

The Story of Johanna Dyck Fröse

by Alice Sitler Dyck*



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Johanna and Jacob Jacobovitch Dyck were twins born to Jakob and Justine (Wall) Dyck, August 17, 1881, in Ostenfeld, Am Trakt, near Saratov, Russia.

Am Trakt was a Mennonite settlement on the Volga River which began early in the 1850s. The name was taken from a 'highway' which ran through Russia beginning at the Elton Sea, a salt lake. The purpose of the highway then was to transport salt. It was also used to drive large herds of cattle and sheep to market. In fact, it was so wide (420 feet) the livestock could graze enroute.

Justine Wall, born 1855, was Jakob Dyck's third wife. He was born in 1832 in Poppau, West Prussia, and went to Russia about 1854. His first wife (nee Siebert) died after two years of marriage, leaving no children. His second wife, whom he married Feb. 23, 1871, was the widow Anna Wiebe Penner who had two children, Catherine and Peter. Peter had been born in August 1870, several months after his father died. From this second marriage was born a daughter, Anna, in 1872. The mother, Anna, also died in 1872, perhaps in childbirth.

When Jakob and Justine were married on Sept. 26, 1873, he was past forty and she was eighteen and stepmother to three very young children. Jakob and Justine's

first child, Jakob, born in 1874, died. Others born to them were: Maria, 1876; John, 1878; and Justine, 1879.

In the early months of 1882, Peter Penner, eleven and one-half years old, stepchild of the second marriage, fell ill with typhoid fever. Hoping to confine the illness to one child, Jakob removed Peter to another building and nursed him there.

Peter regained his health but Catherine and Maria fell ill, as well as Jakob. Eventually the girls recovered but Jakob died April 4, 1882, not yet fifty. Justine was twenty-seven years old, a widow with eight children to care for. The twins, Jakob and Johanna, were only eight months old.

Years later in America, Jakob would become my father-in-law. Johanna's story is much different.

Because of the desperate situation, Penner relatives took the two Penner children and Anna Dyck from Justine who had been their mother for nine years—the only mother the two younger children had known. Also, probably because of her desperate situation, Justine remarried unwisely. Her second husband, Cornelius Fröse, was a widower with a number of children.

The now very large family lived at Ostenfeld until 1887, when the home burned. They then moved to Lindenau, another village in the Am Trakt area. Two sons were born to Justine and Cornelius: Gustav in 1889, and Wilhelm, born later, who died accidentally at fifteen or sixteen years of age. By then the family had moved to Siberia (after 1900), in the Barnaul/Novosibirsk area. My father-in-law once spoke of having to go to Semipalatinsk by sled eighty miles in temperatures of more than -30 degrees.

Nothing is known, to this writer, of the children of Cornelius by his previous marriage—how many there were (except that one source said he 'abounded' in children), their names, or ages. My father-in-law never spoke of them and apparently no one ever asked. Jakob loved his mother dearly but never cared for his stepfather. He was very fond, however, of his two younger half-brothers and named his second son Will Gustav after them.

Regretfully little is known of the early life of Johanna except that life was very hard for all of them. It is thought she may have married prior to "going to Siberia." Jakob joined his parents and others of the family in Siberia in 1904, traveling via the then-new Trans-Siberian Railroad.

Johanna had married Jacob Cornelius Fröse, born Nov. 14, 1877, at Medental, Samara. Was he a son of her stepfather's first marriage? Possibly, but not known. A photograph of him taken during World War I shows him in a Red Cross uniform. Many German-Russian Mennonites so served, caring for wounded Russian soldiers in hospitals and on trains.

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, life began to change. At first the Mennonites were not affected by the new communism and in fact, were given some concessions until as late as 1926. They were the most successful farmers in Russia and had always been a great asset to the economy. Collective farms appeared to be a threat only to others.

Many of the Mennonite colonies were rather remote and they simply ignored the policies of collectivism. Ultimately, though, devastation came to all. Farms began to be seized. Men were seized and sent to labor camps. Fatherless families

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were forced to flee their homes, surviving by their wits, even to living in holes in the ground and in forests.

Sometimes both parents were taken away by authorities, leaving children to fend for themselves, hence the “wild children” of the streets found in Russian cities in the 1920s and 1930s. It was then a simple matter for the government to assume control of these “abandoned” farms.

Mennonites, of course, were not the only people who were so unmercifully persecuted. To add to the problems of non-Russians, only persons who could vote could get jobs on the collective farms.

“Foreigners,” such as ethnic Germans, Poles, etc., had no vote even though many such “foreigners” had been in Russia for generations.

For a time in 1930, the Russian government decided to allow people to leave Russia; people who did not wish to abide by the law could leave.

Somehow Johanna, her husband, and young adopted son got out of Russia, leaving a married adopted daughter. (Johanna had no children of her own.) They went to Germany where they were detained for a time at a “Deutschrussenlager” (German-Russian camp) in Mölln, east of Hamburg.

They wanted to go to Canada, but illness of some sort afflicted some of the people wishing to go (one source told me “eye disease”) so the ship would not be allowed to dock in Canada or the United States.

Brazil agreed to accept them and so it was they sailed to Sao Paulo, Brazil. Johanna must have been heartsick because it was her dream to get to Canada where her older sister, Maria, already lived and then possibly go to Kansas where her twin, Jacob, had been living since 1907.

South America had invited Germans in Russia to their lands as far back as 1862. There were established colonies of German Catholics, Evangelicals, and Mennonites in Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, as well as Brazil.

Johanna was nearing fifty. Hardship and tragedy would continue to plague her for the rest of her long life.

The family settled near Curitiba, south of Sao Paulo. Farming in the jungle-like atmosphere and terrain of Brazil was extremely difficult. Imagine farming in Siberia one year and Brazil the next!

An accident left her almost deaf. Her husband bumped her hand as she was

scratching her ear with a metal knitting needle, driving the needle into her head. Both ears were affected.

We do not know when her husband died. When two of my sisters-in-law contacted her in the late 1950s, she was not only a widow but soon to be childless as well.

Cornelius, her adopted son, had gone to Curitiba to work in a factory. He met a Brazilian girl there whom he married. She spoke only Portuguese so no relationship was established between her and Johanna even though the couple had three sons, one of whom died. While the children were yet young, Cornelius died of tuberculosis. After that Johanna saw no more of her daughter-in-law or two grandsons.

By now Johanna was aging and as always, very poor. She had suggested to my sisters-in-law in the late 1950s that she be brought to Kansas to make her home perhaps with them or my widowed mother-in-law (Jacob had died in 1954).

My mother-in-law had told me several times that she preferred that I not write to Johanna because for years Johanna had been asking to be brought to Kansas. When Johanna had first asked Jacob, he was raising a large family of thirteen children and his farm was not yet paid. He simply could not consider it.

The infrequent letters from Johanna to my sisters-in-law were full of her religious philosophy—she longed to be released from her bondage. She wrote only bits and pieces of a personal nature but they give a glimpse of her lonely and austere life. Remember, she was almost completely deaf for many years so she was denied even the pleasure of a visit with a friend.

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 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



Jacob Dyck, father of Johanna, born 1832, Poppau, West Prussia, and died 1882, Ostenfeld, Samara, Russia. This photograph was taken in Russia in the 1870s.

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 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. My Lord will not desert me. Sometimes I feel deserted from people ... Should you have pleasure from above, come to Brazil, then everything would be well.

Jan. 27, 1960

... I am better, only my back reminds me I am old. I live at Peter Siemens' in his garden. I have a small house, a small room, a small kitchen and a small piece of garden, have electric light; they raise chickens. He is director at the schools.

Polizeiverwaltung

Mölln i. Lbg. den 11. Januar 1920

(Ausstellungsbefugte Behörde)

Personalausweis Nr. 6.

Paßersatz

Familienname: Fröse

Vorname: Jacob Cor.

Staatsangehörigkeit: -

frühere: Russland
bis wann:

Beruf: Landwirt

Ständiger Wohnsitz mit Anschrift:

Gegenwärtiger Aufenthaltsort mit Anschrift:

Deutschrussenlager Mölln i. Lbg.

Geboren am: 14. November 1877 Alter: 52 Jahre

Geburtsort: Medental; Samara

Gestalt: groß Haar: dunkel Augen: blau Gesichtsform: ger

Besondere Kennzeichen:

Es wird hiermit bescheinigt, daß der Inhaber die durch nebenstehendes Lichtbild dargestellte Person ist und die darunter befindliche Unterschrift eigenhändig vollzogen hat.



Unterschrift:

Unterschrift des Inhabers.

Jacob Fröse

Document issued from a "Deutschrussenlager" (German-Russian camp) at Mölln, east of Hamburg, prior to the family's departure for Brazil in Jan. 1930, showing Jacob Cornelius Fröse and, on the reverse side (pictured on the next page), Johanna Dyck Fröse and their adopted son, Cornelius. This was sent to the author by Rev. Peter Siemens, Curitiba, Brazil.

2. Ehefrau: Johanna geb. Dyck

geboren: 4. August 1881
Ostenfeld; Samara



3. Sohn Cornelius geb. 26. März 1918

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Visto no Consulado Geral do Brasil em
Hamburgo, 16 de Janeiro de 1930



pele Consul Geral



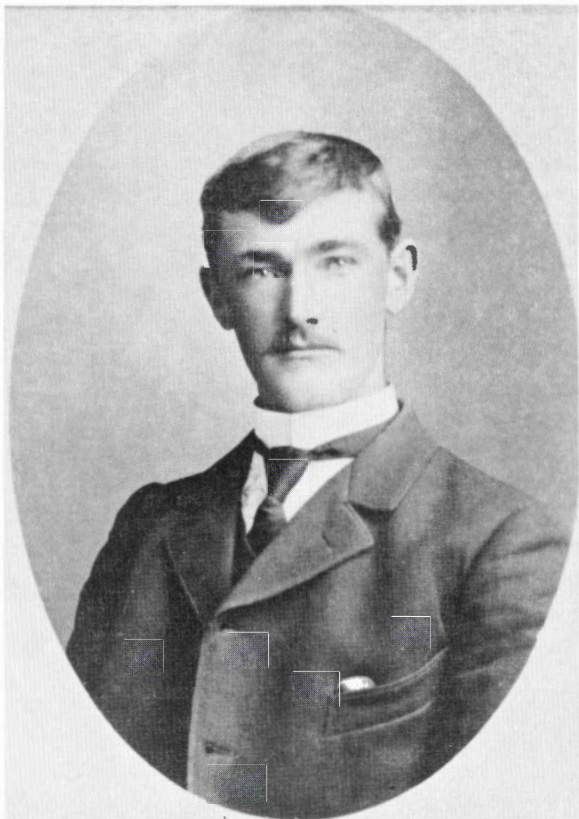
gratis

Antonio Torres

Consul Adjunto

Antonio Torres
Consul Adjunto





Jacob J. Dyck, twin brother of Johanna, was born Aug. 1881, in Ostenfeld, Samara, Russia. He died Nov. 1954, in Butler Co., Kan. This photograph was taken about 1910 in Newton, Kan.

Sometimes I get eggs from them . . . Greet your dear mother and Eduard and all your brothers and sisters and their children. Your loving aunt.

Curitiba, Dec. 9, 1963

. . . Our brotherhood founded an old folks home, we are three women for the start. We are taken care of by a young widow . . . Is your dear mother still living? I probably scared her when I wanted to come there. I did not mean that. She should not be afraid of me.

Curitiba, Sept. 2, 1965

. . . Your last letter I received five years ago. During this time I experienced many things. I was at the Home for the Aged 1/2 year and the small house was taken for the mission, where should I go? Then Peter Siemens took me in, I am here now 1-1/2 years. . . look at my poor writing with love.

July 21, 1967

. . . My dear brother rests already a long time and I still have to go on living . . . I am already at Peter Siemens four years . . . I had my own furniture but could not take it along as I am with strangers. But I am thankful they took me in. It is the Lord's will, I have no friends, I am hard of hearing, that is why I am very lonely. But I have a wonderful Saviour who won't desert me. Your Loving aunt Johanna Dyck Froese.

This was the last letter (all written in German and translated for this article) written to my sisters-in-law. They had sent occasional gifts of money to Johanna but I am not aware of any further contact between them after this.

Frau Siemens, in 1965, asked in a note if my sisters-in-law could not send Johanna a little money. It was not until December 1969 that I was aware of these letters; in fact, I had thought there was no contact since my mother-in-law had asked me not to write. When I read the letters I was stricken with remorse that we had been unaware of her dire straits. And then there was the awful loneliness.

I wrote to Johanna upon my return home the first week of January 1970, writing to her about my fondness for her brother, Jacob, my beloved father-in-law, my interest in her and the family history.

In time I received a letter from Pastor Siemens telling me that Johanna had died on January 7, only a few days before my letter had arrived. She was eighty-eight years old. He said it had been some years since she had received any mail and was gratified by my interest and concern. He sent me her passport from 1930 and a few old photos and snapshots of my husband's family.

But the saga doesn't quite end there.

A few years later, a German friend of mine, living near Heidelberg, wrote that some of her friends who belonged to a choral society were going on tour to some of the German communities of Brazil. I wrote back about Johanna and Pastor Siemens suggesting her friends might inquire about them if they were in the Curitiba area.

Some weeks later I was all but struck dumb when I received letters from Brazil from nurses who had cared for Johanna over the years. Members of the choral group had indeed inquired and found these nurses who then sent me the packet of Bible verses and poems written by Johanna as greetings and gifts, along with several small photos.

A small world.
Undeserved gifts.
Humbly accepted.
Lovingly kept.

Johanna's Song

As a pilgrim going through the land
Redeems the blessed masses
In their ranks there softly sounds
A song so wonderful!
It resounds in the land of tears
Like a multitudinous sound of jubilation.
It sings in spite of deep longing
Of the victory of the song of praise.
It is the song of the land
The majestic new song
A song of Jesus' wounds
Of Jesus' victory and power
How He established a healing
Which here makes everything blessed.

(Translated from German)

This poem was sent by Johanna to Jacob, her twin, in the 1940s. If she did not write it, my apologies to the unknown author. The title is my addition.

Jakob Dyck, 1832-1882

Jakob went to Russia ca1854.

- m. 1) ___ Siebert; no issue
- m. 2) Feb. 23, 1871, Anna Wiebe Penner, d. 1872

Children:

- a. Catherine Penner
b. 1867; stepchild
- b. Peter Penner, b. 1870;
stepchild
- c. Anna Dyck, b. 1872
- m. 3) Sept. 26, 1873, Justine Wall,
1855-?1927
 - a. Jacob Dyck, d. 1874
 - b. Maria Dyck, b. 1876
went to Canada in 1926
 - c. John Dyck, b. 1878
remained in Russia
 - d. Justine Dyck, b. 1879
remained in Russia
 - e. Jacob J. Dyck, b. 1881; twin
went to Kan., in 1907
 - f. Johanna Dyck, b. 1881; twin
went to Brazil in 1930

Justine Wall, 1855-?1927

- m. 2) Cornelius Fröse, n.d.
- a. Gustav Fröse, b. 1889

went to Harbin, Manchuria
b. **Wilhelm Fröse**, ?1891-?1906

The Wall Family

1. **Johann Wall**, b. Bröske, West Prussia
m. **Helene Claassen**, d. 1846, Bröske,
West Prussia.
Child: Johann (2)
2. **Johann Wall**, b. 1790s, Bröske,
West Prussia
m. 1) Feb. 24, 1815, **Justine Toews**,
May 31, 1793-June 2, 1824,
Schönsee, Weichsel, West Prussia;
dau. of Johann and Justine (Claassen)
Toews
m. 2) Dec. 2, 1824, **Margarete Regier**
Child: Johann (4)
4. **Johann Wall**, b. Jan. 8, 1816,
Schönsee, West Prussia; d. Russia
m. Nov. 8, 1849, **Catharine Wiens**,
b. Apr. 1, 1827, Neumuensterberger-
feld, West Prussia; d. Russia.
Siblings are unknown except for
half-brother Gerhard Wall.
Child: Justine (8)
8. **Justine Wall**, b. Feb. 1, 1855,
Mierauerwald, West Prussia
m. 1) Sept. 26, 1873, **Jakob Dyck**,
Lysanderhöh, Am Trakt, Russia
m. 2) **Cornelius Fröse**
d. ?1927 Siberia or Tashkent
Siblings: Julius, Anna, and Cornelius

The Dyck Family

1. **Paul Dyck**, b. 1670, West Prussia;
d. 1740, Junkeracker bei Ostsee,

West Prussia

- m. 1706, **Susanne Hoffman Reimer**
Child: Jakob (2)
2. **Jakob Dyck**, b. 1706, d. Apr. 22, 1786,
Hegewald, West Prussia
m. **Catarina Steffen**, 1717-Mar. 13,
1771, Hegewald, West Prussia
Child: Jacob (4)
4. **Jakob Dyck**, b. Nov. 18, 1743, Hege-
wald, West Prussia; d. May 9, 1820,
Poppau, West Prussia
m. Oct. 3, 1765, **Maria Claassen**,
dau. of Herman and Anna Neufeld
Claassen
Child: Jakob (8)
8. **Jakob Dyck**, b. Oct. 21, 1767, Poppau,
West Prussia; d. Feb. 9, 1843,
Hauskampe, West Prussia
m. Oct. 29, 1791, **Margarete**
Warkentin
Child: Dietrich (16)
16. **Dietrich Dyck**, b. Oct. 9, 1796,
Poppau, West Prussia; d. June 25,
1849, Poppau, West Prussia
m. Oct. 23, 1817, **Agnete Janzen**,
b. Jan. 16, 1796; d. Dec. 26, 1836,
Einlage a.d. Nogat
Child: Jakob (32)
32. **Jakob Dyck**, b. May 5, 1832, Poppau,
West Prussia; d. Apr. 4, 1882,
Ostenfeld, Am Trakt, Russia
m. 1) **___ Siebert**
m. 2) **Anna Wiebe Penner**, d. 1872
m. 3) **Justine Wall**, b. Feb. 1, 1855,
Mierauerwald, West Prussia;
d. ?1927, Siberia or Tashkent
Siblings: Dietrich, Catharine,
Johann, Maria, Agatha, Justina,

and Cornelius. All four brothers
went to Russia, but the sisters
remained in West Prussia.

Child: Jacob (64)

64. **Jacob Jacobovitch Dyck**, b. Aug. 17,
1881, Ostenfeld, Am Trakt, Russia;
d. Nov. 30, 1954, Newton, Kans.
m. Feb. 22, 1911, **Marie G. Harder**,
b. Oct. 2, 1884; d. Oct. 31, 1973,
Whitewater, Kans.
Siblings: Maria, Johann, Justine,
and Johanna; half brothers: Gustav
and Wilhelm Fröse.
Child: Herbert (128)
128. **Herbert Cornelius Dyck**, b. Oct. 20,
1927, Whitewater, Kans.
m. Nov. 28, 1948, Whitewater, Kans.,
Alice Sitler, b. Sept. 11, 1929,
Frankfort, Kans.
Siblings: Kaete, Eduard, Will,
Robert, Bruno, Gertrude, Louise,
Walter, Esther, Arthur, Irene,
and Linda.
Child: Justin Jacob (356)
356. **Justin Jacob Dyck**, b. Aug. 2, 1961,
St. Louis Co., Mo.
Siblings: Frederick, Maria,
Christine, and Nathan.

References for article and charts

Papers of Anna Claassen Harder and
Kaete Dyck.
Letters of Meta Toews and Johanna
Dyck Fröse.
Diaries of John D. Dyck and Johann
Jantzen.
Files of Walter J. Schmidt.
Files of the author.