we'll get him off our back."

After some time, at the end of 1963, it came to pass that I had a conversation with the director about various topics. So it came to be that we spoke of Gaganowsky's and my own circumstances. I told him my opinion of Gaganowsky and he also expressed his opinion: "Gaganowsky remains in this division. If someone has to go, you will go."

After several months, he gave the order that transferred me to the 2nd Division of this commune. So, on 18 March 1964, I took over the 2nd Division.



Eventually, though, Gaganowsky had to leave the village, but still in 1964. It's unknown to me which one of the inhabitants of this village had written a letter with a number of signatures to the district Party Committee that the director had transferred me on account of Gaganowsky. They demanded my return and requested that Gaganowsky should leave the village. The inhabitants could not tolerate his highhandedness any longer, they said. He had to leave the village.

## **Second Division of Commune Bljutschansky**

In the 2nd Division, over one half of the residents were Germans who had been dragged from the Volga Republic. This settlement had been founded after the Revolution [1917] so that the inhabitants were not related to one another. Here there was a main street and four small adjacent streets. In front of each house on the street lay kindling wood and other various unnecessary things: in short, a great disarray [of junk]. Most of the people possessed cows. Mornings they were driven to a commons where a shepherd took them over and in the evening, brought them back. When one walked on the street, one had to be careful not to step in cow manure. In this division there were two large milk brigades, one veal brigade, one calf brigade and one field brigade as well as a swine farm. I acquainted myself with the tractors, agricultural equipment inventory and its state of repair, as well as the feed supply for the livestock because the livestock had to be fed for two months in the barns in the winter.

Afterward, I called a general assembly of all the inhabitants. I said that I had acquainted myself with the operation but the main question I wished to discuss concerned something else. Therefore, I asked them for their assistance and cooperation. First of all, we would bring some order to the streets: everything in front of the houses must be cleaned away. Secondly, they must fence in the place where the shepherd watched over the cattle so that the cows could remain there overnight and the women wouldn't have to clean their yards and the streets would be free of cow manure.

Somewhat later, after the planting, we would plant an allee on the main street. [An allee is a tree-lined street.] They agreed and the allee was planted at the end of May 1964. Later, after I was no longer there, the inhabitants named it "Dycksallee."

In this division, I had no unpleasanties where the people were concerned, with one exception. More about that later. With the director, I constantly had various dissenting opinions about operational questions and our relationship with the workers.

There were four of us men who settled operations questions: Maul, a mechanic, Felsing, head of the tractor brigade, Iljin, head of the field brigade, and myself. Three Germans and one Russian. One often could not solve operational problems within the law. Everything that we four determined in common became known in a short time by the director. One of the three was a traitor, but who? My first suspicion fell on Iljin. I met with him, without witnesses, and had a conversation about the orders and direction of the director in which I was very critical [of the director. Thus, I also met with Maul. Several days passed and there was no reaction from the director.

Then it was Felsing's turn. In the conversation with him, I didn't speak critically of the director. The next day the director came driving up. We went into my office. I turned to him, saying, "I was expecting that you would call me or would come. We are four persons who are responsible that the plans, orders and directions will be fulfilled. You know that in order to achieve that one must often deal contrary to the law and the rules. But we must succeed. Unfortunately, there was among us a traitor and I had to find out who he was. I criticized you in a conversation with Maul and Iljin and also, with Felsing, I discussed you, each one on a different theme. I thank you for your assistance, don't take the criticisms of yourself seriously. I used them only to find the traitor."

The result of this was that Felsing was transferred to a fertilizer brigade.

The second episode. After the sowing, we were driving in the field to see how the new seed was coming up and came past a summer calving operation. The director noticed that one line hung fresh laundry .

"What this", he exclaimed, "a calving operation or a laundry!?"

I explained to him that there was here a single woman who stayed with the calves from early in the morning until late at night and had no days off. During the heat of the day she drove the calves under shelter and during this time, she does her laundry. At home she has no time for it.

"Those are just excuses," he said. "She is taking advantage of the situation to drag home feed."

She washed the laundry in a tub that was upside down next to the fence. The director lifted it up and there stood a bucket of mixed grain feed.

"There you have the proof," he said.

I countered, "She has no cattle except for possibly a runt pig and if she has one, how is she supposed to feed it? There is no special feed for sale."

“What are you trying to say”, he asked. “Is there a right to steal?”

My nerves couldn't stand such a shameless conversation. I looked at him and said, “You know I can't say, Fritz. Haul a couple of sacks of swine feed.”

“Get in the car,” the director ordered, “we're going to the Kontor (accounting office).”

I replied, “I'm going to the calf caretaker, the calves are grazing not far from here.”

He drove off to the south while I walked off to the north to where the caretaker was. I inquired of her how the calves were faring out in the open - were they healthy?

She answered, “Yes, only that one.” She pointed to one. “Its growth is retarded but I hope it will catch up with the others. I'm giving it two feedings of the combined feed.”

I asked, “That bucket under the tub - is it for him?”

She replied, “Yes, I cover it up on account of the birds.”

I kept a special driver who had at his disposal a dual hookup [two horses]. His work was to transport to the hog farm, from the central camp, all that was necessary for the operation. The family name of the driver was Fritz. The director also had swine and when he needed feed, he telephoned Fritz that his feed was all gone so Fritz had to constantly furnish him with feed and free of charge, at that. That, the director didn't call stealing - it was just delivered to him. I expected an order that I had been dismissed, but it never came.

In each commune in the Central Division, there was a structure as follows: a director, an agronomist, a veterinarian, a cattle breeder, an engineer, etc. and a Party Committee secretary. Then, a Worker Committee chairman and Village Soviet chairman. Each had a plan which he had to carry out, to a degree, in the course of the year. For example, the party Secretary had to report to us leaders of the divisions how each of us would carry out the sowing and bringing in of the hay and grain harvests from the fields for storage in the barns for the cattle in winter. At the same time, we were made aware of the orders and directions of the director.

Thus it was, at the time before the hay harvest I am describing. The plans were distributed to us indicating who had to prepare so much hay in order to fulfill the plan and we were to see that no one mowed grass until 100 zentner of hay had been delivered to the barns. I calculated quickly: if everybody who owned a cow delivered 100 zentner, the general plan would be fulfilled. After this the secretary asked if there were any questions. I signaled that I had a question: To whom should I turn over the mowing machines and the tractors? Because I had calculated that

if every cow owner delivered 100 zentner, the plan would be fulfilled and, therefore, I didn't need the equipment.

The director and, also, the secretary didn't know how to answer my question. So I answered it for them: I was not going to allow the workers to know this stipulation in order not to spoil their mood. It would have a harmful effect on their work.

The secretary concluded, "I'll come back to this question later."

I was convinced that this time he would dismiss me but again I was kept on.

During the seven years I worked in this commune, I had many disputes with this director. It would require some months to describe all the instances. I am relating only a few in order to give some idea of my problem.

In a state where the Communists rule, the laws and rules don't apply to the party Members. They could overstep the laws and bear no criminal consequences. On the contrary, it was dismissed as an error in his work. For that they received a party penalty, a slap on the wrist or be transferred with an upgrade in the service.

I knew the director wouldn't tolerate me much longer. One day we happened to meet again. He said that we couldn't work together. "You know too much," he said.

It didn't take long until he ordered that I be removed as leader of the division and gave me a month's vacation, after which, it would be determined what kind of work I should take over. In this order he submitted various reasons which did not accurately reflect reality or the truth. After a time, he named as leader in my place the traitor, Felsing.

During the vacation, Katharina and I traveled to visit her brother who lived in Kazakhstan not far from Alma Ata. On the return trip I accidentally met at the railroad station in Tchany District, the director of the MTS (Machine Tractor Station). The director (family name Golikow), had been the engineer in the commune. He also would not work with the director (family name Kobylak). They often had conflicts. Golikow was a Party Member. He had been transferred by the District party Committee to his present office. I told him my history with Kobylak and he asked what plans I had now.

"I've only determined one thing: I'll not work with Kobylak whatever you might propose. I'm not worried about anything - Russia is big and I'll find something that pleases me," I replied.

Golikow said, "Come with me - I need a master builder. A three-room apartment is empty. If you're agreeable, I'll save the

apartment for you. Rest up until the end of your vacation and then move in.”

I agreed. At this time the bus arrived. Two days later the Party Secretary drove up to me. The director had assigned him to relate to me that I should come and see him. He wanted to offer me another workplace. I told him “Relay to him that I need nothing and want nothing from him. If he needs me and wants something from me, he has to come to me.”

At the end of my vacation, he submitted a memo with the request that allowed me to do as I wished. Thus, on 23 August 1968, I was dismissed and moved to the District Center of Tchany.

## **District Division of Agricultural Technology**

On 26 August 1968, I was ordered to take over the post of building superintendent in the Agricultural Experimental Station of Tchany (its name was changed - earlier it was an MTS). Golikow gave me one month off. During this time, I built a barn for our own livestock. An enclosure gave the area some order: it was a newly built two-family house.

In Moscow in the State Apparat there was a State Agricultural Experimental Station division set up and in every area of the Soviet Union an affiliate. Our district Agricultural Experimental Station belonged to the Novosibirsk affiliation. I had at my disposal a cabinet shop, a sawmill, a truck and a construction brigade of 8-10 men. In the first two years we built two-family houses and did various remodeling jobs. Everything that we needed, such as lumber, as well as windows and doors etc., we manufactured ourselves.

In 1971 there was founded a Construction Authority for the Novosibirsk affiliate: immediately, district construction units were organized. I was transferred on 3 January 1972 to the Tchany Construction Division as construction supervisor. On 8 May 1973, I took over the second district division, Barabinsk. Already in July 1973, they turned over to me two more district divisions, Wengerowa and Kischtowka. On 12 January 1974 I was pensioned. At the same time as the dismissal order, I was named in the Kreis Union Agricultural Experimental Station as master of the technical supervisors in the building industry. In this workplace, I worked until 29 April 1988 and was dismissed at my own request. [Gustav was over 74 years of age.]

We moved in 1975. At this time a building firm had built a two-story dwelling for 16 families. Katharina and I and the children had moved into this house; Katharina and I continued living here until 23 January 1994.

In the course of 20 years I had dealt with five directors. Golikow was transferred to Novosibirsk. Trussow died. Wlasensko was transferred to the State Agricultural Authority. Jurtschuk was moved to a road construction division. Worobjow was the last. I never quarreled with any of them. During the time that I worked as master of the technical supervisors (14 years), I often quarreled with the leader of the Construction Authority. Every month they had to present the state bank with the percentage of completion with my signature: without this, the bank would issue no funds. They often showed a greater percentage of completion than they had accomplished. Such falsification I refused to sign.

12 August 1998  
Gustav Dyck

## **Life's Course of my Wife**

### **Katharina Dyck *geb.* Wiens**

### **25 March 1915-11 February 1994**

Katharina was born to Julius Wiens 25 March 1915 in the village of Koppental (Volga Gebiet in Russia). She was born and grew up during the terrible time of the Russian Revolution. As a four-year-old girl, she saw how men were herded down the street by Red Army units to be shot. One of them was a maternal uncle who was shot in 1919.

Katharina survived the renowned starvation years of the early 1920s. From 1924-1928, there came a better time. But then began the dissolution of the *kulaken* [wealthy farmers] and the beginning of collectivization. From 1923-1927 she completed her education. The so-called Farm Youth School in Koppental was opened in 1927-1928 - two classes, fifth and sixth grades. Artur Riesen from Medental and Herbert Warkentin from Lysanderhoh were the instructors. Katharina and her brother, Cornelius, and, in addition, an Olga Eckart attended. In all there were six Mennonite children in the 5th class. This school existed only one year when it was moved to another village and so, we were separated.

In 1929 her parents voluntarily entered a commune. In 1930 at the age of 15, she took over a herd of 12 cows and became a milker. After one year she became head milker. In 1934 there was a meeting organized of the best milkmaids out of the communes that were served by the Lysanderhoh MTS. Katharina came to this meeting. I had been working five months as a statistician for the MTS. Here we met again after seven years.

The milkers from Koppental were sitting on their wagons ready to depart. We could only speak a few words with one another. I inquired about her brother, Cornelius, and promised to visit her on Sunday. I kept my promise and after that we met often.

In April 1935, the Wiens' were charged as *kulaken*. They were relieved of their house, furniture, clothing and even their cooking utensils. The livestock and agricultural inventory they had earlier given to the commune.

On 8 March 1936 her father was arrested. After a week I fetched Katharina in the dark of the night so that no one could see and kept her in hiding. I was afraid that the family would be dragged off and that we would be separated forever. After two months the family was again taken into the commune. Of the things that had been taken from them, nothing was returned.

I took Katharina out of hiding and on 27 May 1936 we registered our marriage. We now lived in peace. On 6 September 1936 our daughter, Eugenie, was born. On 14 December 1937, a son, Edgardt, was born. On 15 December 1937, I drove to visit Katharina in the hospital and saw our son. I said to Katharina, "Now we have everything we need - a daughter and a son." I left and drove home.

Twenty hours later on 16 December 1937 at 6 p.m. I was arrested. We would never have believed it if someone had said we would not see each other until 10 years later in Siberia.

Katharina lived in Lysanderhoeh until the end of March 1938 when she moved back again to Koppental to her mother and siblings. Katharina was the eldest of the Wiens children. The others were:

Cornelius b. 6 June 1916

Gerta b. 16 April 1918

Julius b. 12 October 1920

Johannes b. 4 November 1924

Hermann b. 22 January 1928

Anna b. 1 November 1929

Cornelius was married and his wife, Frida, was a nurse in the Koppentaler Hospital. With her assistance, Katharina was also employed as a nurse.

Then came for her a very difficult time. On 10 April 1938, our Eugenie died of brain fever. On 14 July 1938, Katharina's mother died after an operation. On the 4 December 1938, her father died while under arrest. Where he died is unknown.

On 12 October 1940, Katharina's sister, Anna, died. Gerta and Johannes were studying at a trade school in Engels. Julius was serving in the army. In September 1941, they, along with all others in the Volga Republic were dragged off to Siberia. Katharina, Edgardt, Johannes, Hermann, Cornelius, Frida and

their daughter, Edita, arrived together in a village seven kilometers from Tchany. Katharina became a milkmaid again.

Cornelius, after a short time, was drafted into the labor army. Katharina was mobilized in December 1942 [because Edgardt was now five years old and did not “need” to be in the care of his mother]. She was sent to Novosibirsk to an armaments factory (N 564) where she worked as a lathe operator until September 1946. Cornelius and Johannes “retired” sooner: they were dismissed on account of weakness because they were no longer in condition to work. [They were only in their 20s.]

After they were all together again and had regained their health, they moved to another village in April 1947: Semsainka. Cornee worked as a brigadier in a tractor brigade. Katharina worked as a cook for a field brigade. She and Edgardt lived with Cornee and Frida. In this village Katharina and I were reunited 4 December 1947.

From this time on, after we were together again, Katharina seldom worked. As mentioned, she worked for a short time as a calf tender. Later, in the 3rd division commune, Bljuntschansky, she worked for two years on a chicken farm. The rest of the time she was busy with our children and vegetable gardens.

The last four years [in Tchany] after our children had become independent, we owned a dacha two km. from Tchany: 500 square meters of ground and a little house. This little piece of ground gave us everything we needed: apples, cherries, raspberries, currants, gooseberries, strawberries, cucumbers, watermelons and enough of various vegetables. Katharina also had many flowers here. Katharina loved this small place. As we prepared for our departure to Germany in January 1994, she said she regretted nothing, but, if it were possible, she’d like to take her dacha along.

This, in short, is a sketch of my wife. She died 11 February 1994 in Germany, less than three weeks after our departure from Russia. She rests in the cemetery in Baienfurt, next to her son, Edgardt. [Baienfurt, near Baidt, is in Wurttetnburg.]

Gustav Dyck



## Afterword

Cousin Gustav Dyck wrote this manuscript in Russian which had become his first language. Because we know no Russian, he translated it into German. He had spoken very little German as an adult, except to his mother and family; he had written no German in sixty years! So when he wrote this in 1995, his German was still rusty. Together Herbert and I translated it with Herb being the premier translator, of course. At times, however, it was difficult to decipher a sentence and that is where I was of the most help. In addition, sentences sometimes had to be rearranged. I have tried to refrain from writing Gustav's story into "good" English, preferring instead, to let him tell his story himself. If, at times, a sentence seems a bit awkward or unclear to the reader, so it may also have seemed to us but we opted for Gustav's construction.

In late September 1996 Herb and our son-in-law, Michael Sehnert, went to Germany. Michael wanted to visit some of the places he remembered from being stationed in the U. S. Army there in the 1970s, but the actual purpose of the trip was to bring Gustav back to Kansas for a two-week visit. There were a wonderful few days in St. Louis on their return when Gustav met all of our family. Our daughters, Maria and Christine, had accompanied us to Germany in 1995. Both had fallen irrevocably in love with Gustav, the feelings were mutual and so it was that Gustav insisted on celebrating Christine's birthday on October 5 with flowers and hoopla. My mother had died while Herb and Michael were away. All of our children had come for the funeral but Christine had stayed here in Washington a few extra days following the funeral to allow me to go to St. Louis with her on her return home. It was a family reunion in the best sense of the word.

Gustav's time here at our home was spent just as he spent his days in his own home except for the special events we attended. He enjoys hot tea with fresh lemon at his meals. It was a special little

ritual, placing the small cutting board with a lemon and a very sharp knife by his place so he could serve himself at will. His daily routine included time in his room where he read, napped and wrote in his journal. Keeping notes of his activities is a lifetime habit. He did this all the years in the labor camps, hence, his ability to reconstruct those years with names, dates and places. His memory is prodigious, too. He provided the list of all the people he can remember from Am Trakt and how many survived. It is a precious document; for some persons, it may be the only knowledge they will have of what became of their loved ones.

We took Gustav to see the Dyck and Harder farms in rural Whitewater. We attended a morning worship service at Emmaus Church where Jacob and Marie Dyck and their family had attended. A time was set aside during the service for Gustav to speak. Herb was with him, acting as interpreter. He spoke of the many years of privation and separation from relatives and the hope of his brother and himself of finding the family of their Onkel Jacob in Kansas. Gustav was visibly moved to be in that place and even more so when he later visited the graves of his Uncle Jacob and Aunt Marie Dyck. He had brought fresh flowers which he lovingly laid on each grave. A potluck meal at the former Countryside School followed. Most of the Jacob Dyck family was present as well as a very large crowd of other relatives and friends. As is his wont, Gustav wrote down the names of all who were there.

It was during our visit to Gustav and his family in the summer of 1998 that I asked him if he would write a memoir about his family during the years he was away. He smiled in his affectionate but mischievous way (he has the Dyck twinkle in his eyes!) and said he knew I was going to ask him and that he was already working on the second part. Sure enough, within weeks of our return home, we received the work.

One quiet afternoon at his home, Gustav said he would like to show me his photograph album and would like for me to select certain photographs which he would have copied for me for my collection. I was astounded to see photographs of his siblings, photographs I did not know existed! Gustav said his mother had preserved them.

Gustav reads voraciously to make up for all the years when he was denied books or any kind of reading material. He knew very little of World War II, for example. And, the end of the war meant nothing to these prisoners - their lives continued on as though it had never happened. He reads much German and Russian history. He also reads both German and Russian literature and poetry. Probably like his father, and most certainly like his Uncle Jacob Dyck, Gustav keeps abreast of current events and politics through newspapers, magazines and television.

Although the Russian Revolution and events that followed, the outstanding personages of that time and the rise of Stalin and resulting decades of terror are not mentioned in Gustav's memoirs, he is very knowledgeable of those times. After his arrest and incarceration, there was a constant influx of new prisoners into the camps, replacing the thousands who continually died, so news of the outside world filtered into the camps. One reads various figures of the millions who died during those years - those who starved to death, those who were shot, those who were killed in the war and those who died in the camps. Gustav says without hesitation that 70 million people died. Russia will always be his home, but he says, sadly, he was considered an enemy of the state because of his German ethnicity until he left Siberia in 1994 to relocate in Germany.

At the end of imprisonments, banishments, and forced labor, the German Russians generally remained in Siberia and Kazakhstan. They had found or built new homes. Many worked in cities such as Omsk, Novosibirsk and environs. Hans had lived in Omsk while Gustav and his family lived in the village of Tchany, near Novosibirsk. Former homes and villages in the west and south of Russia had been completely destroyed and no longer existed, nothing could be reclaimed. One could only look at a bare expanse of land and try to imagine the villages with their homes, streets, schools, churches and farms which had once been home to so many. Cousin Gustav was never able to return to Am Trakt although he said he would have liked to, if only just to touch the earth there. With tears in his eyes, he read a poem, written by a former resident of Am Trakt.

#### AM TRAKT

Many years I had cherished the hope  
Of seeing the old homeland again.  
To learn what actually did occur,  
Even though with quiet melancholy.

My brother, sister, niece and I  
Made ready for the journey  
This hope to fulfill.  
All four of us together.

To Saratov we went by train  
A cup of tea there, and then  
We continued by bus  
On to Lysanderhöh.  
Once this was a rich village,  
A garden before each house.

Now there's desolation here  
And no more expectation.

Of houses there are few  
(Department of the Soviet)  
Compared to what once was  
There's not much extant.

Hohendorf is completely destroyed,  
Not a house remaining.  
The winds blow freely through the steppes,  
Here and there, only a bush.

In Orloff two houses remain  
They still stand  
But without doors and windows  
And without floors.

Only wretched walls are there,  
Where stoves were torn out.  
Someone dwelt here after us,  
Who has this on his conscience?

In Ostenfeld today there's  
Only a small forest  
Where in springtimes often strolled  
Peacefully, both young and old.

Birds were here aplenty  
In our times.  
Today no birds or nests  
As far as the eye can see.

In each homeland valley  
Where once our cradles stood  
There is nothing,  
Not even one home by another.

Til nineteen hundred forty-one  
We lived here in peace.  
Today, those who are still alive  
Are so far away, yet so near.

Dear homeland, dear Volga land  
We had to say "farewell."

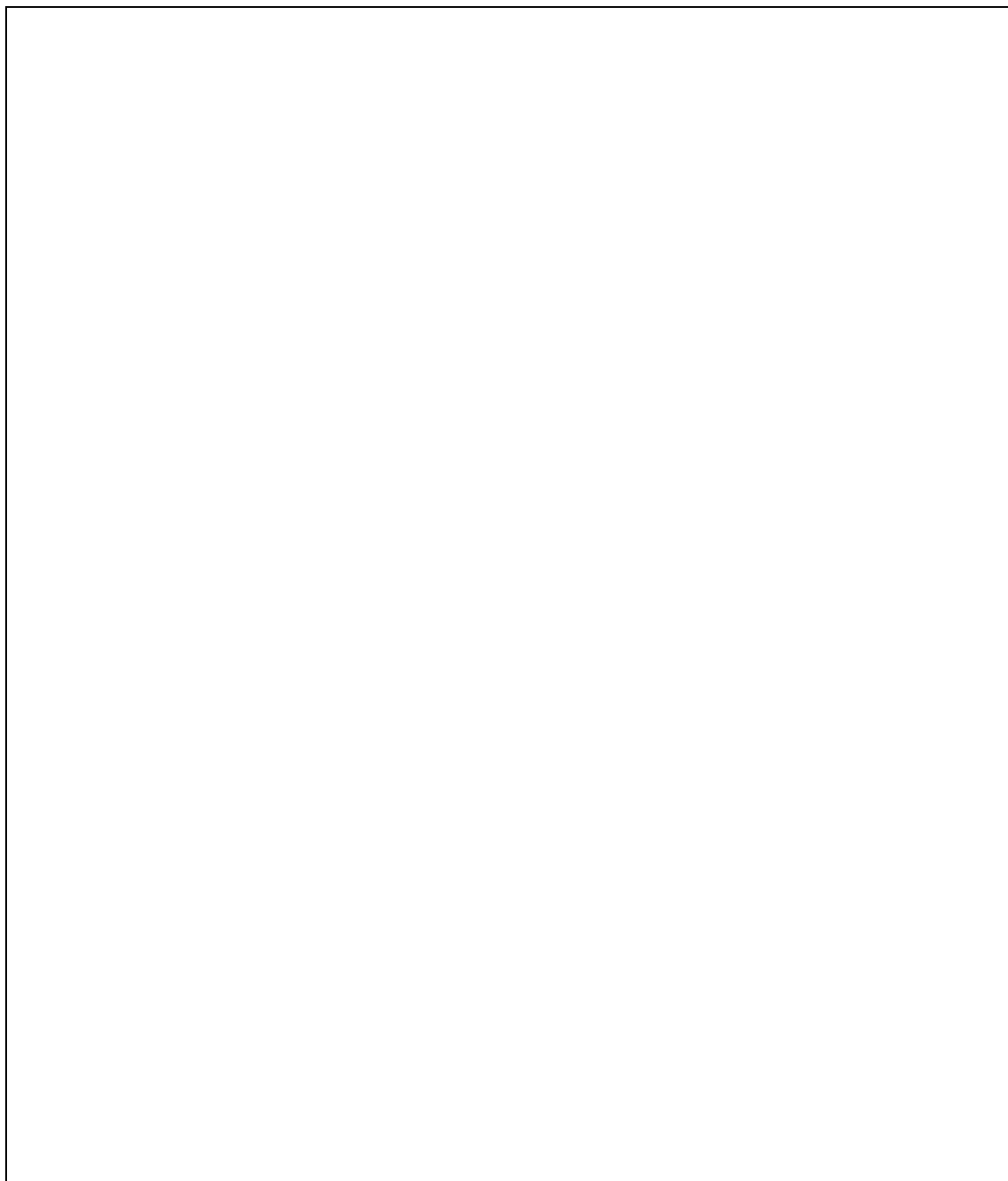
But we'll yearn for you  
As long as we may live.

Translated from the German  
Author Unknown

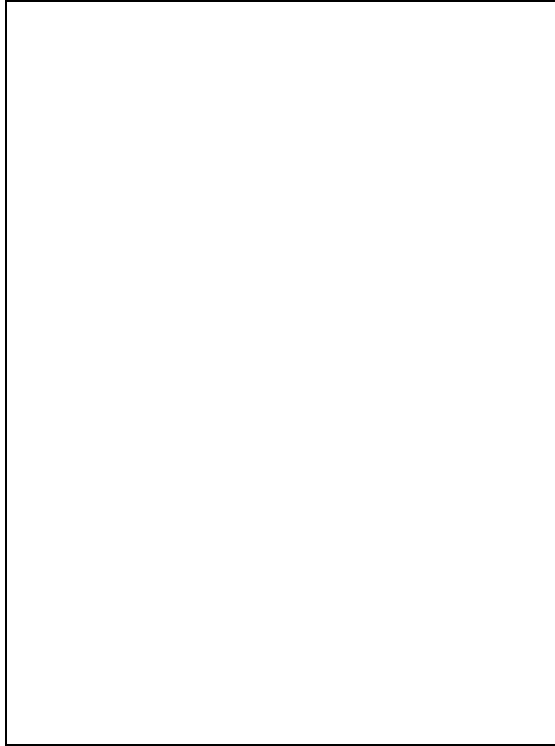
# Photographs

## Sixty Years of Silence

All photographs: Authors' collection.



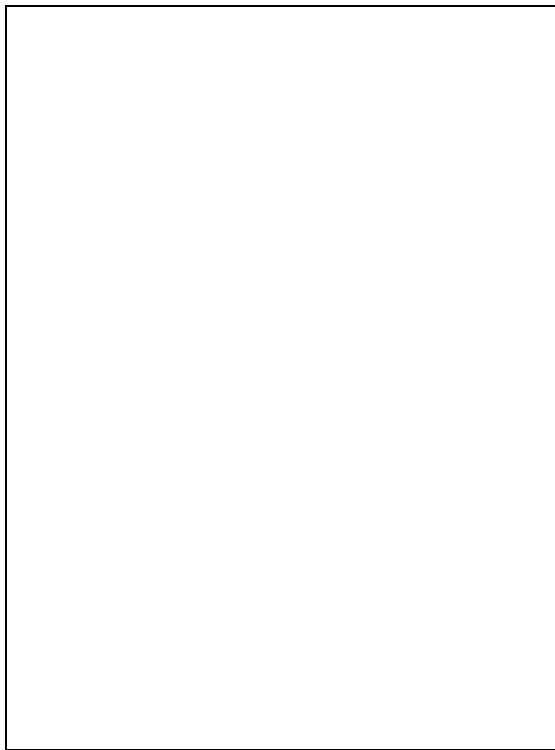
Jakob Dyck (1832-1882), Am Trakt.



Justine Dyck Penner (1879-19--).



Johanna Dyck Froese (1881-1970).



Maria Dyck Dyck (1876-194-).



Heinrich Dyck.



Johannes "Krollyer" Dyck (1878-1921), Am Trakt *circa* 1900).



Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954), Newton, KS, 1907.





Left: Johannes  
"Krollyer" Dyck,  
Maria Wall  
Dyck, 1904, Am  
Trakt.

Below: Anna  
Dyck Tjahrt  
(1872-1945),  
Peter Tjahrt (d.  
*circa* 1924), son  
Bruno (1909-?).





Johannes Dyck, Red Cross Service, 1914-1917.



Maria "Mimi" Dyck Engbrecht, Cornelius Engbrecht, 1925, Am Trakt.



Left: Maria Wall  
Dyck, Irma  
Dyck, Elvira  
Engbrecht, *circa*  
1929, Am Trakt.

Below: Anna  
Dyck Wiens,  
Albert Wiens,  
1930, Am Trakt.





Johannes "Hans" Dyck, Helene "Lena" Wiens Dyck, 1929, Am Trakt.



Above: Gustav Dyck, Katharina Wiens Dyck, 1960s, Novosibirsk.



Left: Ella Dyck (1936-1953), daughter of Johannes and Helene Dyck.



Johannes "Hans" Dyck, Gustav Dyck, reunited after 21 years, 1958, Novosibirsk.





Front: Johannes Dyck, Magda Dyck. Middle: Maria Wall Dyck, Gustav Dyck, Katharina Wiens Dyck holding Maria, Rudolf Dyck. Back: Edgardt, 1955, Tschany.



Gustav and Katharina Dyck. Children left to right: Maria, Rudolf, Edgardt, Johannes, Magda, late 1980's, Novosibirsk.





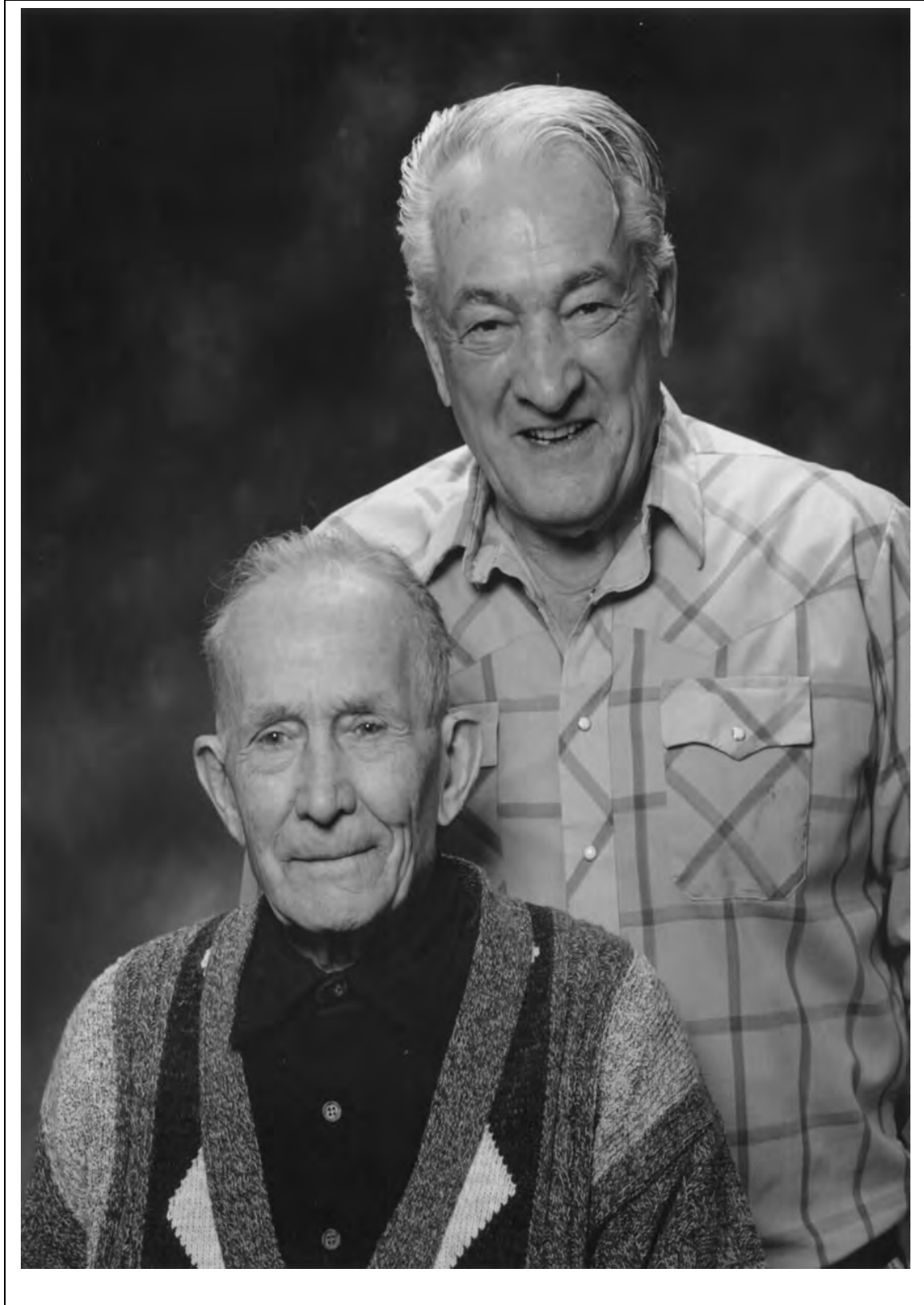
Above: Johannes  
"Hans" and Anna  
Dyck. Children:  
Helene, Alexander,  
1960's, Omsk.



Left: Irma Dyck  
Heier (1915-1995),  
Kazakhstan.



Johannes "Hans" Dyck, 1990, Omsk.



Gustav Dyck, Herbert Dyck, 1996, Washington, Kansas.  
Photo Credit: Dennis Livingston

# Appendix A

## Family of Johannes “Krollyer” Dyck

Johannes “Krollyer” Dyck

b. 27 Feb 1878, Ostenfeld, Am Trakt, Saratov, Russia

d. 30 Nov 1921, Medemtal, Am Trakt

m. 29 Dec 1904, Am Trakt

Maria Wall, daughter of Johannes Wall (1848-1917)

and Catharina Wall Wall (1854-1932)

b. 1 Mar 1886, Am Trakt

d. 13 Apr 1974, Omsk/Novosibirsk

Issue 6:

1. Maria “Mimi” b. 23 Sept 1905, Am Trakt, d. 16 June 1927, Am Trakt.  
m. 1925, Cornelius Engbrecht. Issue: Elvira
2. Johannes “Hans” b. 3 Feb 1909, Medemtal, Am Trakt, d. 6 Apr 1992, Omsk, Siberia  
m. (1) 1929 Helene Wiens, daughter of Cornelius Wiens b. 1913, Am Trakt, d. 20 May 1945, prob. Kirghiz  
Issue 3: Victor d. ca 1930 Leningrad, Eleanor b./d. ca 1933, Ella b. Nov 1935 d. spring 1953, Tchany, Siberia  
(2) 1950s, Anna (Russian) d. 1972-73, Omsk, Siberia  
Issue 2: Helene, Alexander
3. Anna b. 1 Mar 1911, Medemtal, Am Trakt, d. Aug 1934, Am Trakt  
m. ca 1930 Albert Wiens, son of Cornelius Wiens  
Issue 2: Egon m. Emma Hoppe, six children, Tadzhikistan  
Melitta m. ? , d. Omsk, Siberia after 1974  
Albert Wiens m. (2) Helene Wall
4. Gustav b. 16 Dec 1913, Medemtal, Am Trakt  
m. 1936 Katharina Wiens, daughter of Julius Wiens, b. 25 Mar 1915, Am Trakt, d. 11 Feb 1994, Baidt, Germany  
Issue 6: Eugenie b. 6 Sept 1936, d. 10 Apr 1938, Am Trakt  
Edgardt b. 14 Dec 1937 d. 20 Jan 1994, Germany, wife: Valentina, son Constantine

Rudolf b. 11 Sept 1943, Tchany, Novosibirsk,  
 Russia, wife: Vera, two sons, Mark and  
 Johannes, Baidt, Germany since 1993

Magda b. 30 July 1950, Tchany, Novosibirsk,  
 d. 12 Feb 1990, Russia, m. Miller who d. 12  
 Feb 1990, Russia, Issue 3: Two children also  
 died 12 Feb 1990, (car wreck). Surviving  
 child: Eugenie, who is married and now lives  
 in Germany

Johannes b. 6 Dec 1952, Tchany, Novosibirsk, wife:  
 Galina, living in Amale, Kazakhstan, son:  
 Maximilian and wife Galina living in  
 Germany

Maria b. 26 Feb 1955, Tchany, Novosibirsk, m.  
 1978 to Alexander Schiroki, Issue 2:  
 Katharina b. 1980, Anna b. 1982, Living in  
 Baidt, Germany, since 1993 (All of Gustav's  
 children married Russians.)

5. Irma b. 28 July 1915, Medemtal, Am Trakt, d. July  
 1995, Kazakhstan  
 Issue: Maria Reimer-Dyck b. 11 Nov 1935 (illegitimate  
 daughter of Irma and Gerhard Reimer; he was  
 "dragged off" and disappeared before they could  
 marry)  
 m. Alexander Heier 1938, (he left to serve in work army  
 in 1942 and never returned).  
 Issue 3: Names Unknown. All starved to death when  
 very young.
6. Elsa b. 1918, Am Trakt, d. 1919, Am Trakt.

# Appendix B

## The Villages of Am Trakt

The following are lists of the families of Am Trakt probably in the 1920s which were given to me by Gustav Dyck. The reader will notice, for example, that Medemtal includes the name of the teacher at Gustav's school and the family of his classmate, Peter Sinner. One might assume the order of the lists to indicate contiguous homes because the lists were numbered in the order presented here, but that may not be the case. One might also assume these lists to be complete, but the writer cannot vouch for that, either. The reader will keep in mind that there were numerous men of the same name and positive identification of a given person would begin with placement in the correct village: for example, the several Johannes Dycks. Johannes "Krollyer" Dyck lived in Medemtal but one will notice others of that name in other villages. These lists are included here for familial interest, historical value, and in the hope they may help future researchers. ASD.

### Fresenheim

Penner, Artur  
Penner, Lenhart  
Penner, Herbert  
Janzen, Peter  
Schule  
Bachman, \_\_\_\_\_  
Fieguth, Gerhard  
Dyck, Johannes  
Wall, Nickolaus  
Janzen, Heinrich  
Neufeld, Heinrich  
Kamins, \_\_\_\_\_

Strempler, \_\_\_\_\_  
Isaak, Heinrich  
Esau, Aron  
Töws, Hermann  
Wall, Johannes  
Töws, Johannes  
Grosschen, "Tante"  
Dyck, Johannes  
Wall, David  
Bopp, \_\_\_\_\_  
Töws, Aron

## Hohendorf

Töws, Gustav  
Töws, Gustav  
Horn, "Tanten"  
Horn, Heinrich  
Wall, Peter  
Schmidt, Johannes  
Schmidt, Jakob  
Unruh, Cornelius  
Unruh, "Tanten"  
Wall, Franz  
Matiess, Franz  
Engbrecht, Cornelius  
Bergmann, Johannes  
Wall, Johannes  
Schmidt, Johannes  
Schmidt, Heinrich  
Töws, Peter  
Esau, Gerhard  
Franzen, Jakob  
Matiess, Peter  
Janzen, Gerhard  
Schule  
Dyck, Gerhard  
Wall, Nikolaus  
Töws, Johannes  
Klassen, Gerhard  
Philipsen, Abraham  
Neumann, Peter  
Philipsen, Johannes  
Philipsen, Jakob  
Neumann, Cornelius

## Lindenau

Fröse, Cornelius  
Kuhn, \_\_\_\_\_  
Fröse, Cornelius  
Nickel, Cornelius  
Klassen, Jakob  
Franzen, Johannes  
Fröse, Johannes  
Fröse, Johannes  
Wiens, Dietrich  
Wall, Peter  
Kalchert, \_\_\_\_\_  
Janzen, Johannes  
Janzen, Wilhelm  
Schwabauer, \_\_\_\_\_  
Janzen, Dietrich  
Weber, \_\_\_\_\_  
Franzen, Heinrich  
Riesen, Jakob  
Fröse, Jakob  
Penner, Gerhard  
Fröse, Heinrich  
Danke, \_\_\_\_\_  
Wall, Johannes  
Unger, \_\_\_\_\_  
Dyck, Salmon  
Ewert, \_\_\_\_\_  
Janzen, Peter  
Schule  
Franzen, Johannes  
Warkentin, Wilhelm  
Penner, Johannes  
Bergmann, Jakob  
Warkentin, Jakob  
Fast, \_\_\_\_\_

## Köppental

(Note: There were many gaps in this un-numbered list. However, the names are in the order presented. ASD.)

Lanze, W.	Bartukie, Alexander
Penner, Gerhard	Schule
Adrian, "Tante"	Fast, J.
Steinauer, Jacob	Konrad, Ferdinand
Peters, J.	Warkentin, W.
Riesen, H.	Janzen, Cornelius
Eck, Hermann	Tiede, M.
Post, Antropow	Steinmetz, _____
Thiessen, Gerhard	Hermann, Georg
Klassen, David	Franzen, Hermann
Fröse, Abraham	Linkowsky, _____
Wiens, Peter	Eckert, Cornelius
Hein, F.	Seltenreich, _____
Eckert, Cornelius	Reimer, _____
Janzen, Jacob	Penner, Heinrich
Grauberger, Jacob	Görz, P.
Liebrecht, K.	Quiring, J.
Schreiner, E. Warkentin, Jacob	Ries, A.
Neumann, Abraham	Eck, Robert
Pauls, Cornelius	Finkheisen, J.
Thiessen, Johannes	Penner, Dietrich
Thiessen, Bernhard	Wiens, Julius
Neumann, Cornelius	Esau, Artur
Niel, J.	Epp, Franz
Grauberger, David	Epp, Peter
Eck, J.	Epp, Bernhard
Eck, H.	Dyck, Peter
Janzen, F.	Janzen, J.
Penner	
Quiring, Johannes	
Isaak, Cornelius (Laden)	
Bartsch, Hermann	
Filbert, _____	
Hinkel, _____	
Schlotthauer, _____	
Tiede, J.	
Schreiner, _____	
Epp, Artur	
Epp, Bernhard	
Epp, Peter	



## Lysanderhöh

Wiens, Cornelius  
Janzen, Jakob  
Bergmann, Julius  
Preissig, \_\_\_\_\_  
Bartsch, Wilhelm  
Quiring, Franz  
Töws, Heinrich  
Bartsch, Franz  
Bergmann, Abraham  
Bestvater, Jakob  
Schule  
Töws, Albert  
Fröse, David  
Warkentin, Abraham  
Stahl, \_\_\_\_\_  
Niedens, \_\_\_\_\_  
Nuss, \_\_\_\_\_  
Wall, Johannes  
Töws, Aron  
Wiens, Peter  
Bergmann, Peter  
Reimer, Jakob  
Janzen, Julius  
Fast, Hermann  
Dyck, Johannes  
Franzen, Anna  
Gieguth, Gerhard  
Töws, Johannes  
Fröse, Jakob  
Fröse, Cornelius  
Wall, Peter  
Dyck, Franz  
Töws, Dietrich  
Wiebe, Jakob  
Bergmann, Peter  
Neufeld, Hermann  
Lammert, \_\_\_\_\_  
Janzen, Jakob  
Bergmann, Jakob  
Bergmann, Abraham

## Orloff

Riesen, Heinrich  
Kirche  
Inger, Heinrich  
Wall, Bernhard  
Neufeld, Johannes  
Isaak, Johannes  
Fröse, Heinrich  
Wall, Johannes Peter  
Wall, Jacob  
Wall, Johannes  
Fröse, Hermann  
Pauls, Cornelius  
Riesen, Hermann  
Fröse, Jacob  
Fröse, Aron  
Fröse, Hermann  
Töws, Johannes  
Bergmann, Johannes  
Schule  
Wall, Gustav  
Fröse, Peter  
Isaak, Cornelius  
Wiens, Abraham  
Isaak, Heinrich  
Isaak, Peter

## Medemental

Isaak, Hermann  
Fröse, Johannes  
Fröse, Franz  
Peters, Johannes  
Quiring, Franz  
Wall, Peter  
Dyck, Johannes "Krollyer"  
Reimer, Heinrich  
Quiring, Peter  
Wall, Cornelius  
Quiring, David  
Pauls, Heinrich  
Quiring, Jonas  
Quiring, Cornelius  
Klassen, Johannes  
Bestvater, Franz  
Bestvater, David  
Wall, Georg  
Wall, Abraham (1)  
Wall, Abraham (2)  
Vogt, Jakob  
Vogt, Johannes  
Reimer, Peter  
Klassen, Gerhard  
Hamm, Barbara  
Fröse, Johannes  
Engbrecht, Cornelius  
Dyck, Johannes Joh. (1)  
Dyck, Jacob  
Kohl, Jacob  
Zubiks, Friedrich  
Ruhl, Alexander  
Riesen, Franz  
Riesen, Gerhard  
Riesen, Emil  
Quiring, Heinrich  
Fröse, Peter  
Hamm, Nikolaus  
Wall, Johannes  
Warkentin, Hermann  
Wall, Dietrich  
Wall, Gerhard  
Wall, Cornelius  
Wall, Heinrich  
Wall, Hermann

Dyck, Johannes Joh. (2)  
Bestvater, Hermann  
Pauls, Peter  
Penner, Johannes  
Schule (Oskar Hornn und  
Friedrich Hornn,  
Lehreren)  
Janzen, Heinrich  
Flegler, Jacob  
Dau, Cornelius  
Dau, Johannes  
Ewert, Franz  
Pauls, Cornmelius  
Dyck, Dietrich  
Wall, Hermann  
Dau, Peter  
Dyck, Heinrich  
Sinner, Emanuel  
Sinner, \_\_\_\_\_  
Klassen, Abraham  
Fröse, Cornelius

## Ostenfeld

Fröse, Johannes  
Klassen, Peter  
Klassen, Heinrich  
Fast, Cornelius  
Bartschk, Robert  
Siebert, Johannes  
Schule  
Klassen, Abraham  
Neufeld, Jakob  
Siebert, Julius  
Siebert, Peter  
Siebert, Cornelius  
Albrecht, Franz  
Neufeld, Peter  
Dyck, Wilhelm  
Fröse, \_\_\_\_\_  
Klassen, Jakob  
Donslav, Ernst  
Janzen, Johannes  
Siebert, Jakob  
Klassen, Johannes

Fast, Hermann  
Pauls, Cornelius  
Fast, Johannes  
Engbrecht, Cornelius  
Peters, Jakob  
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Andres, Johannes  
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Fröse, Peter  
Wiens, Cornelius  
Unger, Johannes  
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Bergmann, Johannes  
Albrecht, Franz  
Neufeld, Johannes  
Penner, Jakob  
Bestvater, David  
Neufeld, Jakob (2)  
Neufeld, Ewalt  
Wiens, Cornelius  
Janzen, Wilhelm

# Appendix C

## Fate of Persons Arrested in Am Trakt

After Johannes “Krollyer” Dyck died in 1921, Hans and Gustav, somehow, kept the family fed and clothed. As mentioned earlier, they employed whatever means at their disposal to raise a few crops and to bring in a little money. They were also attending school whenever possible. By the mid-1920s, Hans and Gustav were optimistic about the future; in fact, Hans felt they could make a comfortable living.

They saw the beginnings of hope when Lenin instituted the New Economy Policy in 1922 which allowed private property and allowed individual farming again. In 1924 the Autonomous Socialistic Soviet Republic (ASSR) of the Volga Germans was established but was recognized only in Russia. The German language was permitted in schools and in their government. By early 1928, Russian grain purchases from the farmers fell short and, rather than any attempt to import the necessary grain, Stalin ordered emergency measures which included government raids on farms. By 1929 the shortage was critical and Stalin ordered the elimination of the *kulaks* (kulaken) and individual farms and forced everyone into collectivization.

Karaganda is a large city in central Kazakhstan to which many Volga Germans were transported beginning in 1929. The population of Karaganda at that time probably approached 500,000. Although some of those dragged off may have been kept in Karaganda, most were dispersed to the environs to work at farming or lumber. This was territory which had never seen human habitation and had to be cleared before the soil could be cultivated. First of all, trees had to be felled for the building of homes. In addition to being forced laborers, the people were pioneers.

It has been estimated that one-half of the Volga Germans were banished by 1929. “Volga Germans” means Lutherans and Catholics as well as Mennonites, although, Lutherans and Catholics far outnumbered Mennonites. By 1932 all privately owned land, no matter how small the plot or farm, was confiscated. Because the people had lost everything, the ensuing years of famine (1930-1936) were worse than those of the early 1920s when people still had their individual farms. Taxes were higher than incomes; grain quotas were levied on everyone, sometimes on persons who had no land. Persons who could not pay their taxes or who could not meet their grain quotas were designated as “enemies of the state”, arrested, sent to labor camps or shot. In some villages, the food situation was so desperate, residents banded together with clubs and sticks and went

on raids to drive rodents from their underground homes, kill them and eat them. Cannibalism was rare but not unknown.

When people were dragged off, men were put into boxcars separately from the women and children. People were literally packed into the cars with room only to stand. The straw on the floor became soaked with urine, feces and lice. Rarely was there any heat. For these always-long journeys, often many hundreds and even thousands of miles, food might be provided only once a week. There were instances where unfortunate women gave birth in these unspeakable circumstances. Sometimes it was so cold that the child and the afterbirth froze immediately.

The reader may have detected a certain critical tenor in Gustav's memoirs concerning certain Jewish officials or brigadiers in the camps where he was imprisoned. Distrust of the Jews had been widespread in Russia throughout history. It may be, too, that it became known that a Jew played a hand in the fate of the millions who were enslaved. The idea that the energy of prisoners should be extracted by whatever means were necessary and that the best time to do this was during the first three months of imprisonment when prisoners were the strongest became the rule of thumb. Lack of adequate food and clothing quickly took a devastating toll of lives. Replacements were no problem as the numbers of arrests and transports to the camps increased. There were perhaps as many as 10,000 camps in Siberia and in the most remote regions of Russia.

It was Naftaly Aronovitch Frenkel, a Turkish Jew, born in Constantinople, who came up with the idea of merciless labor practices. He had risen in power during the Revolution and was given the task of the construction of the Belomor Canal. For this he used 300,000 slave laborers. Many died and never saw the completion of the project. No matter, there were always replacements. He took on other projects in this same manner: canals, new tracks for the Trans-Siberian Railroad, even an industrial city. This idea of mercilessly extracting labor spread to the labor camps and to the mines in Kolyma.

Naftaly Frenkel was awarded the Order of Lenin for the construction of the Belomor Canal and went on to receive other medals and many honors for his work.

[For detailed information a reader might wish to read *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal* by Cynthia Ann Ruder.]  
ASD.

Persons (kulaken) from Am Trakt who were dragged off to Karaganda in 1931. The name in parentheses is the name of the husband's father. Names have been listed under the name of the village in which they lived. This list was sent to Gustav Dyck by Johannes Bergmann (father: Julius), a former resident of Am Trakt.

	Persons in Family	Persons Forced into Labor	Number Living in 1997
<u>Fresenheim</u>			
Töws, Aron (Johannes) wife: Anna nee Nickel	3	-	-
Töws, Johannes (Johannes) wife: Elise nee Neufeld	6	2	3
<u>Hohendorf</u>			
Bergmann, Cornelius (Johannes) Wife: ?	4	1	2
Bergmann, Heinrich (Jacob) Wife: Maria nee Neufeld	2	1	-
Bergmann, Jacob (Johannes) Wife: Agathe nee Toews	4	-	1
Esau, Gerhardt Wife: Helene nee Mattiess	5	-	-
Esau, Herman Wife: Margareta nee Albrecht	3	-	-
Fransen, Johannes (Jacob) Wife: Anna nee Eck	7	1	1
<u>Köppental</u>			
Epp, Artur (Peter) Wife: Frieda nee Fransen	5	-	2
Epp, Peter (Bernhard) Wife: ?	3	-	-
Epp, Peter (Peter) Wife: Alexandra	4	2	=
Wiens, Petger (Julius) Wife: Helene nee Thiessen	6	-	-
<u>Lindenau</u>			
Wall, Franz (David) Wife: Maria	3	-	-
<u>Lysanderhöh</u>			
Bergmann, Abram (Oeter) Wife: Anna nee Fröse	9	4	3
Bergmann, Peter (Abram) Wife: Katharina nee Essau	4	-	-
Bergmann, Abram (John) Wife: Anna ?nee Bergmann	8	2	2
Dyck, Franz (Abram) Wife: ?	1	-	-

Fröse, Jacob (David)	8	2	1
Wife: Helene nee Wiens			
Fröse, David (Jacob)	5	-	-
Wife: Helene nee Bergmann			
Töws, Artur (Dietrich)	5	-	1
Wife: Anna nee Bergmann			
Wiens, Julius (Peter)	8	1	3
<u>Medental</u>			
Engbrecht, Cornelius	3	-	-
Wife: ?			
Isaak, Hermann (Peter)	9	3	2
Wife: Elise nee Reimer			
Penner, Johannes (Hermann)	6	1	3
Wife: Emilei nee Pauls			
Wall, Gerhard	1	-	-
Wife: ?			
Wall, Hermann (Gerhard)	3	-	-
Wife: Laora nee Ewert			
<u>Orloff</u>			
Epp, Franz (Peter)	5	2	1
Wife: Maria nee Bergmann			
Isaak, Heinrich (Peter)	5	1	-
Wife: ?			
Wiens, Abram (Peter)	7	-	-
Wife: Margareta nee Toews			
Wiens, Peter (Abram)	9	4	3
Wife: Maria nee Reimer			
Wiens, Johannes (Abram)	4	1	-
Wife: Maria nee Bergmann			
<u>Ostenfeld</u>			
Albrecht, Franz	4	-	1
Wife: ?			
Albrecht, Franz (Franz)	2	-	-
Wife: Anna nee Wall			
Janzen, Wilhelm	8	2	1
Wife: Maria			
Janzen, Wilhelm (Wilhelm)	3	-	-
Wife: Klara nee Neufeld			
Neufeld, Gustav (Gustav)	1	-	-
Wife: ?			
Neufeld, Heinrich (Jacob)	2	-	-
Wife: Katharina ?nee Neufeld			
Penner, Jacob	2	-	-
Wife: ?			
Wiens, Cornelius (Julius)	8	1	2
Wife: Maria nee Töws			

After some years in Karaganda and environs, many were arrested, sentenced or shot. The following is a list of some of the above persons and what is known of their fate. The name of the father is in parentheses. This list is also from Johannes (father: Julius) Bergmann to Gustav Dyck.

It should be noted that persons who “returned” did not return to Am Trakt. Persons who were “resettled” were not allowed to return to their former homes which is why, today, Mennonites are found in the areas of Karaganda, Omsk, Tomsk, Novosibirsk, *et al.* The reader will remember that, by 1941, all Volga Germans had been “resettled”. Am Trakt, in fact, had been destroyed in the 1930s-early 1940s. ASD.

Name	Year of Birth	Arrested	Sentence/Return
Bergmann, Aabram (Peter)	1877	1940	8 yrs, returned
Bergmann, Cornelius (Joh.)	1909	1938	Shot
Bergmann, Heinrich (Joh.)	1899	1938	Shot
Bergmann, Jacob (Abram)	1907	1941	10 yrs, returned
Bergmann, Jacob (Abram)	1912	1948	Returned
Bergmann, Julius (Peter)	1880	1934	5 yrs, 1940 2 <sup>nd</sup> arrest, returned
Bergmann, Peter (Abram)	1902	1938	Shot
Bergmann, Peter (Abram)	1917	1938	Shot
Fröse, David (Jacob)	1903	1934	3 yrs, 1938 shot
Janzen, Anna	1914	1942	Returned
Janzen, Jacob (Wilhelm)	1913	1938	Shot
Penner, Johannes (Hermann)	1892	1934	5 yrs, returned
Töws, Artur (Dietrich)	1900	1934	3 yrs, 1938 shot
Töws, Hermann (Johannes)	1885	1938	Shot
Töws, Johannes (Johannes)	1885	1938	Shot
Wiens, Abram (Peter)	1878	1934	3 yrs, 1938 shot
Wiens, Cornelius (Julius)	1881	1938	Shot
Wiens, Peter (Julius)	1885	1934	Became ill, died 23 May 1934



# Appendix D

## Important Dates in the History of Germans from Russia

22 July 1763	Manifesto of Czarina Catherine II (the Great) (1762-1796). Proclamation to all foreigners to emigrate to Russia.
18 Mar 1764	Colonial code determining the agrarian order in the colonies.
29 June 1764	Founding of Dobrinka, the oldest Volga German colony.
July 1789	Founding of Chortitza, the first Mennonite colony in Russia.
June 1800	Goodwill patent of Czar Paul I (1796-1801 ) favoring the Mennonites.
20 Feb 1804	Manifesto of Czar Alexander I (1801-1825); invitation for German settlements in the Black Sea area.
25 Oct 1819	General church council of evangelical churches in the Saratov Volga district.
9 Nov 1838	Czar Nicholas I (1825-1855) establishes the Rights of Colonists.
1842	Codification of all freedoms duties and privileges of the colonists and the investiture of citizenship to colonists in the entire Empire of the Czars.
4 June 1871	The suspension of colonial laws by the Czarist regime.

7 Oct 1879	German-Austrian Pact (Dual Pact). Result: worsening of conditions for Germans in Russia.
13 Mar 1881	Ascendancy to the throne of Czar Alexander III. Beginning of Russification.
1904-1905	Russo-Japanese War. Defeat of Russia leads to a partial domestic liberalization. Results in a new economic and cultural upturn in the German colonies.
1 Aug 1914	Outbreak of World War I (300,000 Germans served in the Czarist Army). Germans are declared enemies of the Russian Empire.
2 Feb 1915	Liquidation laws: Germans are to be expropriated and banished to Siberia.
15 Mar 1917	Abdication of Nicholas II (February Revolution); forthwith suspension of liquidation laws.
20 Apr 1917	First collective (general) congress in the history of Germans from Russia.
17 Nov 1917	Bolshevik Revolution (October Revolution).
3 Mar 1918	Peace of Brest-Litvosk. Reparation clause favoring Germans in Russia.
6 June 1924	Founding of Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic. ASSR of the Volga Germans.

19 Feb 1927	New Economic Politics (NEP). General improvement in the German colonies a general upswing.
1928	Beginning of collectivization. Dissolution of <i>kulaks</i> and closing of the churches.
Nov & Dec 1929	6,000 Germans receive permission to emigrate to Germany. From Germany most went to North and South America.
23 Aug 1939	German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact.
1 Sept 1939	Outbreak of World War II (1939-1945).
22 June 1941	Beginning of German-Soviet War.
July 1941	Deportation of Germans from the western Soviet Union (Crimea, Caucasus parts of the Black Sea district 25).
Aug 1941	German troops occupy Dnepropetrovsk. Germans who escape the Dneper continue to be exiled.
10 Oct 1944	Soviet troops occupy Odessa. Some Black Sea Germans are resettled in Warthegan.
12 Jan 1945	Beginning of Soviet winter activity; many Germans in flight.
23 May 1949	Founding of the Federal Republic of Germany.
9 Sept 1955	Visit of German Chancellor Adenauer to Moscow.

13 Dec 1955	Decree of the Supreme Soviet: abrogation of the restrictions on rights of Germans and their extended families who find themselves in special settlements. But no return of property that was confiscated at the time of their exile and a prohibition of their return to their home colonies.
8 Apr 1958	German-Soviet agreement on bringing families together and cooperation between the Red Cross societies in both countries.
24 Apr 1959	German-Soviet concurrence on reunification of families.
29 Aug 1964	Decree on the partial rehabilitation of the Volga Germans and rescinding of the decree of 28 Aug 1941. Also applicable to other Germans in the USSR.
12 Aug 1970	Conclusion of Moscow Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the USSR on mutual renunciation of force. Result: emigration numbers increase.
1 Aug 1975	Signing of the Helsinki Accords. Further increase in emigration numbers for a short duration.
8 Nov 1984	Debate in the German Bundestag over the situation of Germans in the Soviet Union and the heavy retrogression.
1985	Mikhail Gorbachev becomes Prime Minister of USSR.
1987	Mikhail Gorbachev campaigns for glasnost and perestroika.

- 1988 Mikhail Gorbachev becomes President of USSR.
- 1989 Fall of Berlin Wall.
- 1990 Mikhail Gorbachev is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany invited ethnic Germans living in Russia to come to Germany to live, if they wished. They were given full benefits, including pensions. In addition, they gave the newcomers living subsidies and temporary housing to enable them to find jobs and accumulate enough money to choose their own apartments or houses.

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(Note: Gustav often used a  
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