

“Forget-Me-Not”

Remembering the Victims of the Great Terror

by D. Frederick Dyck*

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.”¹

Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Dachau are place names that resonate throughout the Western world, epitomizing the stark horror of the Nazi Holocaust from 1933 to 1945. From period photographs, newsreels, and documentary films, the images of Auschwitz, the “super” slave labor/death camp, Treblinka, the “pure” death camp, and Dachau concentration camp are ingrained in the minds of hundreds of millions of people. How many of these same people are as familiar with the names of Kolyma, Serpantinka, and Karaganda? The unfortunate answer is very few.

Kolyma is a region in far eastern Russian Siberia where millions of Russian citizens were sent to die from exhaustion, hunger, and cold, in slave labor gold mining operations under the most inhumane conditions. In temperatures that reached 50°F for months on end with inadequate clothing and food, a prisoner could expect to die within 90 days, if he or



Brothers Johannes “Hans” Dyck (1909-1992) on the left and Gustav Dyck (b. 1913) on the right—both survivors of Stalin’s Great Terror, reunited after 21 years in the gulag. This photo was taken in Novosibirsk, Siberia in 1958. Photo: D. Frederick Dyck.

she survived the rigors of transport to Kolyma. Kolyma encompassed an area of approximately 250,000 square miles and was administered exclusively by the Soviet Security Police.

Serpantinka rivaled Treblinka as a death camp. No one was sent to Serpantinka to work—only to die. This infamous murder camp was located in the Kolyma region.

*The victims . . . include among their millions
many thousands of ethnic German Mennonites.*

Karaganda is located in eastern Siberia and was a dumping ground for many ethnic minorities deported from their homelands west of the Ural Mountains. Slave labor was Karaganda’s sole reason for existence until well after World War II. The Nazi camps and Soviet camps equal each other in almost any comparison one cares to make except one. More people died in the Soviet camps.

The victims of Kolyma, Serpantinka, and Karaganda include among their millions many thousands of ethnic

*D. Frederick Dyck, 189066, Crossroads Correctional Center, 1115 East Pence Road, 5-A-117, Cameron, MO 64429, is a Contributing Editor of *MFH* and has written a number of articles published previously.

¹ This poem, handwritten in German script and signed by Jacob J. Dyck (1881-1954), was found in the papers of Marie G. Dyck née Harder (1884-1973), Jacob’s wife. Jacob and Marie are the author’s paternal grandparents.



Johannes "Hans" Dyck and second wife, Anna, with children, Helene and Alexander, in the early 1960s in Omsk, Siberia. Photo: D. Frederick Dyck.

German Mennonites. Photographs and films of these places where they died are virtually non-existent. First-person accounts of Kolyma by survivors are extremely rare, of Serpantinka rarer still. Of Karaganda there is more information available. In fact, descendants of the slave laborers still live there. But the world does not know about these innocent victims, nor, it seems, does it care. Is this a public relations failure, or perhaps a failure of education? Are not the victims of Joseph Stalin's Great Terror in Soviet Russia deserving of a memorial/museum such as the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C.? Certainly they are, but the political realities of the world virtually ensure that such a thing will never occur.

The Soviet Union lost the Cold War, but it is not the defeated nation that Germany was at the close of World War II. There are no vast warehouses of documents that provide evidence of the Communists' genocide and monstrous crimes against humanity. There will never be the equivalent of a Nuremberg International Military Tribunal in post-Cold War Russia. All of these circumstances conspire to condemn Stalin's victims to anonymity.

Unfortunately, and unfairly, this cloak of anonymity also hides

Front: Johannes Dyck and Magda Dyck; middle: Maria (Wall) Dyck, Gustav Dyck, Katherina (Wiens) Dyck holding Maria, and Rudolf Dyck; back: Edgardt Dyck. This photo was taken in 1955 in Tschany, Siberia. Photo: D. Frederick Dyck.



the names of the perpetrators of these crimes. Except for the well-known leaders of the Soviet Union, little is known of the army of people required to commit these crimes over decades of time. Should there not be an accounting for these crimes? I think most Mennonites would say that this is not of primary importance. Some victims say the names of perpetrators should never be uttered or written, that to recognize them in any way demeans the victims. Remembering the names of the victims, where they died, and where they once lived is important, however. On this there is near universal agreement.

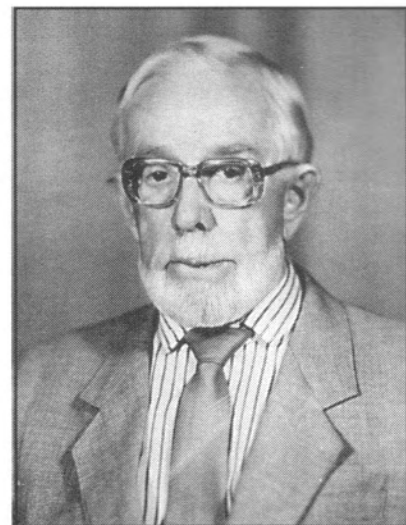
Between 1920 and 1941, all settlements of German Mennonites in Russia were liquidated. This was accomplished in a variety of ways. Terror-famine and its attendant consequences accounted for the most deaths prior to deportation to a slave labor/death camp. Terror-famine is distinguished from naturally occurring famine that results from weather, crop failure, insects, etc. Terror-famine was an instrument of murder for the Soviet government every bit as effective as gassing or shooting. The numbers that died in the Soviet Union (including many thousand Mennonites) as a result of terror-famine vary widely but run into the millions of victims. Some figures for the death toll of the Volga-German Republic and the German Mennonite settlement of Am Trakt are known from the autobiography of Johannes J. Dyck (1885-1948). In 1922, 100,000 Volga Germans fled south toward the Ukraine. Fully one half died en route from starvation. Of Am Trakt residents deported to slave labor in Karaganda,

Kazakstan, by 1932, 90% of children and 40-60% of adults died from terror-famine, typhus, and cholera. These numbers and percentages are astounding when the overall numbers of Mennonites in Russia are considered. Never before or since in their history have Mennonites suffered such persecution.

There arises the question of whether or not the Russian Mennonites who died in the Great Terror are martyrs for their faith. The honest answer must be no because they were killed as much for their German ethnicity as anything. Thus these innocent dead cannot be elevated to the same level as those whose names fill the pages of *Martyrs Mirror*. What then is their status in the worldwide Mennonite community? At the present time it would appear to be a kind of limbo, "a place or state of neglect or oblivion."² These victims deserve a better fate, and a proper first step would be remembrance. Presently there is no central repository (and attendant museum memorial) that collects the names/data/information of and about Mennonite Great Terror victims, although it is an idea whose time has come. Without the existence of an institution it is incumbent on individuals to collect and preserve the names and data of the Mennonite victims of the Great Terror.

Reading large lists of printed names, without data and information that humanizes the people, can be a tedious and boring exercise. The following lists of residents of the villages of the Am Trakt Mennonite settlement in Russia³ have important family history value for descendants of these individuals. In a wider context they represent the names of victims of the Great Terror. Am Trakt completely ceased to exist by 1941. None of the former residents that managed to survive the Great Terror was ever allowed to return there. Some of the people on these lists did survive but the number is certainly very small. It is also important to remember that these names represent heads of households. The vast majority of the men on these lists were married and had children and grandchildren, *i.e.*, these 318 heads of households represent a total population estimated to be 1500-2000. The order of the lists not being alphabetical indicates that these were contiguous homes/farms. The lists are not represented as complete.

These lists of Am Trakt residents date ca1920 and were preserved/compiled by Gustav Dyck. Gustav was born December 6, 1913, at Medemtal, Am Trakt. He is the son of Johannes "Krollyer" "Curly" Dyck (1878-1921) and Maria *née* Wall (1886-1974). Gustav was arrested in 1937 and spent ten years in slave labor camps in regions of northern Russia and an additional ten years under house arrest in Siberia. In 1958 Gustav was reunited with his brother Johannes "Hans" Dyck (1909-1992). Hans had first been arrested in 1930 and was sent to Kolyma in 1937. Hans earned the nickname "Kolymskoye"—old man of Kolyma—because he was the oldest prisoner there. Hans was 28 years old when he arrived in Kolyma and survived for 21 years. Gustav Dyck lives today in Baidt, Germany.⁴



Johannes "Hans" Dyck in 1990 in Omsk, Siberia. Hans was known by the nickname of Kolymskoye—old man of Kolyma—because he survived 21 years in this brutal camp complex. Photo: D. Frederick Dyck.

Data and information added to names is by the author. This data and information was obtained from *A Pilgrim People*, Volume II, copyright 1994 by Rena and George Kroeker, 317 Kelvin Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3P 0J1. This book contains large excerpts from the diary of Johannes J. Dyck (b. April 16, 1885, Lysanderhoe, Am Trakt, Russia, d. April 11, 1948, Laird, Saskatchewan, Canada) for the years 1907-1908, 1922, and 1937. Additional information was gleaned from Johannes J. Dyck's autobiography.

More information on any name on these lists of the villages of Am Trakt is encouraged to be sent to the author.

Lysanderhoe

Weins, Cornelius
Janzen, Jakob
Bergmann, Julius
Preissig, _____
Bartsch, Wilhelm
Quiring, Franz
Toews, Heinrich
Bartsch, Franz
Bergmann, Abraham
Bestvater, Franz
Schule/School
Toews, Albert, May 11,
1897-1966, Siberia
Warkentin, Abraham
Stahl, _____

Toews, Johannes
Niedens, _____
Nuss, _____
Wall, Johannes
Toews, Aron
Wiens, Peter
Bergmann, Peter
Reimer, Jakob
Janzen, Julius
Fast, Hermann
Dyck, Johannes
Franzen, Anna
Fieguth, Gerhard, exiled
in 1932
Froese, Jakob

² *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition.

³ For a map showing the location of Am Trakt see *MFH* 21, (July 2002), p. 105.

⁴ "The Memoirs of Gustav Dyck" comprise pp. 251-329 of the compilation *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 and *Sixty Years of Silence: The Dyck Family in Soviet Russia* by Alice Sitler Dyck. A review of this book was written by Lawrence Klippenstein and published in the July 2003 issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, pp. 490-92. This book is available from Masthof Bookstore.

Froese, Cornelius
 Wall, Peter
 Dyck, Franz
 Toews, Dietrich, b. Feb.
 20, 1894, d. in labor
 camp
 Wiebe, Jakob
 Bergmann, Peter
 Neufeld, Hermann
 Lammert, _____
 Janzen, Jakob
 Bergmann, Jakob
 Bergmann, Abraham

Fresenheim

Penner, Artur, b. Oct.
 16, 1895, d. in a slave
 labor camp
 Penner, Lenhart, Dec.
 1, 1866-Jan. 21, 1927
 Penner, Herbert, Mar. 2,
 1899-1938, d. in a
 labor camp
 Janzen, Petr, d. Apr. 1922
 of typhus
 Schule/School
 Bachman, _____
 Fieguth, Gerhard
 Dyck, Johannes

Wall, Nickolaus
 Janzen, Heinrich
 Neufeld, Heinrich
 Kamins, _____
 Strempler, _____
 Isaak, Heinrich, Feb. 9,
 1877-Mar. 15, 1934,
 sent to Siberia in 1929
 and died of hunger
 Esau, Aron
 Toews, Hermann
 Wall, Johannes
 Toews, Johannes
 Grosschen, "Tante"
 Dyck, Johannes
 Wall, David
 Bopp, _____
 Toews, Aron

Lindenau

Froese, Cornelius
 Kuhn, _____
 Froese, Cornelius
 Nickel, Cornelius
 Klassen, Jakob
 Frazen, Johannes
 Froese, Johannes
 Froese, Johannes
 Wiens, Dietrich



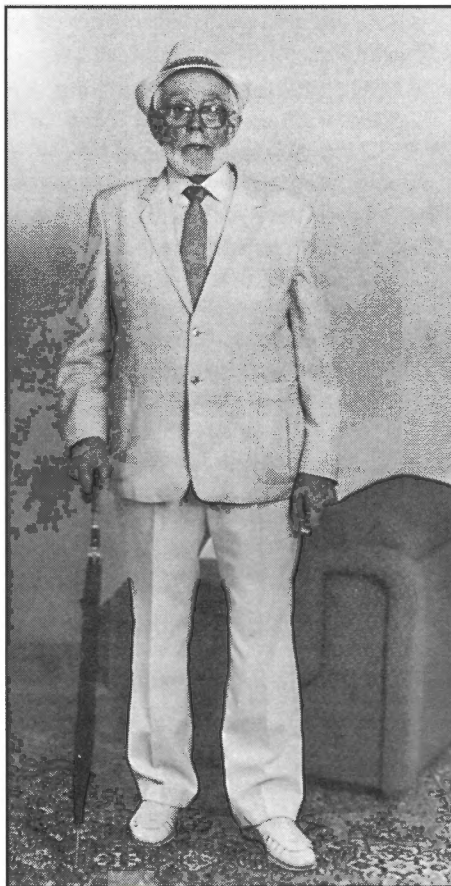
*Gustav Dyck and wife Katherina (Wiens) Dyck in 1962
 in Novosibirsk, Siberia. Photo: D. Frederick Dyck.*

Wall, Peter
 Kalchert, _____
 Janzen, Johannes
 Janzen, Wilhelm
 Schwabauer, _____
 Janzen, Dietrich
 Weber, _____
 Franzen, Heinrich
 Riesen, Jakob
 Froese, Jakob
 Penner, Gerhard
 Froese, Heinrich
 Damke, _____
 Wall, Johannes
 Unger, _____
 Dyck, Salmon
 Ewert, _____
 Janzen, Peter
 Schule/School
 Franzen, Johannes
 Warkentin, Wilhelm
 Penner, Johannes
 Bergmann
 Warkentin, Jakob
 Fast, _____

Koepental

Lanze, W.
 Penner, Gerhard
 Adrian, "Tante"
 Steinauer, Jacob
 Peters, J.
 Riesen, H.
 Eck, Hermann
 Post, Antropov
 Thiessen, Gerhard
 Klassen, David
 Froese, Abraham

Wiens, Peter
 Hein, F.
 Eckert, Cornelius
 Janzen, Jacob
 Grauberger, Jacob
 Liebrecht, K.
 Schreiner, E.
 Warkentin, Jacob
 Neumann, Abraham
 Pauls, Cornelius
 Thiesen, Johannes
 Thiesen, Bernhard
 Neumann, Cornelius
 Niel, J.
 Grauberger, David
 Eck, J.
 Eck, H.
 Kamzem, F.
 Penner
 Quiring, Johannes
 Isaak, Cornelius, d. 1923,
 son Cornelius was shot
 on May 19, 1921
 Bartsch, Hermann
 Filbert, _____
 Hinkel, _____
 Schlotthauer, _____
 Tiede, J.
 Schreiner, _____
 Epp, Artur
 Epp, Bernhard
 Epp, Peter
 Bartukie, Alexander
 Schule/School
 Fast, J.
 Konrad, Ferdinand
 Warkentin, W.
 Janzen, Cornelius
 Tiede, M.



*The old man
 of Kolyma,
 Hans Dyck,
 shortly before
 his death in
 1992 in Omsk,
 Siberia. Photo:
 D. Frederick
 Dyck.*

Steinmetz, _____
 Hermann, Georg
 Franzen, Hermann
 Linkowsky
 Eckert, Cornelius
 Seltenreich, _____
 Reimer, _____
 Penner, Heinrich
 Goerz, P.
 Quiring, J.
 Ries, A.
 Eck, Robert
 Finkheisen, J.
 Penner, Dietrich
 Wiens, Julius
 Esau, Artur
 Epp, Franz
 Epp, Peter
 Epp, Bernhard
 Dyck, Peter
 Janzen, J.

Hohendorf

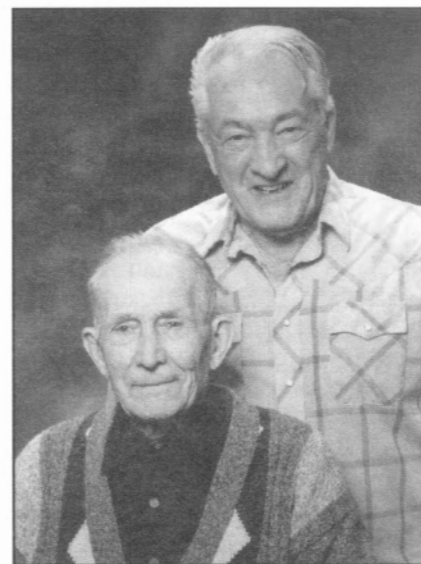
Toews, Gustav
 Toews, Gustav
 Horn, "Tanten"
 Horn, Heinrich
 Wall, Peter
 Schmidt, Johannes
 Schmidt, Jakob
 Unruh, Cornelius
 Unruh, "Tanten"
 Wall, Franz, b. Mar. 22,
 1866, d. in Saratov
 Prison
 Matiess, Franz
 Engbrecht, Cornelius
 Bergmann, Johannes
 Wall, Johannes
 Schmidt, Johannes
 Schmidt, Heinrich
 Toews, Peter
 Esau, Gerhard, Feb. 14,
 1886-Nov. 4, 1933
 Franzen, Jakob
 Matiess, Peter, Jan. 18,
 1851-June 1, 1934,
 d. in Siberian exile
 Janzen, Gerhard
 Schule/School
 Dyck, Gerhard
 Wall, Nickolaus
 Toews, Johannes
 Klassen, Gerhard
 Philipsen, Abraham
 Neumann, Peter
 Philipsen, Johannes
 Philipsen, Jakob
 Neumann, Cornelius

Ostenfeld

Froese, Johannes
 Klassen, Heinrich
 Klassen, Heinrich
 Fast, Cornelius
 Bartschk, Robert
 Siebert, Johannes, in labor
 camp in 1931
 Schule/School
 Klassen, Abraham
 Neufeld, Jakob
 Siebert, Julius
 Siebert, Peter, Jan.
 15, 1886-1933,
 d. in a
 labor camp
 Siebert, Cornelius
 Albrecht, Franz
 Neufeld, Peter
 Dyck, Wilhelm
 Froese, _____
 Klassen, Jakob
 Donslav, Ernst
 Janzen, Johannes
 Siebert, Jakob
 Klassen, Johannes
 Fast, Hermann
 Pauls, Cornelius
 Fast, Johannes
 Engbrecht, Cornelius
 Peters, Jakob
 Andres, Cornelius
 Andres, Johannes
 Neufeld, Gustav
 Froese, Peter
 Wiens, Cornelius
 Unger, Johannes
 Wiens, Johannes/Julius
 Bergmann, Johannes
 Albrecht, Franz
 Neufeld, Johannes
 Penner, Jakob
 Bestvater, David
 Neufeld, Jakob (2)
 Neufeld, Ewalt
 Wiens, Cornelius
 Janzen, Wilhelm

Orloff

Riesen, Heinrich
 Kirche/Church
 Inger, Heinrich
 Wall, Bernhard
 Neufeld, Johannes,
 deported 1932
 Isaak, Johannes
 Froese, Heinrich
 Wall, Johannes Peter
 Wall, Jacob



Gustav Dyck (front) and first cousin, Herbert C. Dyck, in 1996 in Washington, Kansas. At age 82, Gustav realized his dream of visiting relatives in the U.S. Gustav celebrated his 90th birthday on December 16, 2003. Credit: Dennis Livingston.

Wall, Johannes
 Froese, Hermann
 Pauls, Cornelius
 Riesen, Jakob
 Froese, Jacob
 Froese, Aron
 Froese, Hermann
 Toews, Johannes, b.
 Mar. 10, 1888,
 starved in Siberia
 Bergmann, Johannes
 Schule/School
 Wall, Gustav
 Froese, Peter
 Isaak, Cornelius
 Wiens, Abraham
 Isaak, Heinrich,
 deported 1932
 Isaak, Peter

Medemental

Isaak, Hermann
 Froese, Johannes
 Froese, Franz
 Peters, Johannes
 Quiring, Franz
 Wall, Peter
 Dyck, Johannes "Krollyer,"
 d. 1921, typhus
 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
 Froese, Johannes
 Engbrecht, Cornelius
 Dyck, Johannes Joh. (1)
 Dyck, Jacob
 Kohl, Jacob
 Zubiks, Friedrich
 Ruhl, Alexander
 Riesen, Franz
 Riesen, Gerhard
 Riesen, Emil
 Quiring, Heinrich
 Froese, Peter
 Hamm, Nikolaus
 Wall, Johannes
 Warkentin, Hermann
 Wall, Dietrich, Dec. 26,
 1888-May 19, 1921,
 shot by Communists
 with 22 others after

	Friedrich, Dec. 27, 1894- Dec. 27, 1941. d. after being deported	Persons in Family	Persons forced into labor	Number living in 1997
tribunal sentence at Koeppental Wall, Gerhard Wall, Cornelius Wall, Heinrich Wall, Hermann Dyck, Johannes Joh. (2) Bestvater, Hermann Pauls, Peter Penner, Johannes, Dec. 2, 1889-Feb. 15, 1942, deported 1930 to Arkangel-White Sea sent to Kolyma 1937 Schule/School; teachers: Oskar and Friedrich Horrn	Janzen, Heinrich Flegler, Jacob Dau, Cornelius Dau, Johannes Ewert, Franz Pauls, Cornelius Dyck, Dietrich Wall, Hermann Dau, Peter Dyck, Heinrich Sinner, Emanuel Sinner, _____ Klassen, Abraham Froese, Cornelius			
	Wiens, Petger (Julius) Wife: Helene <i>née</i> Thiessen	6	-	-
	Lindenau			
	Wall, Franz (David) Wife: Maria	3	-	-
	Lysanderhoeh			
	Bergmann, Abram (Peter) Wife: Anna <i>née</i> Fröse	9	4	3
	Bergmann, Peter (Abram) Wife: Katharina <i>née</i> Esau	4	-	-
	Bergmann, Abram (John) Wife: Anna <i>?née</i> Bergmann	8	2	2
	Dyck, Franz (Abram) Wife: ?	1	-	-
	Fröse, Jacob (David) Wife: Helene <i>née</i> Wiens	8	2	1
	Fröse, David (Jacob) Wife: Helene <i>née</i> Bergmann	5	-	-
	Tows, Artur (Dietrich) Wife: Anna <i>née</i> Bergmann	5	-	1
	Wiens, Julius (Peter)			

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
Fresenheim			
Töws, Aron (Johannes) Wife: Anna <i>née</i> Nickel	3	-	-
Töws, Johannes (Johannes) Wife: Elise <i>née</i> Neufeld	6	2	3
Hohendorf			
Bergmann, Cornelius (Johannes) Wife: ?	4	1	2
Bergmann, Heinrich (Jacob) Wife: Maria <i>née</i> Neufeld	2	1	-
Bergmann, Jacob (Johannes) Wife: Agathe <i>née</i> Toews	4	-	1
Esau, Gerhardt Wife: Helene <i>née</i> Mattiess	5	-	-
Esau, Herman Wife: Margareta <i>née</i> Albrecht	3	-	-
Fransen, Johannes (Jacob) Wife: Anna <i>née</i> Eck	7	1	1
Koeppental			
Epp, Artur (Peter) Wife: Frieda <i>née</i> Fransen	5	-	2
Epp, Peter (Bernhard) Wife: ?	3	-	-
Epp, Peter (Peter) Wife: Alexandra	4	2	-
Medental			
Engbrecht, Cornelius Wife: ?	3	-	-
Isaak, Hermann (Peter) Wife: Elise <i>née</i> Reimer	9	3	9
Penner, Johannes (Hermann) Wife: Emilei <i>née</i> Pauls	6	1	3
Wall, Gerhard Wife: ?	1	-	-
Wall, Hermann (Gerhard) Wife: Laora <i>née</i> Ewert	3	-	-
Orloff			
Epp, Franz (Peter) Wife: Maria <i>née</i> Bergmann	5	2	1
Isaak, Heinrich (Peter) Wife: ?	5	1	-
Wiens, Abram (Peter) Wife: Margareta <i>née</i> Toews	7	-	-
Wiens, Peter (Abram) Wife: Maria <i>née</i> Reimer	9	4	3
Wiens, Johannes (Abram) Wife: Maria <i>née</i> Bergmann	4	1	-
Ostenfeld			
Albrecht, Franz Wife: ?	4	-	1