

# The Trek to Central Asia—Why They Went

by Henry Schapansky\*

In a series of very interesting and informative articles, D. Frederick Dyck has provided new information and additional historical material on one of the most interesting episodes in Russian Mennonite history, namely the Trek to Central Asia (1880-1881).<sup>1</sup>

In these articles, Dyck has assembled a scattered and otherwise relatively inaccessible collection of writings by persons who participated in the Trek or were acquainted with such individuals. The great strength of these pieces is that Dyck allows them to tell their story “in their own words,” unlike some editions of original Russian Mennonites’ writings (diaries and journals, for instance), edited by scholars who often take it upon themselves to select what they themselves judge to be relevant or important. These naturally reflect only their own judgments and are often inadequate in the broader historical context. Sometimes, too, the translations are inadequate. This is not the case in Dyck’s articles, since the translations appear to be accurate and to reflect the spirit of the writer.

Nonetheless, in the series, particularly in Part II, Dyck sets out a thesis, consisting of a number of related propositions, concerning the origins and motivating factors relative to the Trek. This thesis is supported by writers such as Fred Belk and Waldemar Janzen. The thesis is of importance because it affects our perspective not only on the Trek itself and on the Trekers,<sup>2</sup> but also on how we define and categorize Mennonites in general.

The first proposition advanced is that avoidance of “military” service and not chiliasm<sup>3</sup> (or pietism) was the primary motivating factor for the

Trek. Another proposition is that the role of Nicholas “Claas” Epp Jr. in the Trek was minimal. A related proposition is the idea that the Trek was very similar to the emigrations from Russia to North America in the 1870s, the only difference between the two being that the Trekers moved east rather than west, over land rather than across the Atlantic. A corollary of this thesis is that the Trekers were to some extent in the mainstream of Mennonite thinking, and that it is

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<sup>1</sup> Dyck has written a number of articles, published in *MFH*, focusing on the Am Trakt settlements as well as on the Trek. The pieces noted in the references are those that discuss the Trek in detail.

<sup>2</sup> By Treker, I mean a participant in the Trek to Central Asia.

<sup>3</sup> Chiliasm, or Millenarianism, is the view that the Kingdom of Heaven will be established on earth, (with the second coming of Christ), at a definite point in time.

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incorrect to regard the Trekers, or their relatives or children, with suspicion as to their place in the global Mennonite community.

This thesis, which affects our perspective on the Trekers and on the Mennnite community in general, is skewed towards a benign view of the reasons for the Trek that, in my personal view is not entirely accurate. Nor is it complete.

A few comments on the nature of the evidence for Dyck's thesis may be in order here. This evidence consists of autobiographical memoirs of individual Trekers or writings of close relatives, with the conspicuous absence of references to Claas Epp and to the chiliastic theme in these pieces.

There are several classes of historical writings. There are those writers who propose to examine the history of a period or a set of events. If such a history is written by an eye-witness (as in the case of F. Bartsch), we need to bear in mind that the historian was a participant or a relative of a participant of the period or events described. Thus we need to know something of the historian's background and family history. Then there are letters, journals, and other like documents which may or may not reflect on larger historical issues. Lastly, there are autobiographical writings. The perspective of each class of writer is different.

The historical writer may focus on some events as opposed to others (sometimes unconsciously, sometimes reflecting his personal views and bias). But in general we must assume that the historian is writing in good faith and not suppressing evidence that is directly known by him (or her) to be relevant.

The case of the autobiographer is somewhat different. Usually, the autobiographer is writing from an "older and wiser" perspective and is focusing on his (or her) life, justifying, to some extent, the actions of a life to descendants or to a wider public. Such a writer will naturally dwell on the positive actions and events of his or her life and may remain silent with respect to foolish deeds and embarrassing events. Such omissions may be deliberate or unconscious. Indeed, memories of pleasant times and events are much stronger than those of unpleasant ones because we continually call the former to mind while continually repressing the latter. And, if I were to write my autobiography, I would likely do the same. The relative rarity of references to Claas Epp and to chiliastic ideas in autobiographies of Trekers is therefore to be expected, because, as it turned out, the prophecies of Epp simply failed to materialize. Why this scarcity

of reference should surprise historians is perhaps a greater mystery. Indeed, the Trekers who later moved to America probably felt foolish and embarrassed over their belief in the visions of Claas Epp.

In this article, I propose to advance the opposite thesis, namely that chiliasm was, indeed, the primary motivating factor for the Trek. The Trekers, like the Mennonite Brethren, were part of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century movement in Mennonite Russia towards individualism, elitism, and pietism. The thinking of the Trekers was, to some extent, in opposition to traditional Mennonite thinking. We can go back to early Anabaptist history to see a parallel between the Trekers, to some extent followers of the prophet Claas Epp, and the spiritualist followers of prophet and pseudo-Anabaptist David Joris.

If the latter, standard thesis, is correct, then it follows that traditionalist Mennonites would indeed be correct in viewing the Trekers with suspicion. Moreover, that such suspicion would extend to children or relatives of Trekers is also natural since the ideals and thoughts of parents often extend to their children and frequently also include close relatives.

In this article, I advance yet a further thesis, namely, that the same spirit of discontent, pietism, and elitism which led to the creation of the Mennonite Brethren (MB) and Templer groups also led to the formation of the Treker group. The former two separatist groups also moved, to the Kuban region in the Caucasus mountain foothills.

The ultimate goal of the Templers was the founding of a separate community in Palestine (the only appropriate home for a truly Christian community, in their view). As it happened, some Templers did eventually settle in Palestine. The Kuban settlement would likely have attracted all the MBs, had that settlement met with early success. But this was not to be. Dissention and difficulties beset the Kuban group in the founding years, and many disillusioned and disappointed MBs left the Kuban.

The Kuban adventure, while moderating to some extent the extremism of the MBs, did not lead to a return to the traditional Mennonite community. Nor was this the case with the Templers. In all three cases, a segment of the original group remained in the intended utopia, but with little of the original enthusiastic ideology.

The profound and sweeping changes which affected Europe during the period of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars also strongly impacted the Mennonite community in West Prussia.

These changes deepened an already existing division between those who wished to “modernize” and those who wished to retain the essentials of Mennonite faith and the concept of community—the *Gemeinde*<sup>4</sup>—as it had existed for centuries. Roughly speaking, this division ran along Friesian-Flemish lines and, to a lesser extent, along urban-rural lines. The heavy death toll and economic hardships experienced in this tumultuous period also led many to reevaluate their future in the Prussian state.

Those Mennonites who had immigrated to south Russia before the full impact of these troubling events in Europe were experienced—that is, roughly before 1806—were able to build a traditional Mennonite community in Russia. Many of those who were to follow in the years after 1815 subscribed to pietistic thinking. This was particularly true among the Friesian immigrants, who carried with them the seeds of further division with the Russian Mennonite community.

Pietism is the view, present in many religious groups, that the inner spirit and inner spiritual growth are more important than rigid adherence to the scriptures or even strict adherence to the teachings of Christ himself. Pietism is a view favored by persons who feel constrained by the religious community in which they live in their pursuit of more personal objectives (sometimes including wealth or fame). In its extreme form, pietism leads to an absolute conviction of salvation and thus to the belief in an elite group, predestined for such salvation. Extreme pietism is often very personal, emotional, and subjective in nature, and, as such, readily lends itself to prophetic elements. Skillful charismatic speakers, adept at manipulating emotions, often have great appeal and influence in such an environment.

Pietism, at least in its extreme form, stands, I claim, in opposition to central tenets of the Mennonite faith. Menno Simons himself viewed spiritualists as the worst menace to the true church. The *Gemeinde*—a community of Christians, alternatively, the Brotherhood—played a central role in the lives of traditionalist Mennonites. Its purpose was to assist individuals along the path to salvation but not to give positive and absolute assurance of salvation. Mennonites were a democratic body and rules of conduct, mutually agreed upon, were established for the benefit of members. These rules sometimes differed from those of other similar *Gemeinde* or had possible differences in modes of application. Within the *Gemeinde* was a process of discipline, whereby members—voting

members, that is—transgressing these rules would be censured, possibly shunned, or banned. If no such process had existed, the *Gemeinde* would have rapidly disintegrated as a meaningful entity.

For those few within the traditional Mennonite community who felt the intrusion of the *Gemeinde* into their lives to be officious and unwarranted, pietism had a special appeal.

The position of Pietists in the Russian Mennonite community was strengthened by the immigration of the Friesians (the Rudnerweide *Gemeinde*) led by Pietist *Ältester* Franz Görtz (1819) and by the Neumark Mennonites (the Gnadenfeld *Gemeinde*) led by Pietist (and former Lutheran) *Ältester* Wilhelm Lange (1834). Perhaps the greatest negative impact on the traditionalist Mennonite community was made by Pietist Johann Cornies, who, having gradually acquired extensive dictatorial powers, fostered division and pietism in the Molotschna, later using forcible means to create yet further division. Having also gradually acquired wide-ranging authority over the educational system, he introduced Pietist teachers into the schools. Indeed, many, if not most, of the later Zentralschule (high school) teachers in the Molotschna were Pietists, MBs, or Templers.<sup>5</sup> Noteworthy too is the fact that a significant number of later MBs and Templers were of non-Mennonite family background.<sup>6</sup>

Pietism made significant inroads into the West Prussian Mennonite community as well. This was due partially to growing affluence, increasing pressure to assimilate, and the departure of many traditionalists to Russia. As in the Molotschna, the educational system also played an important role. Of particular note is the founding of the Pietist Rudloffhuben School in 1826 (at Kalthof/Koldau). The first teacher was Pietist Friedrich W. Lange, and sponsors included Pietists Jacob Van der Smissen and Jacob Mannhardt.<sup>7</sup> F. W. Lange was a friend of Separatist-Pietist Eduard Wüst and indeed officiated at Wüst’s wedding. Wüst was instrumental in the formation of the MBs, as attested by MB histo-

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<sup>4</sup> In this article, I have retained German words for which no adequate translation can be rendered. These include the following, with approximate English equivalents: *Gemeinde*—congregation, *Ältester*—elder, *Lehrer*—minister, *Lehrdienst*—members of the ministry, but including *Diakonen* (deacons), *Reiseprediger*—itinerant minister, *Oberschulze*—head of a Mennonite regional municipal district (later Volost).

<sup>5</sup> Schapansky, p. 241. See complete reference on p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Schapansky, chapter 10.

<sup>7</sup> John Friesen, “Education, Pietism, and Change among the Mennonites in Nineteenth-Century Prussia,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 66 (1992), pp. 155-66. See Also H. Penner, p. 52.

rian, P.M. Friesen. F.W. Lange was later to be *Ältester* (1841-1849) of the Gnadenfeld *Gemeinde*, but he was removed from office because of adultery.

The Rudloffhuben School was moved, because of local opposition, to Bröskefeld (in the region of the Ladekop *Gemeinde*), and was sometimes referred to as the Bröskefeld School. Many later Trekers were either students of this school or from families living at Bröske/Bröskefeld.

Later teachers of the Bröskefeld School included (1838-1859) Karl Gottlieb Roller (a soldier in the Napoleonic Wars<sup>8</sup>), X Reich, and (1862-1866) Johann Klassen (Oct. 24, 1835-Apr. 1898). Klassen was a son of *Lehrer* Abraham Klassen (b. ca1785) of Königsberg and subsequently joined a theosophical circle in western Germany, writing a number of articles and books on theosophical themes. (Theosophy includes elements of both mysticism and pietism.<sup>9</sup>)

Among the persons with connections to the school or to Bröske/Bröskefeld may be cited:

Johann Epp (Oct. 19, 1835-Feb. 17, 1922). Attended the school. Delegate of 1879 and an autobiographer. A son of Kornelius Epp (b. Nov. 20, 1785) of Bröske.

Abraham Janzen (Nov. 6, 1797-June 23, 1876) of Bröske. His many children were Trekers, including *Lehrer* Johann Janzen (b. Oct. 6, 1823).

Johann Wall (b. Nov. 2, 1788). From Bröske. *Ältester* at Am Trakt from 1853. His son Kornelius was a Treker.

Heinrich Wiebe (1784-Apr. 16, 1837). Born at Bröske and grandfather of Treker Heinrich Wiebe (July 15, 1857-Mar. 20, 1922).

In the revolutionary and eventful year 1848, the Prussian parliament (*Landtag*) debated continuing Mennonite exemption from military service. In any event, no changes were made to the existing laws regarding Mennonite exemption. The exemption was, however, annulled years later, on November 9, 1867. Nevertheless, an option to serve in a non-arms-bearing military capacity was made available to Mennonites soon after the 1867 law was passed. The unrest and changes resulting from the events of 1848 prompted West Prussian Mennonites once again to consider immigration to Russia.

The exact motivating factors leading to this further and last immigration to Russia remain a subject

for further research. Some historians simply claim the main factor was the issue of military service. The fact that that cannot be directly the case should be clear from the remarks above. No doubt, the reasons for emigration were more complex and involved the increasing pietism of many future emigrants.

At a meeting at Koscelitske in 1850, *Lehrer* Johann Wall (b. Nov. 2, 1788) of the Ladekop *Gemeinde* and Nicholas Epp (b. 1803) of Fürstenwerder were delegated to travel to Russia to investigate settlement options. They concluded an agreement with government officials Peter v. Köppen and Eugen v. Hahn (likely also a Pietist, as was his former chief, General Inzov—a factor no doubt facilitating the negotiations) for further Mennonite immigration to Russia. They were permitted to purchase land in the Saratov region, and immigration of 100 families was allowed, each family being required to deposit 350 Thalers with the government. After twenty years, freedom from military service would be granted in exchange for payment of special taxes.

Two separate new Mennonite settlements in Russia were established as a result of these negotiations, namely (1854-1873) Am Trakt (Malyschinskaya Volost) and (1859-1870) Alt Samara (Alexandertal Volost). The reason that two separate colonies were established was the shortage of suitable land in the Trakt area for one very large colony. The Alt Samara Colony was to the north of the Trakt Colony and about 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of the town of Samara on the Volga.

In a sense, the two settlements were sister colonies, although there were striking differences between the two. The Alt Samara Colony was to be more prosperous in subsequent years than Am Trakt. The Am Trakt Colony, on the other hand, contained a large number of pietistically and chiliastically inclined individuals. It is worthy of note that Nicholas "Claas" Epp Sr. (b. 1803), later *Oberschulze* of Am Trakt and Alexandertal, father of the chiliast Class Epp Jr., disassociated himself from the pietist-chiliast movement and relocated to Alt Samara.

Most members of the Am Trakt *Lehrdienst* were enthusiasts of the chiliastic movement, including *Ältester* Johann Wall (b. Nov. 2, 1788) and *Ältester* David Hamm (Oct. 4, 1822-1884), author of the preface to Nicholas Epp's book of 1877. Eye-wit-

<sup>8</sup> D. Frederick Dyck, II, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> H. Penner II, pp. 52, 94.

ness Franz Bartsch reports “prophetic writings which dealt with Christ’s second coming came to dominate most of the preaching in the Trakt.”<sup>10</sup> Alexandertal historian Bernhard Harder also confirms the influence of the Pietist Movement on the Am Trakt and Alt Samara settlers—*der größte Teil der Alexandertaler Siedler war in der alten Heimat mit ihnen in Berührung gekommen*<sup>11</sup> (“most of the Alexandertal settlers had become involved with it [pietism] in the old country [Prussia]”). This Bernhard Harder should not be confused with *Lehrer* Bernhard Harder mentioned below. Additional observation on the effect of the Pietist Movement on the Am Trakt and Alt Samara colonies can be found in this reference.

One of the propositions in Dyck’s thesis is that the Trek occurred to avoid military service. This idea is not in accord with historical information, in my opinion. In fact, universal military service had been under discussion in Russia since the 1860s, although the Mennonite community was likely not aware of the full implications until later. By 1874, however, it was clear to most Mennonites that alternative non-military service would be available to all Mennonites, with the Forestry Service being the option chosen. And it should have been clear to most future Trekers that this service could not be avoided anywhere in Russian territory. What can be said, however, is not that the forestry obligation motivated the Trek but that chiliastic leaders feared *it would interfere with the Trek* (in that many young men would not be able to participate in the Trek, when and if it occurred.)

The role of Epp in the chiliastic movement is perhaps the only really debatable issue. It seems clear that there were several other leaders in the Am Trakt chiliastic movement. Among these was Kornelius Wall (Mar. 9, 1829-1907), son of *Ältester* Johann Wall already mentioned, later at Aulie Ata. Historian Bartsch concludes that Epp’s hand was forced by Wall and others as well as by the universal service law, and that Epp would have delayed the Trek, had he not been afraid of losing his leadership role. For, if anything, Epp wanted to be the leader.

Nicholas “Claas” Epp Jr. (1838-Jan. 6, 1913) was the son of delegate and *Oberschulze* Nicholas Epp (b. 1803). In 1877, he wrote the book *Die est-siegelte Weissagung des Propheten Daniel und die Deutung der Offenbarung Jesu Christi*. It is clear from all accounts that Epp had a very charismatic personality. Even Bartsch, who had many harsh things to say on the subject of Epp, admits this fact.

One of the old Trekers, living at Ak Metchet in 1934, told *Ältester* Jacob Rempel that “his teachings still were a source of comfort and strength . . . We are still convinced that Epp was sent by God to be our leader.”<sup>12</sup>

Epp and his book were well known throughout Mennonite Russia. In the Old Colony, Bernard Höppner (Apr. 18, 1840-May 15, 1913) of Neu Schönwiese makes numerous references to Epp, in letters<sup>13</sup> to his brother in Canada. In a letter dated Aug. 4, 1880, Höppner states that someone, referred to as “uncle” (possibly only a term of respect), was almost ready to join the Trek, but that he, Höppner, felt Epp was a false prophet.

In a subsequent letter, dated Feb. 16, 1881, however, Höppner writes in quite a different and chiliastic mood, giving a remarkably detailed account of the Trekers’ progress, gleaned from letters to the Molotschna. Höppner, then in the Molotschna, states that he himself is not in Tashkent. But the letter gives the definite impression that he is about to join the Trek. The wording of the letter is too vague, however, to draw definitive conclusions. In a letter to Canada dated May 21, 1881, Bernard Hildebrandt (July 11, 1840-Dec. 30, 1910) of Insel Chortitza provides yet further details of the Trek to his uncle, P. Höppner (at P. Höppner’s request).

Hildebrandt’s thoughts on the Trek are ambivalent, but he does mention that someone [the transcription provided is problematic] from Insel Chortitza had left for the Molotschna, enroute to join the Trek. Both B. Hildebrandt and B. Höppner mention a certain Rempel [Heinrich?] from the Jasykovo Colony who traveled to the Volga region to talk with the chiliasts. In a letter to Canada dated Feb. 13, 1879, Isaac Ens (Sept. 10, 1817-Feb. 7, 1889) of Michaelsburg (Fürstenland Colony) discusses Epp’s book, stating, “The book is being widely distributed. I have not read the book, but some who have, tell me they do not understand it.”

In the Molotschna, Epp’s ideas may have been even more widely discussed. *Lehrer* Bernhard Harder (Mar. 25, 1832-Oct. 1, 1884) of the Orloff *Gemeinde* was, for instance, a one-time enthusiast of Epp’s ideas.<sup>14</sup> Abraham Peters (no dates) of

<sup>10</sup> Franz Bartsch, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Harder, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Bartsch, p. 134.

<sup>13</sup> All the letters referred to in this section are from the Falk collection (see references).

<sup>14</sup> P. M. Friesen, p. 481.

Fürstenau, also *Lehrer* in the Orloff *Gemeinde*, who had left the Orloff *Gemeinde* in 1873 to form a separate "Brüder" *Gemeinde*, was one of the most influential of the chiliasts. He had traveled to Am Trakt and met with chiliastic leaders several times in 1879. His group may not have been accepted as a regular MB *Gemeinde*, but it seems probable that the group had much in common with the MBs. Later most of his group, in central Asia, did indeed form a MB *Gemeinde*. This MB *Gemeinde* was visited in 1906 by MB *Ältester* (and *Reiseprediger*) Hermann Neufeld and Peter Töws.<sup>15</sup>

Abraham Peter's group was the largest participating in the Trek. Not all the members of Peter's group were necessarily from the Molotschna. A smaller number of families may have come from other areas of Mennonite Russia. Many in this group were, no doubt, deeply affected by the changes brought about in the dictatorial era of Johann Cornies, which had resulted in division, dissention, and the promotion of pietism. Changes in Russian governmental policies and the reforms following in the wake of the Crimean War also caused many to wonder what the future might hold. Thus it came about that some Mennonites (albeit a relatively small number) gave Epp's end-of-time prophecies serious consideration.

I propose to outline, in the following, some detail in respect of the Trek itself, to give perhaps a clearer view of the nature of the Trek and the Trekers themselves.

Delegations of Epp supporters went to Petersburg in 1879 on two occasions, to investigate settlement options in the East.

The first delegation left in March 1879 and consisted of:

*Lehrer* Johann Epp (Oct. 19, 1835-Feb. 17, 1922) Köppenthal, Trakt. Did not join the Trek, having distanced himself from Epp, as a result of some of Epp's remarks.

Martin Klassen (Apr. 15, 1820-Nov. 24, 1881) Köppenthal, Trakt. A school teacher.

*Lehrer* Abraham Peters (no dates) Fürstenau, Molotschna.

X Buller (no dates) Molotschna.

The second delegation met with the Governor-General (served 1867-1882) Constantine v. Kaufmann

of Turkestan in September 1879. He apparently advised (possibly without authority) that freedom from service would be available in his province. The delegation consisted of:

*Lehrer* Johann Epp (Oct. 19, 1835-Feb. 17, 1922) Köppenthal, Trakt.

*Lehrer* Jacob Töws (June 26, 1838-Jan. 2, 1922) Ly-sanderhöhe, Trakt.

*Lehrer* Abraham Peters (no dates) Fürstenau, Molotschna.

The prospective Trekers also sent out two delegates in 1879/80 to report on conditions in Tashkent, namely Jacob Hamm (no dates) of Köppenthal, and another from the Abraham Peters group in the Molotschna.

A series of wagon trains participated in the Trek:

Leaving Am Trakt July 3, 1880. Ten (10) families, led by Hermann Janzen (no dates), a son of Abraham Janzen (Nov. 6, 1797-June 23, 1876), a wealthy immigrant who came to Am Trakt 1853-55. Claas Epp was a brother-in-law of Hermann and Heinrich Janzen, mentioned here. Included in this group were *Lehrer* Wilhelm Penner (no dates), (previously a school teacher, later Aulie Ata), and *Lehrer* Jonas Quiring (no dates), later USA, both of whom were elected shortly before the Trek, as well as historian Franz Bartsch (Apr. 24, 1854-Jan. 14, 1931).

Leaving Am Trakt Aug. 13, 1880. Twelve (12) families, led by Heinrich Janzen (Apr. 18, 1830-July 20, 1905), brother of Hermann Janzen. Included in this group were *Lehrer* Johann Penner (Nov. 27, 1850-Oct. 8, 1926), brother of Wilhelm Penner above, and *Lehrer* Jacob Töws (June 26, 1838-Jan. 2, 1922) of Ly-sanderhöhe, the delegate mentioned above.<sup>16</sup> Martin Klassen (Apr. 15, 1820-Nov. 24, 1881), "an adherent of the chiliastic movement long before Epp,"<sup>17</sup> author of a book on Mennonite history, was also a member of this group.

<sup>15</sup> Neufeld, p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob Töws, the Treker, was later *Ältester* at Newton, Kansas, and was the father of David Töws (Feb. 9, 1870-Feb. 25, 1947), later *Ältester* (1913) at Rosthern and a leader on the Board of Colonization (Canada).

<sup>17</sup> Franz Bartsch, p. 56.

Leaving the Molotschna September 1880. Some 80 families led by *Lehrer* Abraham Peters (no dates) and Jacob Janzen (1844-June 16, 1917) of Gnadenfeld, a son of Franz Janzen (b. Dec. 11, 1878) of Lichtefeld, an immigrant to Russia in 1819. This train had hoped to join with the Am Trakt trains but did not leave in time. Abraham Peters was later elected *Ältester* of the group; but the election was contested by Epp, and Peters was dismissed.

Leaving Am Trakt Sept. 1, 1881. About 40 families including Claas Epp and *Lehrer* Johann Janzen (b. Oct. 6, 1823), previously *Lehrer* in the Am Trakt *Gemeinde*.

The first two groups (from Am Trakt) wintered at Kaplanbek (near Tashkent), while the third (Molotschna) group wintered at Tashkent.

The assassination of Alexander II in early 1881 led to confusion and further changes in government policies. The original intention of the Trekers had been to settle in Russian Turkestan, relying on Governor-General v. Kaufmann's apparent promises of exemption from service. After subsequent and unsuccessful attempts by the Kaplanbek group to settle in the Khanate of Bukhara, some 80 families under Abraham Peters did settle at Aulie Ata in Russia to the northeast of Tashkent, in 1882.

Some 60-odd families, including Epp and his more dedicated followers, moved to Lausan, some 600 miles west of Tashkent in the Khanate of Khiva. After a short period, some 40 families moved to Ak-Metchet near the city of Khiva, at the invitation of the Khan. The other Trekers, who abandoned this group, disillusioned with Epp's leadership and later, the failure of his prophecies, returned home in 1884. Many continued onwards to America, sometimes with the help of relatives who had already emigrated to the USA.

The Trekers who moved to Aulie Ata formed a *Gemeinde* with a *Lehrdienst*, as follows (it should be noted that most of the Aulie Ata settlers later formed a true MB *Gemeinde*):

#### **Ältester:**

1800-1881, *Abraham Peters* (no dates).

1884- , *Johann Regier* (no dates). From Hamberg, Mol. Elected *Lehrer* 1878.

#### **Lehrer:**

1884- , *Hermann Epp* (b. July 1850), a son of Kornelius Epp (b. Oct. 20, 1785) of Bröske, later Am Trakt.

1894- , *Franz Abrams* (no dates).

1895- , *Gerhard Kopper* (no dates).

1895- , *Hermann Wall* (no dates).

#### **Diakonen:**

1895- , *Kornelius Wall* (Mar. 9, 1829-1907) [?] Likely a son of *Ältester* Johann Wall (b. Nov. 2, 1788) of Am Trakt.

The villages of the Turkestan settlements were:

- Gnadenfeld (Vladimirovka), near Aulie Ata
- Gnadenthal (Andrejevka), near Aulie Ata
- Nikolaipol, near Aulie Ata
- Köppenthal (Romanovka), near Aulie Ata
- Orloff
- Ak Metchet, near Khiva

I will summarize by repeating the conclusions drawn in this paper. Firstly, the principal motivating factor for the Trek was the chiliastic thinking present in Am Trakt and elsewhere. This chiliasm had its roots in the individualistic, elitist, and pietistic leanings of persons estranged from traditional Mennonite beliefs and was reinforced by formal pietistic teaching in the schools of both West Prussia and in the Molotschna. Government service was a factor only in the sense that it presented a potential hindrance to the Trek. It was not an underlying cause of the Trek. Many other chiliasts might have usurped the leading role of Claas Epp, had Epp not been a powerfully charismatic figure. Epp was widely known throughout Mennonite Russia. If similarities can be found between the Trek and other Mennonite movements, they involve the MBs and the Templers.

There is no basis for comparing the Trek with the migration of traditionalist Mennonites to America from Russia in the 1870s and 1880s. In many respects, the thinking of the Trekers was, to say the least, not in the mainstream of Mennonite faith.