

In Their Own Words, Part II

A Short Sketch of My Life by Jacob Toews (1838-1922)

translated by Frank L. and Anna Toews Wenger, and
edited and annotated by D. Frederick Dyck*

In the January 2006 issue of *Mennonite Family History*, I began this series of first-person accounts by West Prussian Mennonites who immigrated to the Russian Mennonite settlement of Am Trakt with the narrative of Johann Epp (1835-1922). This series continues with Jacob Toews's memoir written during the years 1918-1921 after he came to America from Am Trakt, Russia, in 1884.

Jacob Toews's memoir is important primarily because it provides an eyewitness account of the Asian Trek (*Asienreise*) of Russian Mennonites into Turkestan in the years 1880-1884. Jacob's memoir is supplemented by three letters written while he was on the Trek and sent to Peter Klaassen in Newton, Kansas.

The Asian Trek of Russian Mennonites had its seeds first planted in Germany in the late eighteenth century by a cataract surgeon named Heinrich Jung-Stilling. Jung-Stilling wrote an allegorical novel titled *Heimweh* (Homesickness) in 1793-1794 that has been compared to *Pilgrim's Progress*. In *Heimweh*, a young German named Christian Osterheim journeys east in search of his eternal home where he will establish a kingdom of true believers. The hero's very name tells the story, Christian and Osterheim meaning home in the east.¹

Heimweh was very popular reading among Mennonites in Prussia and Russia, taking its place alongside *Martyrs Mirror* and the Bible in many Mennonite homes. One reader who took the book especially to heart was Claas Epp Jr.

Claas Jr. was the son of Claas Epp Sr., who was the mayor of Furstenwerder, West Prussia, prior to the family's immigration to Am Trakt, Russia. Claas Sr. played an important role in organizing the immigration of the first settlers to Am Trakt in 1853 and the establishment of the first village named Hahnsau.²

As a young man, Claas Jr. was widely recognized for his leadership skills in Am Trakt. He was also a financially successful farmer, so, when he spoke, he did so with some authority. In the 1870s Claas Jr. began speaking

of the imminent apocalypse and the return of Christ. Combining biblical interpretation (Rev. 3:8-10, 12:14) with *Heimweh*, Claas Jr. fancied himself a real-life Christian Osterheim who would lead his followers to a place of refuge in the east to await Christ's return. Claas Jr. decided the place of refuge was somewhere in Turkestan.

Turkestan in 1880 was a vast region between Iran and Siberia. Today the region is composed of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and China. The entire area of the Middle Asian republics is a drought area. Much of the area receives less than eight inches of rain per year. Except for the higher mountains, the area is entirely desert or steppe. The area southwest of the city of Tashkent was known as "The Hungry Steppe."

Until well into the nineteenth century the area known as Turkestan was non-Russian territory. Russian-armed forces captured the city of Aulie-Ata in 1864, Tashkent in 1865, and Samarkand in 1868. The Khanates of Khiva and Kokand were not subdued until 1876. In spite of Russian occupation in these population centers, the countryside was ruled by warlike nomadic horsemen who captured settlers and sold them in the slave markets of Khiva and Burhara.

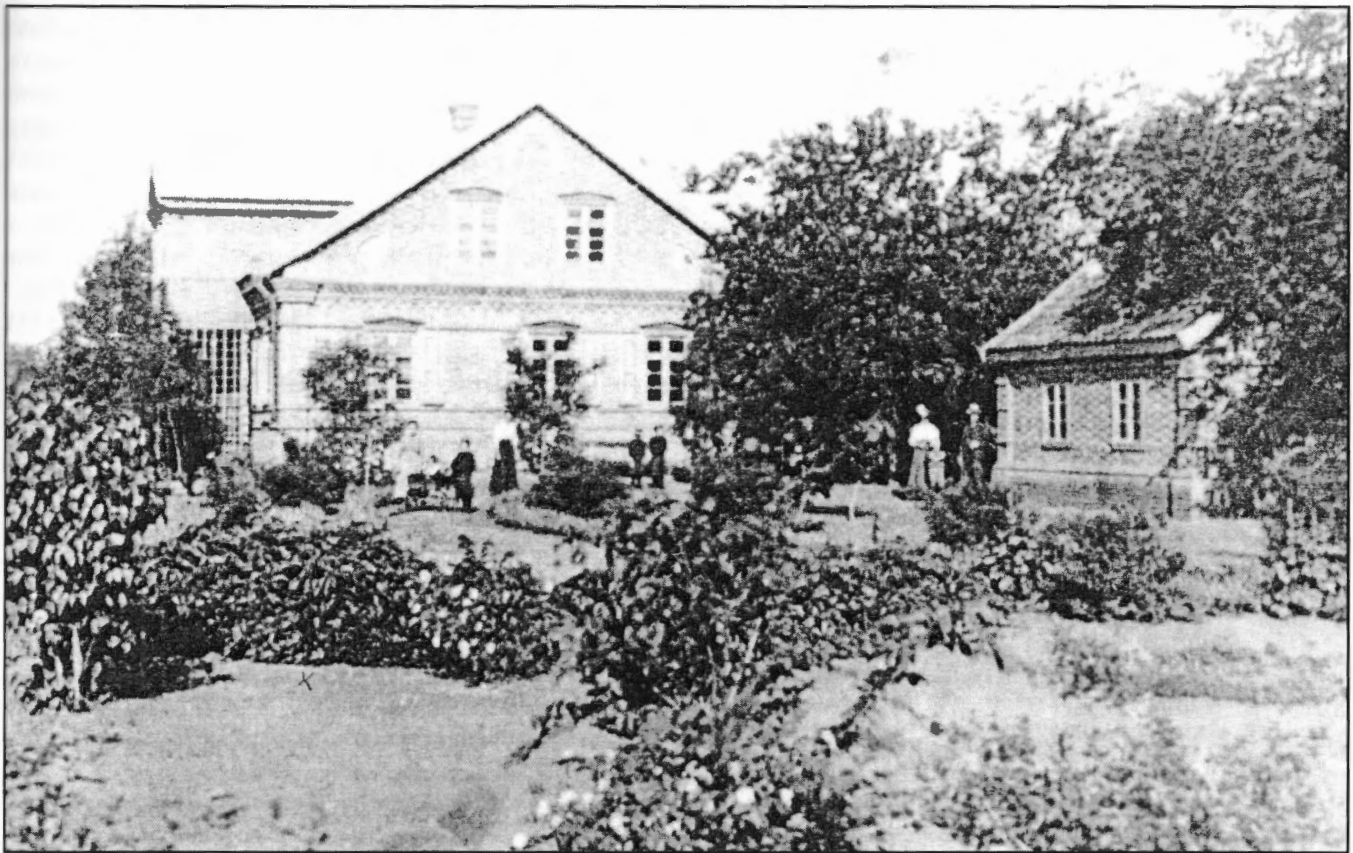
Tashkent and Samarkand (burial place of the great Turkic conqueror Timur Link-Tamburlaine [1336-1405]) were important stopover points along the Silk Road between China and Europe. These old caravan routes from Orenburg to Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva were connected by railroads beginning in 1906 and completed in 1956. The late date of 1956 gives a good idea of how remote much of this country is.³

¹ At the time that Jung-Stilling wrote *Heimweh*, the period known as the Enlightenment had arguably reached its peak. Concurrent with the spread of Enlightenment ideas across Europe and America was the flourishing of Freemasonry. A dominant theme in Freemasonry is looking to the East for knowledge, understanding, and enlightenment. I do not know if Jung-Stilling was a Freemason, but it would be interesting to learn what influences were behind his writing of *Heimweh*.

² Harold S. Bender, ed. *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vols. I-V. (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1959).

³ Paul E. Lydolph, *Geography of U.S.S.R.* (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1964).

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Home of Oberschulze Johannes D. Dyck (1826-1898) at Lysanderhoeh, Am Trakt, Russia.

Class Epp Jr.'s prophecy by itself was not enough to get several dozen families to sell their farms and head out across the desert to an unknown destination. The fundamental reason for immigration was the lapse of exemption from military service in the Czar's armed forces. Russian Mennonites had been put on notice in 1870 that this exemption would expire in ten years. This is what prompted the large migration of Russian Mennonites to the Plains states and provinces of America and Canada in the 1870s. But with roots and relatives in Russia and Prussia, many Russian Mennonites were hesitant to travel so far away, adding to the appeal of going east instead of west.

There is a fairly large volume of published literature regarding the Trek, on its origins, protagonists, participants, and the disastrous outcome. Almost without exception the focus of attention in books and articles is Claas Epp, Jr. While Claas Epp Jr. is certainly an interesting character and a convenient scapegoat for all that went wrong on the Trek, I believe his importance in this episode of Russian Mennonite history has been overblown. My primary reason for coming to this conclusion is that in the collection of first-hand accounts of the Trek in my possession, Claas Epp Jr. is mentioned in only two of six and merely in passing. Jacob Toews does not mention Claas Epp, Jr. even once.

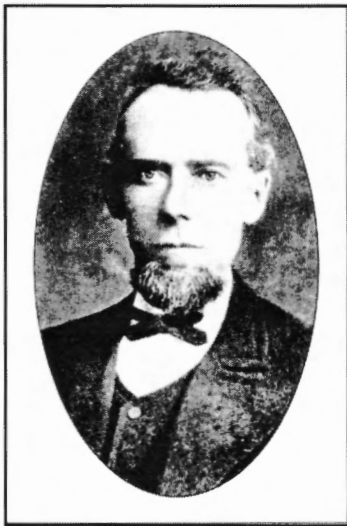
Another contemporary source that helped me form my opinion about Claas Epp Jr. is the diary of Johannes Dietrich Dyck (1826-1898), *Oberschulze* (Mayor) of Am

Trakt from 1866 to 1884.⁴ Johannes Dyck took a very dim view of his fellow Mennonites who did not want to accept Czarist alternatives to compulsory military service, such as the Russian Forest Service. His diary entries on this subject, the proposed immigration to Turkestan, Class Epp Jr., and Abraham Peters of the Molotschna colony are dripping with sarcasm. Dyck refers to Claas Epp Jr. as the "prophet" and Abraham Peters as the "agitator." Selected entries from Johannes D. Dyck's diary for the years 1878-1880 give the impression he considers Abraham Peters the primary instigator of the immigration movement. Indeed, Peters' Molotschna contingent made up the majority of those that went to Turkestan.

From the diary of Johannes D. Dyck:

Dec. 1, 1878. M. Klassen, C. Wall, and later Joh. Epp have been to the Molotschna. On Nov. 8 there had been a ministers' conference in Halbstadt: decided to ask the governors how the recruiting and service assignments of our young men are to be handled. Some here are of the opinion that nothing should be done in this matter; Johann Penner is the leader of this party. In our ministeriam only D. Hamm and Joh. Toews are in favor to fulfill the military services as the Czar has ordered it for the Mennonites.

⁴ For an account of Johannes D. Dyck's early life and his ten years in the California Gold Rush, 1849-1858, see Dyck, (D. Frederick), "The Odyssey of Johannes Dietrich Dyck," Oct. 2002 *Mennonite Family History*, 21 (2002), pp. 150-55.



Johannes Dietrich Dyck (1826-1898) went to California during the 1849 Gold Rush and was Mayor of the Am Trakt settlement in Russia 1866-1884. Credit: A Pilgrim People.

December 9. Election of District judge; very dumb choice.

December 10. Yesterday afternoon the emigration friends had a big meeting at Martin Klassen's to discuss their affairs.

January 8, 1879. I had a discussion with Rev. J. Penner re the local movement of the so-called "Pure Ones."

March 7, 1879. There is to be a big meeting of the non-resisters at Jacob Hamm's. In the afternoon visited P. Neufelds.

August 21, 1879. Yesterday, Peters from the Molotschna, who has been here twice, is said to have arrived again. There seems to be big excitement among the friends of the prophet about the negative reply from the Ministry.

September 7, 1879. In spite of having received two negative replies, the local prophecy party again wants to send J. Epp and Jacob Toews to St. Petersburg, likely due to the instigation of the agitator Peters from the Molotschna, who left for St. Petersburg today.

September 26-29. Waiting in Koeppental for his Excellency, the governor of Samara Province. Joh. Epp and Jacob Toews have written from St. Petersburg that Gen. Kaufmann has given them hope they will get permission to move to Turkestan. Discussed the preaching of Claas Epp with our two bishops.

October 29, 1879. Sent out circular notice that by Nov. 5 everyone must pay the fire insurance premium of 100 ruble. The delegates Joh. Epp and Jacob Toews returned from St. Petersburg on the nineteenth. They accomplished nothing. They have now asked Peters from the Molotschna to go to Livadin to seek deferment of military service for the young men from His Majesty the Czar himself.

December 28, 1879. Among the chiliast emigration enthusiasts there is great inclination to move away. M. Klassen had gone to the Department of Religious Affairs and had been told by a man named Musarew to move away; emigrate as soon as possible. The young men would not be recalled for military service.

January 22, 1880. It is said that the prophet, Claas Epp, has had a disagreement with some of his followers. His prophecies are not coming true and so his disciples are beginning to doubt him. He is supposed to maintain now that his time for emigration has not yet come, but that he has to go to Germany in the near future to fulfill a mission. What that mission is, nobody knows."⁵

Finally, regarding Claas Epp Jr. and his role in the Trek, I am influenced (and greatly impressed) by Waldemar Janzen's essay on Fred Richard Belk's doctoral dissertation subsequently published as a book, *The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites in Central Asia, 1880-1884*. Janzen's essay, "The Great Trek: Episode Or Paradigm" was published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 51 (1977).

Janzen wrote two theses in his essay giving his analytical interpretation of the Trek. At the end of the first thesis, Janzen wrote: "For these reasons, then, it appears to me that Epp's chiliastism is insufficient to characterize and explain the Mennonite movement to Central Asia in the 1880s. It performed a triggering function, determined certain decisions concerning the timing and the geography, and added its accents of fervor and hope, as well as excess and blindness, to a migration which was in many ways paradigmatic of Mennonite migrations through the centuries; a migration by a group of practical and pious people who—though not adverse to comfort and affluence—were ready to bring great sacrifices as they searched for a place of refuge where a life of obedience to God could be lived."

Had the immigration of Russian Mennonites to America in the latter part of the nineteenth century met with disastrous results would they have been held up for scorn and ridicule, an example of their leader's folly? Most probably. There seems to be a capacity for *schadenfreude* among North American Mennonites regarding Russian Mennonites as a whole and Asian Trek Russian Mennonites in particular. This attitude extended well beyond the generation of the trekkers themselves and was evident to me as a young man in the 1960s. I can recall several times being told a person's name by a third party with a whispered follow-up and knowing nod, "His parents (or grandparents) were on the Asian Trek," as though it was an illness passed from one generation to the next.

There were, however, many other Mennonites with a capacity for love and understanding who welcomed these trekkers into their communities and homes and helped them to start new lives in North America. It is among the descendants of these families and descendants of the *Asienreise* survivors that the small memoirs of the Trek circulate. Jacob Toews's memoir is one of these and a valuable addition to our collective Mennonite family history.

Following the suggestion of some of our children, I undertake to write a short account of my life.

I wish to base this record on two passages of scripture which have become very meaningful to me. The first one is Psalm 23:3. "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

These records will reveal the wonderful way in which God leads us. We, through our misunderstanding of

⁵ Rena and George Kroeker, *A Pilgrim People*, vol. II. (1994). Rena and George Kroeker, 317 Kelvin Blvd, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3P 0J1.

His ways, often hinder His plans for us, making it necessary for Him to intervene. We must recognize that He, even though righteous and just, still is a God of faithfulness and great mercy. These records will show clearly how King David's words in the first part of verse three, 'He restoreth my soul,' brought times of unforeseen and unexpected refreshment, no matter how difficult the way has been or still may be.

Another word of scripture which came to me in a time of deep discouragement, when it seemed that the very foundation of my faith and trust would vanish, when I was sorely in need of comfort and it seemed my house of faith would crumble, must also be mentioned as evidence that God in His faithfulness and mercy may allow His child to walk in paths of deep darkness, but in the end will lead Him back to a firm basis for his faith, is the word found in Psalm 37:57. Here, too, God in His mercy revealed Himself to me and undergirded His humble servant as a tender and faithful shepherd.

Following these words of introduction I will pass on to the record itself.



Jacob Toews (1838-1922) and his wife Maria Wiebe were married in 1860. He was elder at the First Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas. Source: Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College; photo ca1900.



Jacob Toews (1838-1922) and his wife Maria Wiebe. Source: MLA, Bethel College; photo ca1910.

As shown in the History of the Anabaptist Churches by M. Claassen (p. 234) and in the third volume of A Short History of the Mennonites by C. H. Wedel (p. 68), many Mennonites who were severely persecuted in Holland in the sixteenth century were invited to come over to the province of Prussia [Germany] where there was land to be had which could still be made tillable and were allowed to settle there to bring it into production.

The forefathers of our family were possibly among this group of immigrants. This cannot be historically established, at least not on my part. I was told by an older brother in the faith, when I was a young lad, that the name Toews came from Holland and was originally called Mathaus. Whether this is the case or not, I do not know, but the fact remains that we find many families by the name of Toews in our denomination.

I had the privilege of knowing my grandfather who lived to be 83 or 84 years old. He died in the year 1850. That would put his birth in the year 1765 or 1766. He lived in the village of Hochzeit near the city of Danzig, Germany [now Gdańsk in Poland]. As far as I know, he had seven children (four sons and three daughters) of whom two sons and one daughter migrated to what was known as the Molotschna colony in South Russia in the early part of the year 1820. The others remained in Prussia. They lived in what was called the Danziger Werder, a low area reclaimed from swamp land about twenty English miles in length and breadth. A high dike protected it against flooding by the River Weichsel [Vistula], a stream comparable to the Missouri River. This made it a hazardous place in which to live.

My parents lived in this area near the city of Danzig. They were born in the village of Hochzeit. Father was born on June 6, 1806. I do not remember the date of mother's birth. In their youth they no doubt experienced many difficulties and hardships brought on by the war which the French Emperor Napoleon was waging against Prussia in the years 1806-1813. His armies overran this

area, and, to make the siege of the fortress city of Danzig more effective, he cut the dike on the River Weichsel so that the area where my parents lived was flooded and remained under water for a long period of time. My parents often spoke of this time of hardship which lasted until about the year 1830. My father had to earn his daily bread by working away from home. By the year 1830 the effects of the Napoleonic War had gradually grown less, and my parents began thinking of establishing their own household. In the year 1833 they joined hands in holy wedlock and established their home in the village of Wotslaf near their birthplace. Even though conditions had improved, they still faced many privations.

I was born here on June 26, 1838, and I remember having been told there were two brothers older than I but who died in early infancy.

Since there are no written records available from the time of my early childhood, I can only mention a few things which I call to memory of my early childhood and the impressions which they left on my mind. An outgrowth of these early impressions was the firm assurance of faith which God, through His grace, was preparing for me in the later years of my life and that a gracious God was holding His protecting hand over me and directing the course of my life from its beginning.

I now commit my all into my Lord's hand who has led me to this assurance in which I, by His grace, will remain unto the end.

I remember vividly an experience that occurred when I was four years old and which assures me that the watchful care of God's angels has attended me. Near the home of my parents there were two canals with bridges over which people could pass. One day I saw some people coming from the far side of the bridge. Thinking they were relatives, I ran to meet them. Not noticing a large hole in one of the bridges, I fell into deep water and would have drowned if one of those near at hand had not rescued me. By this and many experiences in later life, it became very evident to me that God had surrounded me with His protecting angels.

In the spring of 1844 when I was six years old, my parents sold their homestead and bought a larger farm near the village of Weishoff. This consisted of three and one-half hufe, according to a German measurement, or approximately one-quarter section [160 acres] by our reckoning.

The time had now come when I should make new contacts with the outside world. When I was six years old, I started going to school which I attended for the next eight years. The school which I attended was a church-supported school, having a higher standard than the village school, and was staffed by two teachers.

In the year 1854 I received the rite of baptism on Pentecost Sunday in the small village church of our congregation. I well remember this experience and how the sacredness of this holy sacrament overpowered me. Later in life, however, many a misstep revealed the fact that

my poor heart was still in need of a deeper experience. I am thankful to my God for His faithfulness in guarding me from gross sin.

In the year 1858, partly on the suggestion of my father, I, in company with two friends, undertook a trip to visit some relatives who lived at the Molotschna colony in South Russia. In the spring of the year the three of us with wagon and three-horse team left our home with the understanding that we would return by fall. Such a trip required more time than today when one can travel hundreds of miles in a short time by train. The Lord watched over us, and we reached our destination, the Molotschna colony, without mishap in three and one-half weeks.

We had a happy reunion with my two uncles and other relatives. As often happens with the plans of man, instead of starting on our return trip after having visited our relatives, on the suggestion of others, we decided to visit the newly founded colony on the Volga River. In the late summer of 1858, we set out with our team and arrived at the colony 1,100 werst [one werst is equal to three-fifths of a mile] or about 660 miles to the east of Molotschna. As I recall, we had planned to remain in the colony consisting of three partially completed villages for about three weeks, after which we would resume our homeward journey by way of the Molotschna colony. Here, too, our intentions did not materialize. We remained for the winter and started home the following spring. A result of this decision was that I failed to find my mother among the living when I returned home the following spring. During the winter I had spent in the Volga colony mother had passed from this life, and her place in our family circle was empty.

March 1919. The sketches which have gone before were written in 1918. After a considerable delay, I was able to take up the work again. Before I go further I would like to mention that, even though the Lord had spoken to me in such a special and direct way through the death of my dear mother, my heart, though deeply touched, still remained the same natural unregenerated one. Though as a young man I was heedless and carnal, God in His grace continued to seek after me and keep me from falling into gross sin.

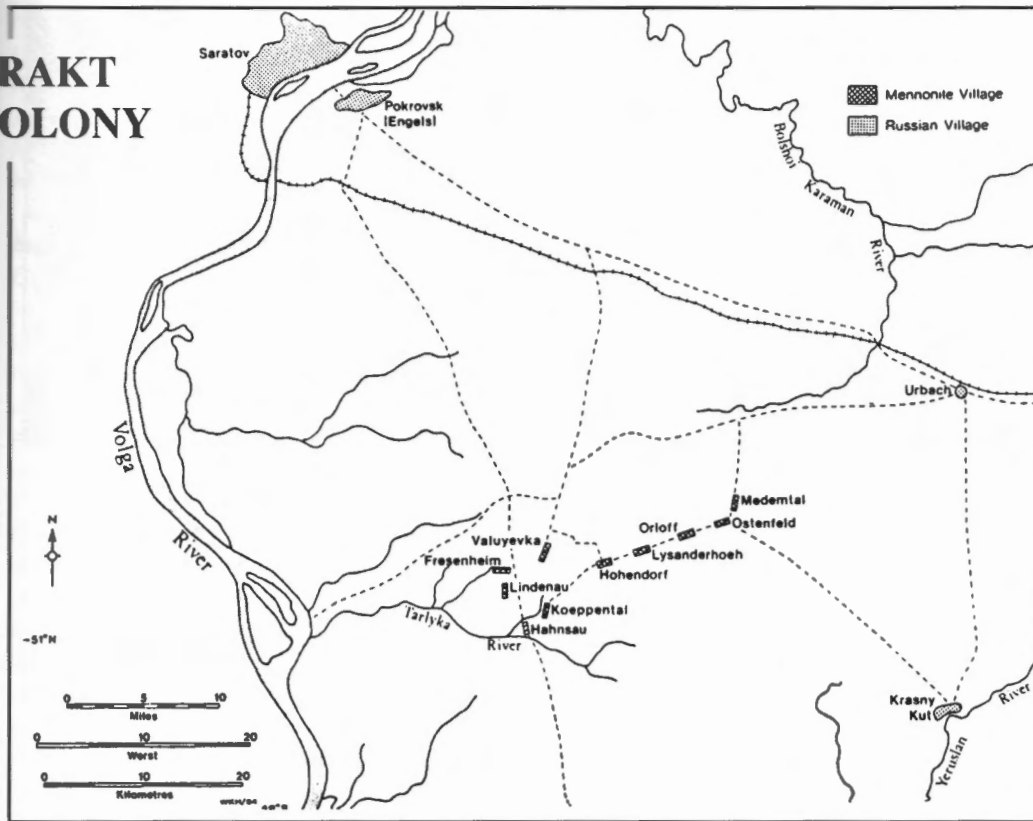
January 20, 1920 [age 81]. After another long delay, I continue; and, if God lends grace, I hope to finish my account.

I now have arrived at a most meaningful and important chapter of my life's history. As I mentioned before, my mother had passed away during the time I had spent on my trip to Russia.

The question of what arrangements should be made concerning the further care of the household now confronted my dear father and me. To keep up the household for any length of time without a housekeeper presented its difficulties. With the approval of my father, I decided to seek a helpmate to fill this need.

On my behalf, my father approached the widow of Christian Wiebe, one of his former associates in the ministry in the church at Quadendorf, and asked for the hand of her oldest daughter. Since our hearts had for some

TRAKT COLONY



Am Trakt Mennonite Colony in Samara, Russia. Credit: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Man.

time been drawn to each other, this request was granted. On February 23, 1860, we celebrated our engagement, and our wedding took place on March 15, 1860. My father lived with us. My young wife had assumed her duties, and there was no lack as far as temporal things were concerned. There was nothing to mar our happiness.

An experience which helped make ours a happy and dedicated home was that, through the union of our two families, I made contacts which encouraged a life of deep spirituality and a strengthening of my faith in Jesus Christ. Many times of spiritual refreshing were ours also as we met with Uncle Peter Claassen whom our children will still remember. He, after a long illness, has long since gone to be with the Lord. We were permitted to have many times of blessing and fellowship with him.

The Village Settlement						
Village	Year Founded	Farms & Inhabitants in 1897				
		Farms 65 dess.	Farms	Male	Female	Total
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. Ostentfeld	1872	26	19	66	61	127
10. Medental	1872	30	30	118	101	219
Total			197	602	574	1176

Credit: Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Man.

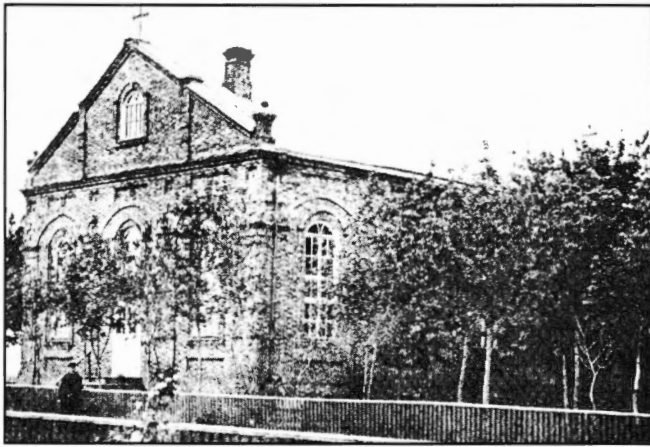
An abundance of material blessings together with a deeper experience of our inner life and our faith in Jesus Christ was the basis for our happy wedded life. Our marriage was blessed with 16 children, eight of whom died in early infancy. One married daughter passed away at the age of 38 years. Although they are widely scattered, we have at present seven living children. Two of our sons are living near us.

Going back to the year 1861, I continue our life's story. We lived with my father on his farm where our first son Jacob was born February 22, 1861.

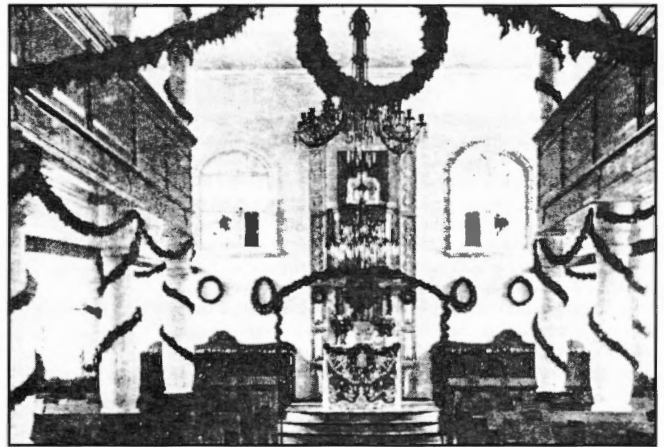
In the spring of the following year father went to visit his brothers who were living in Molotschna in South Russia and, after spending some time with them, returned home in the fall.

On April 22, 1862, our second son Heinrich was born. As I write these lines vivid memories come back to me. I can still see my father walking about entertaining our young children, one on his arm and the other one at his side. As far as we were able to understand, it was a lovely and happy time which the Lord permitted us to spend in our early wedded life. There was nothing to mar our happiness. Surely the protecting hand of a gracious God was over us.

In the month of March 1864, a saddening experience came to us in that my father was stricken with pneumonia and died after an illness of eight days. While the passing of my father on March 6 or 10 left a void in our family circle, it brought about another change which was to have a direct bearing on my future course of life. My



The Koeppental-Orloff Mennonite Church at Am Trakt. The church was destroyed after the Russian Revolution. Credit: Aaron Klassen, In the Fullness of Time.



Interior of the Koeppental-Orloff Mennonite Church. Credit: Aaron Klassen, In the Fullness of Time.

father had been a minister in the small church, and I was one of the two elected to fill this vacancy. Brother Heinrich Zimmerman was elected with 33 votes and I with 30. I was ordained as minister the first part of August by Elder Johann Wiebe. As a text for my installation sermon, I spoke on the scripture passage John 21:15-18.

A time of unexpected blessing and a deepening of my living faith were to be mine in the bond of friendship and companionship with my two co-workers. They were Brother Janzen, who had served previously along with my father, and Brother Zimmerman, who was elected into the ministry with me, and also the aforementioned Peter Claassen, uncle to my dear wife. These were times of inspiration and spiritual growth, a springtime of refreshing. When my mind recalls those days, a feeling of sadness and loneliness overwhelms me. All these except my beloved wife and I, who are still pilgrims on life's journey, have passed on to their eternal reward.

My story continues. The pleasant time of fellowship with the brethren also came to an end.

Prussia's war with Austria came to a close in the year 1866. Prussia was victorious and joined a number of smaller German states to form so-called North Germany. In 1868 the North German Reichstag passed a resolution in which the Mennonites were also to be called into military service. While this was not full military service, it involved the bearing of arms. Since repeated requests to be released from this service had been ignored, we were among a group of families that decided to migrate to Russia where many of our brethren in the faith lived and where, humanly speaking, there was the prospect that our freedom to worship would not be menaced.

Another factor which had a bearing on this decision was the thought that Revelation 12:14 seemed to many to indicate that Russia would have an important role to play in the time of rapture of the church of the end time. Our own denomination was not alone in holding this view; many students of prophecy in other evangelical churches also held this opinion which, no doubt, was largely trace-

able to the writings of Jung-Stilling which were read in many circles at that time.

Still young in years, and younger in our faith, filled with 'first love' enthusiasm, and also through the oft repeated encouragement of an old experienced minister from another church, after much prayer and careful consideration of the facts, we made our decision to leave our home and migrate to Russia.

In the month of June in 1869, after having arranged our business affairs, we left our home and started on our journey to the Volga colony located in European Russia. We were accompanied on our journey by a younger sister of my wife and her family. We traveled by train from Danzig, via St. Petersburg, to the trading center Nichne Novgorad and thence, by steamboat, down the Volga River to Saratov, a larger city, near which the colony where our people lived was located. The most strenuous part of our long journey was from Saratov to the colony. This was made by horse and wagon. While it was the shortest distance, it was the most difficult on account of the intense heat and dusty roads. In spite of these conditions we arrived safely and in good health.

Our first impression on arriving at the colony was very depressing. We had left a prosperous community with well established homes in Prussia and had traveled through well improved country along the way. But here we saw many tattered roofs and small, dilapidated houses. This was the result of a number of years of crop failure. However, the warm reception we received from the brethren to whom we were partly strangers in the colony and who opened their homes to us tended to overcome our first impression of discouragement. Owing to the fact that the Russian calendar is twelve days later than ours, we had already enjoyed the blessings of Pentecost before we left Prussia and were now able to celebrate it for the second time there in connection with a baptismal service in which a goodly number of young people were taken into the fellowship. These experiences made us feel more at home, even though the outward circumstances of the brethren

there seemed discouraging. A devoted Christian life and the aforementioned interest in the prophetic word that Russia should have an important part in the time of the second coming of Christ was also found here. I can truthfully say that our stay of eleven years among the brethren here amounted to years of blessing for us.

We now began to establish our new homesteads here in company with many others who left their homes in Germany.

There were enough of us who had recently migrated from Germany to establish a new colony which we named Lysanderhoeh. In the fall of the year 1869 we, with our relatives, were able to move into our new brick home. Although not yet fully completed nor as large as the one we left in Prussia, it was, by God's grace, a lovely home.

As it often comes to us in our lives or as a faithful God often leads His children, so it came about that we were saddened by the death of our beloved brother-in-law Peter Penner, who succumbed to an illness of typhoid fever during this winter. This left the sister of my dear wife a widow with two children to meet the uncertain conditions of our new life. Under such conditions it is often hard to conceive of God's plans as working toward peaceful ends for us. It was a severe trial for the bereaved widow and also for us on whom she was dependent for help and counsel. But here, too, a faithful and gracious God provided a way.

In the following year our home was completed, as were also those of the widows. Life under the new conditions took on a normal course. I will also mention here that the aforementioned Brother Johann Jantzen, who was my older colleague as we ministered to the church in Prussia, also came to Russia in the year 1869 and built his house beside ours. The year 1870 was a busy one in the new colony, and all the buildings were completed. The busy life of the daily routine of work in the house and fields and the fellowship with those of like faith provided the activities of the new colony.

The widowed sister of my wife was married again in 1871, and in the following year another sister and her family from Prussia came and settled in our colony. The years 1871 and 1872 brought two more families of our relatives to Russia. They settled in the colony near the city Samara after having visited with us.

In the winter of 1873 my mother-in-law also came to Russia and came to live with us. All of my wife's family now had come to live on the steppes of Russia except one brother, the oldest of the children, who remained in Prussia.

It was a delightful time which we spent with those people. A deeply spiritual life prevailed there and also the aforementioned emphasis on the 'signs of the times' as set forth in the Holy Scriptures which were becoming increasingly apparent left their lasting impressions on us. Oh! It was a wonderful and blessed time which we were permitted to spend there. And though our views regarding the coming of the Lord have changed, nevertheless I say we are grateful, and should be even more so, to our Lord that we have had this experience.

But this time also came to an end and in a way we had not expected. In the year 1874 Russia also introduced compulsory military service. The Mennonites were not required to bear arms but were permitted to do work in forestry or in the civil service instead. Even though they were not required to bear arms, it caused a feeling of grave concern among those of our faith, especially so since, in the previous year 1873, the special privileges which had been enjoyed by the German settlers in the past had been taken away. They were no longer allowed to have German-speaking officials to transact their business and legal matters, nor were they any longer allowed the privilege of having their children attend their own schools. This, together with announcement of compulsory military service, was a serious shock to the confidence which our people had in the government. Sensing this, the government sent a high official from the Czar to allay fears. To a large extent they were successful in this, but there remained quite a group who decided to migrate to America. We were allowed six years in which to make our decisions as to what we would do. That extended our time to 1880.

The following years were a time of quiet reflection and much earnest prayer to God for light from above that He might guide us in our choice of the right way. A considerable number of the brethren from the Molotschna colony decided to migrate to America where they had been promised freedom of faith and freedom to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. Letters also came from loved ones from the old home in Prussia inviting us to accompany them to America. Truly these were times of earnest seeking and inquiry to find God's way for us.

Leaders of our group made numerous trips to the Molotschna colony and St. Petersburg to get information which might throw some light on the situation. But the matter remained obscure, and our efforts all were to no avail. To accept military service, even in its slightest form, was not acceptable to our conscience. Migration to America was opposed to the view that Russia had an important place to fill for the church of the latter days. So it seemed there was no satisfactory answer to the question, 'What shall we do?' Again various trips were undertaken. On one of these trips it was learned that a small group of the brethren of our faith had decided to migrate to the Caucasus with the hope that religious freedom would be granted them there. Since this small group was in accord with our way of thinking as to Russia's part for the latter day church, we joined them in sending a deputation to St. Petersburg to explore the possibilities concerning the matter. I was named to serve on this deputation together with Brother Johann Epp from our group and Brother Peters from the Molotschna colony. The responsibility of this task rested heavily on our shoulders, not only because of the special matter it represented, but also on account of the conditions in Russia itself at this time. Several attempts had been made to assassinate Czar Alexander II, and the police were on the search for suspicious persons. How

easily it could have come about for us to have aroused suspicion and have been taken captive. How God in His faithfulness had protected us and cared for us can be seen from the following experience.

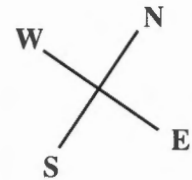
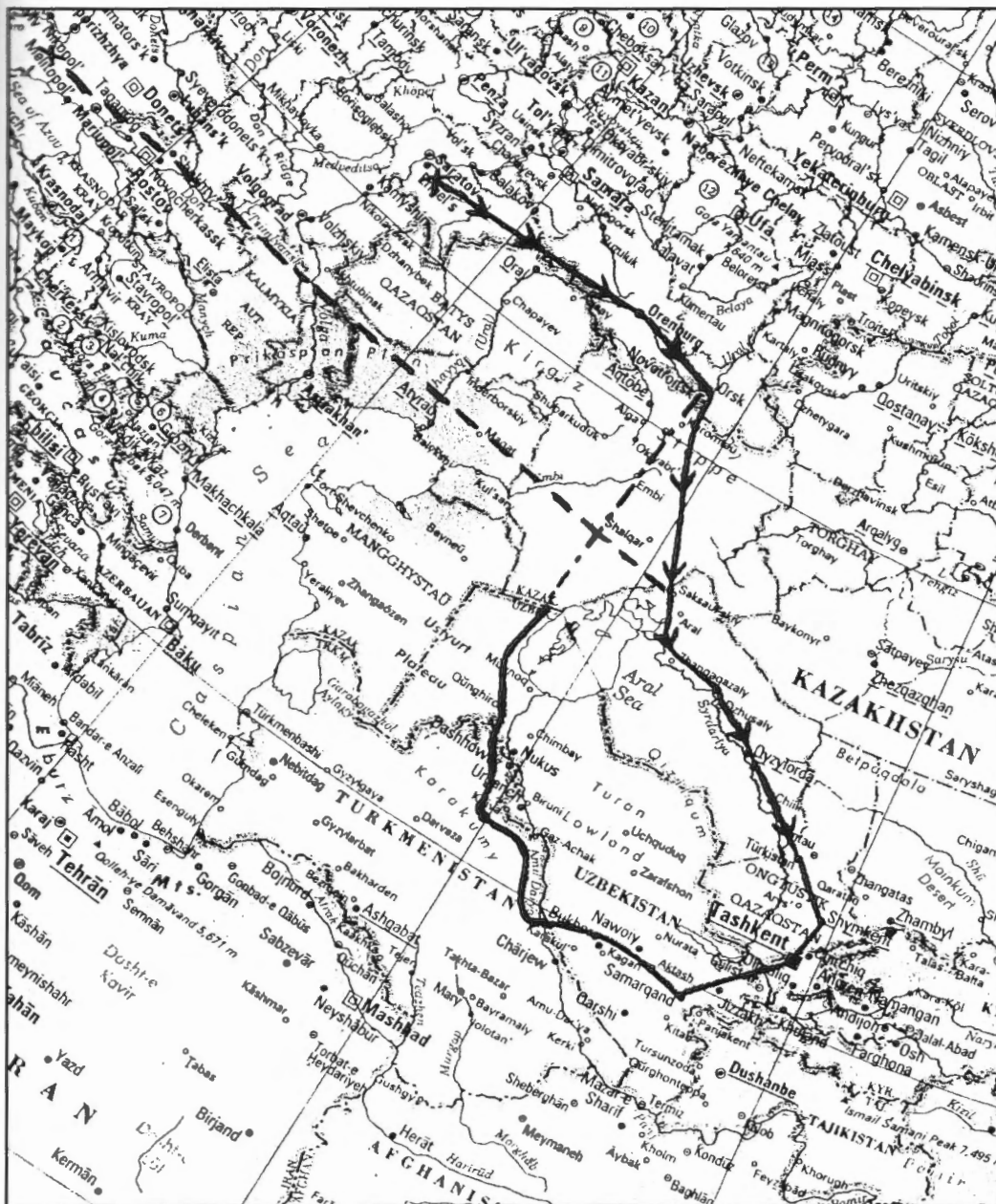
In the fall of 1879 we three started on our way to St. Petersburg and after a few days' travel arrived there safely. After having found a suitable hotel, we looked about for persons who might be helpful to us and give us advice concerning the matter on our minds. First of all we sought out Pastor Hans of the Moravian Brethren with whom there had been a contact from former visits to the city. Through him we made contact with other influential persons, such as Pastor Dolton, a pastor of the Reformed Church, and Baron Von Mirbach, a personal attendant to the Czar. I will never forget the contacts with these dear people. They were men who possessed a living faith in God's word and who dealt with us in a way which revealed a spirit of heartfelt sympathy and brotherly understanding. In Baron Von Mirbach, especially, we found a devout and humble Christian whom we often heard offer his humble prayer at meals which he ate in the room adjoining ours. Here I was made aware of the fact that the Lord has His own among those who hold positions of authority.

Now we took up the matter of our concern. First we made contact with Minister of Interior Ivanov who gave us a friendly reception and promised to be of help wherever possible. Having heard that the Governor General of Turkestan, General Von Kaufmann, had arrived in St. Petersburg, we sought an audience with him and conferred with him concerning the matter regarding the exemption from military service for our young men. He said, 'Come over to Asia, to Turkestan. There is plenty of land to be had, and you will be free from military service.' When asked whether we could take our young men 20 years old and older along he said, 'That is a matter over which I have no authority to speak.' In a few days he planned to go to Livadia to meet with the Czar, and we should remain in St. Petersburg until his return. He would consult with the Czar and be back in two or three weeks. This gave us plenty of time to look around the beautiful city of the Czar. We made good use of our time, but, not knowing the dangers involved, we probably failed to take proper precautions. An experience which we had will give evidence of this. Coming to Pastor Dolton one day he said, 'Brethren, the Countess Schwatov was here and said, "Tell them that they should report to General Von Schmidt." We took this suggestion, and on the following day went to find our man. What confronted us when we met with the General was quite different from what we had experienced thus far. On our former contacts with the officials, high and low, we had found an attitude of sympathetic and friendly confidence. Immediately on entering here we were met with suspicious glances which seemed very strange to us who were not acquainted with the present circumstances. Having a good conscience, we told them, in answer to their question, what we wanted, that we would like to meet His Excellency General Von Schmidt, and our request was granted. If we

had expected a friendly reception here, we were sadly disappointed. The same distrustful attitude confronted us. His manner, though different from what we had experienced with the other officials, encouraged us to confide in him. In answer to his question what we wanted and why we were in St. Petersburg, we replied that we had come seeking information on our standing regarding military conscription. We also mentioned the names of the officials with whom we had already conferred and that the Governor General of Turkestan had gone to meet with the Czar and had instructed us to remain in St. Petersburg until his return, etc. We also told him that the Countess Schwatov, through Pastor Dolton, had suggested that we contact General Von Schmidt. He listened with seeming interest and then asked how long we would remain in St. Petersburg and told us to report to him before we left, which we also did. We were dismissed and had no immediate explanation of the whole matter. But that was to be forthcoming. We had given Baron Von Mirbach our word to give him a full account of our activities at the end of each week. After we had related this experience to him, he said with some agitation, 'Brethren, do you know where you have been? You were in the Third Detachment.' In short, the Third Detachment was the secret police whose duty it was to watch over the life of the Czar whose life had been threatened by a number of assassination attempts. The Third Detachment had the authority to arrest suspicious persons and send them into exile to Siberia without further trial. Now a word of explanation. Brother Johann Epp and I, without suspecting anything, had gone about the city at will past the Czar's and the Grand Duke's palaces with no thought that we might be watched or arouse suspicion. This no doubt had been the case, and the Countess had possibly received this information and wanted to give us an opportunity to present ourselves before the Chief of Police so that he could be informed about us. We feel that God in His mercy had kept us from what might have been a very disastrous experience.

On his return from Livadia, Governor General Von Kaufmann reported to us that we could come to Turkestan where we could have land and that we would be exempt from military service. When we inquired about taking our young men along with us, he again told us that he had no authority to make a decision on that, but we should see the Minister of Interior, Ivanov. He alone could pass on that. After we met with him again the only answer we received was that all young men 20 years old and older who were subject to the draft must perform their military service but the others would be exempt. This then was the final outcome of our extended stay in St. Petersburg.

Our parting with Baron Von Mirbach, whom we visited once more before leaving, was quite impressive to me. 'Brethren,' he said, 'now you go home and examine yourselves once more before God and His word whether you can accept this service or not. If your answer is no, we cannot, then, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; Trust also in Him; and He will bring it to pass."'



Route of trekkers leaving the Am Trakt Colony.



Route of trekkers leaving Molotschna Colony.



Return route of of Am Trakt trekkers.

Zhambyl—Aulie-Ata (1880)

It should be mentioned here that we looked up General Von Schmidt before we left for home. Since there were but few results to be reported on our work in St. Petersburg, we came home somewhat discouraged. When we told of our meeting with General Von Kaufmann and the promises which he had given us, there was a determination to investigate this matter further, trusting in God's guidance. After further consideration, it was agreed to send two of the brethren to Turkestan to get an on-the-spot view and further information on the conditions that we would meet there so that a definite decision could be arrived at. In the summer of 1879 the brethren started on their journey and came back with an answer. The conditions there for our faith as well as for our economic welfare seemed to be favorable. Therefore a considerable number of the Brethren decided to migrate to Central Asia.

A number of things entered into the picture which raised the perplexing question in my mind as to what we should do, which way we should choose. Among these were such matters as our experiences with the officials in St. Petersburg, the migration to America already underway from the Molotschna colony, and the many letters with invitations from loved ones in Prussia who were closely connected with us in bonds of love and faith, asking us to accompany them to America, and also the fact that the governor of the province of Samara had visited our colony and had called our attention to the migration to America which was now in progress. I personally was very undecided. This was a time of earnest consideration and waiting on the Lord for guidance and light from above which way we should choose.

Oh! Those were most serious and solemn days. But, finally, the influence of those of our surrounding

community who believed that Revelation 12:14 seemed to indicate that Russia had a service to render for the church of the latter times was the deciding factor for our final decision. We decided to migrate to Asia.

The first group, consisting of 12 or 14 wagons, each drawn by two or three horses, started on the way in the spring of the year 1880. The second group of 23 wagons left in August of the same year. We with our children and my wife's mother were in this group.

The parting from loved ones was sad and heart-breaking, and I never will forget the parting words of a brother of our group who based his farewell remarks on Ephesians 6:10, "Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Our future seemed dark and uncertain, bearing in mind that we were depending only on a verbal promise of the officials.

The journey was a difficult one, especially for the children and those who were sick. Altogether we traveled 16 or 17 weeks, three of which led through an uninhabited desert area where only two small military posts were located. Fall was giving way to winter which made it difficult, especially for those who were sick and for the children. But with God's help we survived the trip quite well, and shortly before Christmas we arrived in Tashkent, the capital of the Russian provinces of Asia. The government had provided some simple little huts with earthen walls and roofs for us. These, however, could be heated. When we called on Governor General Von Kaufmann, he gave us a friendly greeting and again assured us that we would be able to get land. Thus far things seemed quite favorable.

Eight days after our arrival a group of fellow-believers from the Molotschna colony arrived. They were quartered in houses similar to ours in Tashkent. We had a pleasant time of fellowship and were all most happy to leave our wagons. One stage of our long journey had been completed, and we looked forward with renewed hope to the future.

During the winter we made plans to inspect the lands which had been allotted to us in various places in order that we might begin our improvements on them. All seemed hopeful for us, but the Lord our God had other plans for us. In March of 1881 the shocking news came from St. Petersburg, the capital of Russia, that Czar Alexander II had been assassinated. This was disturbing news for the nation, and especially for us it was to have far-reaching results. What will happen to us now, was the question which became very urgent to us. The former Czar had been friendly to the Germans and was a mild-mannered man. But his son who became heir to the throne was known to be hostile to Germans. When we came to Governor General Von Kaufmann to express our sympathy and regrets, we became aware of an attitude of reserve and caution which became more noticeable as time went on. The promises given us were not withdrawn, but there were noted indications that this might happen later on.

A part of the group, depending on the Governor's promise, settled on land 300-500 werst [180-300 miles] from Tashkent. The rest of us traveled from Tashkent to

Samarkand and from there through a border town of Russia into Bokhara. Here we were not welcomed and were forced to return to Russia again, where we were permitted to spend the winter in a small place near the Russian border. At this place we were allowed to hold our church services and meetings in a Mohammedan mosque. It was an uneventful winter which we were permitted to spend there. While we spent this time among Mohammedans who were the avowed enemies of the Christians, we were not molested. It should be mentioned here that the Russian officials, both high and low, were always friendly and helpful. A faithful God who had cared for us on our long journey held His hand over us. We were not spared from times of sorrow and affliction. Sickness came and on frequent occasions we wended our way to the graves of our loved ones. So the year 1881 made way for the new year 1882.

Advancing Age

Due to the infirmities of advancing age, Jacob Toews was unable to complete his memoir beyond this point in his narrative. His brief account of the Trek written 40 years after the fact lacks detail, and its vagueness belies the immense hardship suffered by those that participated in the Trek. A better account of this time, 1881, was included in letters Jacob wrote at the time of the Trek. Some of Jacob Toews's letters written to Rev. Peter Klaassen (Jacob's wife's uncle) of Newton, Kansas, survive in the Historical Library at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas. These letters were previously published in the *Christlicher Bundesbote* in the issues of February 16 and 23, 1937. An edited version of these letters continues Jacob Toews's narrative of the Trek.

To Peter Klaassen, Newton, Kansas, from Jacob Toews, Bokhara, Turkestan, September 4, 1881. For some time now you have been expecting a letter, and oft times I have had the urge to write to you. As I now begin with my report, I must reach back into the past. For over one year now we have been 'pilgrims and strangers' in the true sense of the word. Although there was no lack of resting places, there was an ever-present urge to be on our way again.

On August 13 of the past year we left our home in Lysanderhoeh [Am Trakt], and for fifteen weeks we journeyed through a desert area frequented only by hordes of nomads and filled with war cries and the noise of battle. But now, through the songs of love and peace sung by our people, the Lord inspired us with renewed strength when we met with times of trial and affliction.

The desert area between Orenburg and Kasalinsk, a distance of 720 werst [430 miles], was less troublesome than we had expected. Even though provisions for us and our horses had to be carried along by camel, there were only three days during which we were short of hay. With only a few exceptions, the roads were good and the wild tribes along the way were friendly.

Wasilinsk is the last Russian city. Here we entered a new world. The city is inhabited by Mohammedans, and the well-kept streets were lined with mud walls. From Kasalinsk we followed the Syr-Daria River to the city of Turkestan. This was not a desert country but still had much the same appearance of that through which we had passed.

Snow storms and -13 degree Roemer⁶ weather were our greatest hindrances. This made it hard, especially for the women, children, and older folks. To see the children suffering from the cold was a painful experience.

In Turkestan we found letters awaiting us from those of our group who started earlier. They told us that the Russian government had set aside living quarters for us. These houses were quite small but were usable. This was an encouragement to us, and, with the help of a merciful God, we arrived at Kaplan Bek, which is 20 werst [12 miles] from Tashkent, on November 20.

We had a friendly meeting with the officials concerning the matter of our settlement. General Kaufmann was very kind and gracious. In the matter pertaining to our faith, we were given the assurance that we would be allowed fifteen years' time and then would have a free will choice. This was satisfactory to us. But the Lord had determined other ways for us. The news came that the Czar had been assassinated. That changed our whole situation. We thought our struggle was ended, but now we became aware that the conflict had only begun.

We had some of our young men with us who were eligible for the military draft and who had been registered before we left the old homeland. General Kaufmann, who had consulted with the Czar about the matter which was our concern, now stood helpless before those who opposed us, and now not the Czar's promise but the law was what must determine his decisions. The meaning of the words, 'Put not your trust in princes,' became most meaningful to me.

Added to this was the fact that General Kaufmann was stricken with an apoplectic fit. Our young men, according to the draft law, were subject to military service, and in the meantime their names had been called up in the old homeland on the Volga to appear for this service.

To make matters worse, the time set by the government for our departure, June 4, was drawing near, and this, from a human standpoint, increased our difficulties. As matters grew more and more serious and the day had come when our young men should be enlisted into the service, we maintained our conviction and stood our ground. Finally the order came for us to move out, but the young men should remain. [Portion of the letter is missing.]

In the meantime, we, with the consent of the government, had sent two of the brethren to Bokhara to seek permission for us to enter their country. These returned with the report that our request had been refused. We were now hemmed in on all sides, and all hope of continuing our journey was cut off. Only God's word remained as an anchor to hold us fast. It continued to admonish us to remain faithful.

Now the question confronted us, Shall we abandon our pursuit? Shall we give up this precious tenet of our faith which was so near and dear to our hearts, or shall we follow the example of Abraham who went out at the Lord's command not knowing whither he went? We chose the latter course and left on July 25, the day on which we had our orders to go. Under the watchful eyes of the officials, we set out on our way to Bokhara.

Heartfelt greetings from your friend and brother, Jacob Toews.

From a second letter in September 1881:

Address: Kata Kurgan, Russia, General Delivery. The conduct of the government officials was remarkable even though we could in no wise bow to their will and demands, and the man who filled the place of General Kaufmann, a severe-mannered man, was not easily drawn aside from his purpose. The government officials in most instances showed leniency toward us. Even though they were often feared and evil was spoken of them, we were met with a sympathetic approach by some of the highest officials of the government of Russia, now no longer our government. We must give them a word of commendation for this.

Because of some hindrances, we were unable to set out from Tashkent before July 28. The heat, reaching 30 degrees Roemer, and the dust were very oppressive, especially for those who were sick. Of these we had a number with us. The whole caravan was made up of 153 persons, 48 wagons, and 81 horses.

As we approached the city of Samarkand, an official met us to direct us through a shallow but quite turbulent river. He stayed with us and directed us to the quarters in the city set aside for us. Here we could rest. Since one of those of our number who was sick had become so weak that the thought of going further was out of the question, we remained there 14 days. The brother passed away in the Lord.

In Samarkand we were asked to sign a paper in which we acknowledged notification that, if we should return after leaving, we would be subject to full military duty. The official was careful to remind us that we had the choice between two ways: either to come back or perish. But we dared not waver or be faint-hearted.

At this place we also experienced a friendly attitude from the officials. High officials were always present at our church worship services. The Governor himself, on

⁶The Roemer temperature scale was developed in 1702 by Ole Roemer, the mayor of Copenhagen, Denmark. The scale has 7.5 as the melting point of ice (equal to 32F) and 60 as the boiling point of water (equal to 212F). Blood temperature of the human body was 22.5 on the Roemer scale (equal to 96F). Comparing the Roemer scale to the Fahrenheit scale is inexact at best, as Roemer was unconcerned with the upper areas of his scale. Minus 13 Roemer might be equivalent to minus 30-39F, but that is a guess on the author's part. See Tom Shachtman, *Absolute Zero and the Conquest of Cold* (Houghton Mifflin Co.: N.Y., 1999).

whom we called before we left to express our thanks for the friendly treatment we had received, asked us what we would do should Bokhara not allow us to enter and wished us God's blessing on our way after we had assured him that the Lord our God would permit us to find a place where we could worship according to our faith.

After we had accompanied our brother, who had passed away, to his final resting place, we set out in the name of the Lord, looking to Him and trusting in His promises, on our journey toward the last Russian station. From here we would cross over into Bokhara, the land which so many times had been pictured to us in such a bad light. To enter a land whose government and people and whose rule of conduct and faith were of necessity opposed to us was a delicate matter.

Near nightfall we came to the first Bokhara village and put up our camp for the night. The curious native people, like those in Russia, were friendly toward us. On the following morning officials came out to inquire about our concern and noted down all the information which we gave them, the number of wagons and horses, etc. The information was brought to the Emir by one of the high officials. The brethren who accompanied the officials were received in a friendly manner and were presented with gifts. Now we are standing by awaiting the decision.

Since on a journey of 1,300 werst [780 miles] no great disaster came to us, even though there were hours of testing and times of struggle, we still have had much reason to bring God our heartfelt thanks. When we look back over the pathway over which we came, we are assured that God has led us. There were times which brought serious and grave experiences but also those which brought good will and blessing.

The state of health among our people has given us much concern. In Kaplan Bek where we were given permission by the Russian government to spend seven months in winter quarters, we experienced a time of sorrow and grief. On 12 different occasions we wended our way to the graves of our loved ones. In these times of bereavement we were able to understand more fully that the soothing and comforting hand of the Lord was ever near us. Through these times of sickness our family was spared and remain with us. Our son Jacob was married.

Speaking of the country and its people, this is a very productive land where irrigation is practiced and produces two crops per year. The natives are very skillful in handling the water. Sometimes it almost seems the water actually runs uphill. To make it easier to level, the land is divided into small fields and is crossed through by small ditches which carry the water from fast-flowing streams out over the land. There is prolific growth of trees, and the beautiful countryside has the appearance of a forest. There is also much planting done in the modern, well-kept cities. The area around Samarkand was especially gorgeous, a veritable Garden of Eden.

We who consider ourselves as 'pilgrims who have no abiding city' were at least privileged to view and enjoy it. Someday we shall possess an everlasting inheritance if

we fight the good fight to the end. The beautifully built mosques indicate that the inhabitants of this country are Mohammedans. The people, while friendly, are dull, simple-minded, and unapproachable.

I was interrupted here; this accounts for an eight day lapse of time. As already mentioned, the high official had brought the report of our arrival in Bokhara to the Emir. We remained here awaiting the decision while the two brethren had gone over the second time. The decision came, but it was contrary to our expectations. On Wednesday six or seven officials came to notify us that Bokhara had no land for us and that we would not be permitted to pass through their country but should return to Russia immediately. A young child who had died lay ready for burial. Some of our wagons had been taken apart for repairs. Our request for an extension of time beyond the two hours given us was not only refused but we were ordered to pack up immediately. The midday meal was ready to be served, and in the turmoil many came out short and left hungry. Bread which was ready to be baked had to be packed up as we hurried off toward the Russian border. One of the wagons broke down on the way, but there was no time for delay; we loaded it upon one of the other wagons and went on. That we were not especially happy about this experience goes without saying.

We had thought that the hope of establishing a home of our own, even though it might be only for a short time, might soon be realized. Now came this disappointment.

Now we are back in Russia, in the land which had so recently barred its doors for us, whose laws we could not submit to then and much less now. What should we do now? Where shall we go? were the questions which confronted us. We did not have to wait long for an answer. One of our brethren, while riding to a small Russian village nearby, met one of the high officials who asked whether we would be willing to obey the law now. When he was told that we could not do it under any circumstances, even if it should cost us our lives, he then said, no doubt by the authority of someone higher up, that there was a small tract of land on the border between Russia and Bokhara, lying mostly in Bokhara, which might be had. It was neutral land and was about 16 werst [9.6 miles] long and the same width. Bokhara would be notified that we should not be molested, and we could live there without any cause for concern. An officer would come and show us the land, and we could let him know whether we would accept it or not, after we had inspected it.

That was more than we had expected. Here was a place as good as we could wish for where we would be free from all restrictions and the congregation could function at will.

Viewed from other angles, there still remained much to be accepted in faith. While the land near ours had to be irrigated to make it productive, that offered us was high-lying prairie which became parched and barren during the hot, dry summer. The outlook for a good crop



Jacob Toews (1838-1922) and his wife Maria Wiebe with family members as they observe their sixtieth wedding anniversary in 1920 in Aberdeen, Idaho. Credit: Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College.

naturally was not as favorable as we hoped it might be. But of so much we were sure, that the things which were needful for us would be provided. The necessary arrangements still have not been completed. It is possible that some difficulties may still be encountered before the matter can be closed.

After another delay of eight days, I again take up my letter which is assuming the appearance of a diary.

Today is September 20, 1881. Regarding the matter of our land, the situation remains much the same as it was eight days ago. We are still in our wagons out in the open field without any assurance of a place to set up our winter quarters. The officials with whom we have to deal are still friendly toward us and do all they can to help us. But they, being human, may also fail us.

The land which they suggested to us is private property over which they have no jurisdiction. In the meantime there has been some land in Bokhara made available which we could buy. Because of the high price we could not think of buying it. Now we must wait to see how God will lead us. In buying this land we could also raise a question in regard to our position as "pilgrims and strangers."

Today three of the brethren went to Samarkand to draw up a contract for the above-mentioned land. We must

now wait and see whether a gracious God will give His approval. I can truthfully say that we have a longing to see the end of our journey, especially since the change of climate and weather conditions have brought us so much distress. We have a number with us who are sick and infirm. We are much concerned about a disease affecting the eyes which has broken out among the children.

Now, my dear Uncle and Aunt, I will close, but, before my letter is posted, I hope to give you the outcome of the work of the delegation.

Our dear mother, who has been well during the past year on our journey, is now very weak, often listless and worn. Most of the time she suffers from diarrhea which saps her strength. My dear wife has often been ill but, thanks to the Lord, not seriously. Our three youngest children are suffering from a painful eye infection.

No doubt you have heard unfavorable reports from reliable (or unreliable) sources concerning the matter of our emigration. I would rather not go into that. It is so easy to attempt to justify one's self, and far be it from me to attempt that. We have experienced many struggles and tears along the way.

And now may God be with you. To see you again in this earthly life may be beyond our hope. May God give us

a happy meeting at the Throne of Grace. Having read this letter, will you please send it to Heinrich Z., Beatrice, Nebraska?

I mention also that the brethren Johann and William Penner are also in our congregation. Thanks to God they are in good health. The elderly Mother Penner is confined to her bed, having been kicked by a horse.

Our greetings to all who shall read this letter. It goes without saying that letters would be most welcome. I will enclose our address. With hearty greetings, Yours in Christ Jesus, Jacob Toews.

From a third letter:

A whole month has passed by since I last wrote you. It has been a time of severe trials and soul distress, but it was not a time without its blessings for us.

The Lord has seen fit to call our dear mother to Himself during this time. She is no longer with us. She has fought the good fight of faith and has entered into her reward. Hers was a time of very severe struggle, especially so during her last eight days. Weakened by continued diarrhea, she was bedfast after September 26. This was a difficult time because it was so late in the season and winter was making itself felt. This made it difficult for all concerned, but doubly so for those who were sick. Oh! It caused a feeling of inexpressible sorrow when she would call out, 'If I could only be in a warm room.' An offer came from a nearby Russian village that we could bring those who were sick among us over to them. But our dear mother was hesitant about accepting it, so we undertook to make it as comfortable for her as we could under the circumstances. We bought some felt blankets and made a tent for her, but at best it was incomplete to many ways. Added to this was the fact that we were forced to move on three different occasions, on one of which we thrust out in great haste. At times the pain was very severe, and mother suffered almost beyond endurance.

On her last morning here below, she suffered greatly from severe pains, especially in her back and abdomen, but in spirit she was calm and peaceful. At seven o'clock on the evening of October 17 her life's journey was ended. She entered into the joy of her Lord. The end came without a struggle. Even though we sat at her bedside, we were unaware of her passing.

On October 20, we laid our dear mother to rest. Since we are still on our journey, our burial service was very simple. There was no elaborate meal, only the message for the burial service in which the whole congregation took part.

Previously I had mentioned that three of the brethren had gone to Samarkand to make the necessary arrangements concerning the land which had been offered us. Suddenly an order came from the Russian Governor General that the young men with us would be called into military service if we had not yet crossed over the border. This called for a speedy decision. After we had refreshed

our spirits by partaking of the Lord's Supper, we made our way across the border into Bokhara for the second time. After being there about one day, and while we were preparing to set up quarters for the winter, an officer appeared and ordered us to go back over the border. Oh! That was a serious and desperate decision. Before us lay Russia with her ironclad laws; and we had no permission to stay here. Now we were confronted with the question, Shall we go or stay? When the officer saw our depressed spirits (either he had sympathy with us or was playing foul with us), he told us the land on which we were was private property and he would show us another place but also promised not to take us back over the border. We followed him but found out later that he had led us back over the Russian border. So, that evening we found ourselves back on Russian soil once more. That was the end of a day filled with anxiety. What was there left for us to do?

The next morning we felt led to go back across the border again. The same officer came out to meet us and this time allowed us to come in. However, we had the feeling that there might be trouble ahead. But of this we were sure, we would stand our ground and not sacrifice our principles.

The following day was set aside as a day of fasting prayer by the whole congregation, and the hand of the Lord our God kept the enemy at bay. On the following day the order to go back was renewed and with greater emphasis. We answered that that was impossible. We could not do that. The next day they threatened to come with 400 soldiers and start shooting. Again we answered them that they could do as they wished but that we could not, nor would we, give in. In answer to their question whether we would defend ourselves, we told them, 'No, you can do as you please with us.' The evening following this day was a very serious and earnest time. Our only consolation was in the words of scripture, 'Be thou faithful unto death.' In a situation such as ours was, that is more easily said than done. For us there remained no other choice.

As the next day came, the Lord gave us peace of mind and confidence. The soldiers failed to show up, but some officials came and directed us to go over nearer the border. The Beck (a high official) had given permission for us to put up our winter quarters. We promised to obey.

We then sent two of the brethren to the Beck to express our thanks for giving us this privilege. They returned with the report that, the next day, 200 soldiers would be sent to shoot us down. The number had been reduced so much.

The remaining portion of this letter written by Jacob Toews is missing. To continue the narrative the words of Jacob's son Henry are used. Henry Toews completed his father's narrative in April 1921 after Jacob could no longer write himself.

Sickness, deaths, childbirths, heavy snow, and broken axles on the wagons all caused delay, so that finally we were forced to seek winter quarters in the garrison town

of Turkestan. In the spring of the year 1882, a part of the group went to Aulie-Ata, and a small number followed those who had gone to Bokhara, joining them in the small border town of Serbulak. In the spring of the year 1882, the journey was resumed. From Serbulak we went through Bokhara, thence across the desert to the Amu-Daria River. One part of the journey was made by camel. All household goods, dismantled wagons, women, and children, were loaded on camels, and the men followed with the horses.

The journey was made by boat up the Amu-Daria River from Cadshalia to Lausan in the province of Kiva (Khiva) where we expected to make our home. We arrived in Lausan in the fall of 1882 where, as best we could, we made preparations to stay for the winter. But this was not to be the place where we were to stay.

The Mohammedans, who had been friendly to us in the beginning, now, possibly instigated by others, became our enemies and began to steal wherever they could. In one of their raids one of our men was killed. Thus it became impossible for us to remain here. We were now faced with the serious question, Where shall we go? Our finances were practically exhausted, and only a few had any money left.

When we had come to an end with our own wisdom and planning and there seemed to be no way out, God had a way of escape for us, an open door, and He proceeded to lead us in the way which He had chosen for us—a way which we in our folly would not see nor were willing to go. He awakened in the hearts of our friends and brethren in America a willingness to come to the rescue of their destitute brethren in Asia. The result was that 20 or 30 families were willing to accept this help and go to America, but that necessitated another long and difficult journey.

From Lausan we went around the southern end of the Aral Sea, across the plain of Ust-Urt which lies between the Caspian and Aral Seas. Our journey from Kiva (Khiva), where we broke up camp, to our first goal of Orenburg was about 800 miles and took us about six weeks to reach.

We arrived there near the latter part of May or the first of June 1884. We came to Orenburg which was the first city in which we could procure our passports. This necessitated a delay of several weeks. In the meantime we visited with the youngest brother and sister of my mother in the vicinity of Samara.

This was a happy reunion with loved ones for our parents, but it also proved to be the last time they were permitted to see them. In another side trip to Saratov, also to Am Trakt, they had a time of fellowship with another sister and with friends and relatives. Time passed all too quickly. When all arrangements had been completed and difficulties removed, we set out on our journey again. We were on our way again by the first part of September, and on October 4 we landed in New York.

The following will still be fresh in the memory of all: that our parents bought an 80-acre farm east of Newton, Kansas, and depended on farming for their living and that father became elder of the First Mennonite Church of

Newton, Kansas, and how he, in deep humility and many times of quiet communion and prayer, received the necessary strength to carry on in faithful service and remained true to his Lord and was not moved to bitterness in spite of the many difficulties and reproaches which beset his way.

Through God's blessing and his faithful service, the church grew and prospered. After a long period of faithful service, father, on account of advancing age and diminishing strength, resigned from his position as elder of the church about the year 1916, and he and mother decided to spend the years of their retirement near their children Henry and John Toews who lived in Aberdeen, Idaho. They arrived in Aberdeen in April 1917.

Jacob Toews died on January 2, 1922. His wife Maria died April 17, 1924. Both are buried in the family plot in the Mennonite cemetery west of Aberdeen, Idaho.

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